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toolkit

Tools for Knowledge and Learning

A Guide for Development
and Humanitarian
Organisations

Ben Ramalingam

Tools for Knowledge and Learning: A Guide for Development and Humanitarian Organisations

Ben Ramalingam

July 2006

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Foreword

No one should be dying or suffering because knowledge that already exists in one part of the world has not reached other parts. It is up to each of us to take the responsibility to ensure the knowledge flows easily to where it is needed.

I recently spent 18 months on a UN project to help develop and apply a systematic approach to the sharing of knowledge around the global response to HIV/ AIDS. I learned that communities in the development sector, and indeed in the world, have bits and pieces of the knowledge needed to deal with issues like HIV-AIDS, but that such knowledge is not spread evenly. This experience convinced me that knowledge and learning approaches are every bit as relevant to the development sector as to operations in the private sector.

Importantly, knowledge should not be seen as something that is supplied from one person to another, or from rich countries to poor ones, but something that flows back and forth, and is continually improved, adapted and refreshed. By accepting that we all have something to learn, and something to share, knowledge can start to flow more effectively around and across organisations and communities, to the benefit of developed and developing countries alike.

This excellent handbook puts together a number of tools to help humanitarian and development organisations around the world contribute to this process. A number of these tools are adapted from the book *Learning to Fly* which I co-wrote with Chris Collison. I would encourage you to use these tools and focus on getting the knowledge to flow more effectively, so that we can improve our collective efforts to alleviate suffering and reduce poverty. It may be the most important task we face.

Geoff Parcell, Co-Author of the best-selling *Learning to Fly* books
July 2006

See www.aidscompetence.org for more details of Geoff's work on HIV-AIDS.

Introduction

‘ ... if all you have is a hammer, then every problem becomes a nail ... ’

1. Background

The idea of capturing, storing and sharing knowledge so as to learn lessons from the past and from elsewhere – overcoming the boundaries posed by time and space – is far from being a new one. In recent years, a growing movement has emphasised the improved application of knowledge and learning as a means to improve development and humanitarian work. The movement has led to the widespread adoption of learning and knowledge-based strategies among the range of agencies involved in such work, including donor agencies, multilaterals, NGOs, research institutes, and the plethora of institutions based in the South, including national governments, regional organisations, and indigenous NGOs.¹

This guide is aimed at staff working in all such organisations. There are 30 tools and techniques contained here, divided into five categories: i) Strategy Development; ii) Management Techniques; iii) Collaboration Mechanisms; iv) Knowledge Sharing and Learning Processes; and v) Knowledge Capture and Storage.

Many of these tools are simple and trying them out requires nothing more than the desire to try something new, and the drive to ‘get on and do it’. Undertaking them effectively requires effective – sometimes advanced – facilitation and communication skills. Here, we have aimed to provide comprehensive accounts of how to apply such techniques, with a focus on the requirements of potential facilitators.

Other tools covered here are more complex, and call for significant planning and resources if they are to be delivered effectively. Here, we have attempted to provide an introduction and orientation to a broad subject, as well as suggestions for further resources that might prove useful for the reader.

There are a number of existing toolkits on knowledge and learning, some of which, such as the deservedly popular UK National Health Service knowledge management toolkit and the *Learning to Fly* books, have served as inspiration for the current volume.

The aim behind this toolkit is to present entry points and references to the wide range of tools and methods that have been used to facilitate improved knowledge and learning in the development and humanitarian sectors. It is hoped that our efforts here will go some way to ensuring that the quote starting this chapter does not become a truism: users will have access to more than just hammers, and the diverse problems faced in this important area of work will not have to be treated as just nails.

The RAPID programme

Knowledge and learning is at the heart of the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) approach on which ODI has been working for the past five years. RAPID has worked hard to further understanding in this area of work, through efforts to deepen awareness of what works in practice, to explore new and innovative ways to apply this awareness, and to undertake action and theoretical research across a wide range of circumstances. Our interest has led us far and wide:

- RAPID has undertaken reviews of knowledge and information approaches: a review of information systems in sustainable livelihoods, followed by a literature review of knowledge management and

¹ King, K. and S. McGrath (2004) *Knowledge For Development? Comparing British, Japanese, Swedish and World Bank Aid*, London and New York: Zed Books; Cape Town: HSRC Press.

organisational learning² and a case-study based investigation into the effectiveness of knowledge and learning.³

- Valuable lessons have been learned through developing and implementing the ODI strategy for knowledge and learning; RAPID has carried out similar activities for a range of other organisations, including bilateral donor agencies, multilaterals, Southern NGOs and governments.⁴
- RAPID has evaluated and suggested improvements to ongoing initiatives, and run training courses for recipient groups ranging from humanitarian workers to economic researchers.
- Studies have been made of shifts in international policy on development and humanitarian issues, including examining the contribution of different forms of knowledge to these changes.
- RAPID has consulted with civil society organisations across the world as to how they use knowledge to influence policy.
- RAPID has facilitated energetic regional and national debates on how to build local capacities to utilise different kinds of knowledge for developmental ends.
- The complementary RAPID toolkit on communication may also be helpful for those interested in knowledge and learning in the external environment.⁵

In carrying out the above, we have stood on the shoulders of others, trying as hard as possible to practise what we preach. We have learned that, regardless of the institutional setting, organisational learning and knowledge management initiatives that are successful are those that focus on a number key of organisational competencies.

2. Why is this guide relevant?

RAPID research has shown that knowledge and learning tools, if effectively applied, have the potential to transform the efficiency and effectiveness of development and humanitarian agencies. However, tools and techniques alone are not enough: a number of other factors need consideration. Findings have indicated in particular that where knowledge tools and processes, relationships and collaborations, organisational contextual factors and external factors are dealt with in an integrated and coherent manner, resulting strategies may prove more effective. Since undertaking this research, we have applied these principles in wide range of settings, learning more with each application.

Figure 1, developed as part of our research into this area, demonstrates the importance of using knowledge and learning tools as part of a holistic approach to organisational change. The diagram takes account of the specific environment and pressures faced by development and humanitarian agencies. The knowledge, relationships, contexts, external factors model is one that has since been used by RAPID to undertake research on existing initiatives and to develop new initiatives. And as the test of any such model is in the application, we have been gratified that it has proved useful in a range of settings.

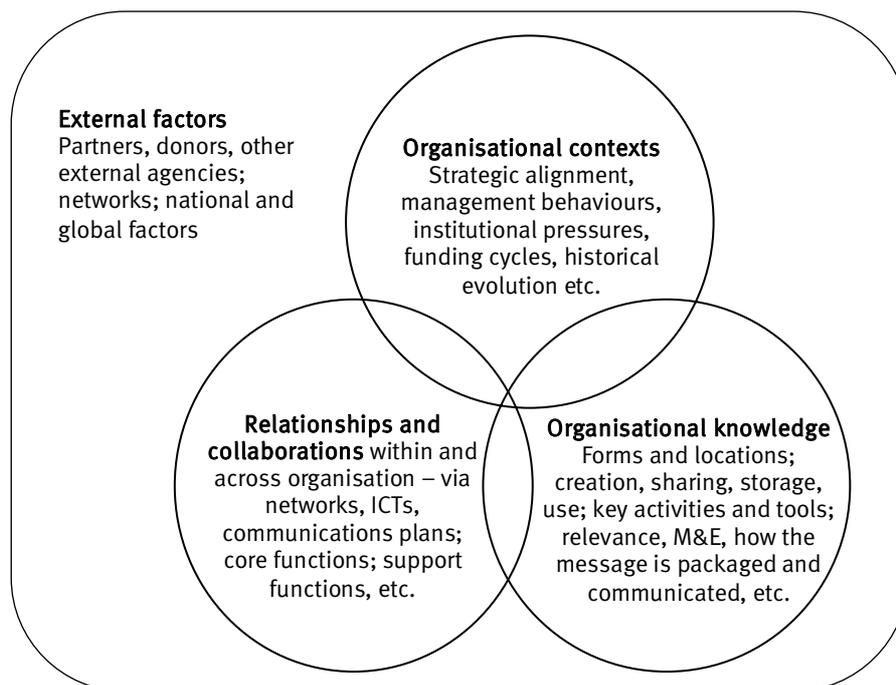
² Hovland, I. (2003) *Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning: An International Development Perspective*, ODI Working Paper 224, London: ODI.

³ Ramalingam, B. (2005) *Implementing Knowledge Strategies: Lessons from International Development Agencies*, ODI Working Paper 244, London: ODI.

⁴ See: www.odi.org.uk/rapid for further information and resources.

⁵ Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.

Figure 1: A holistic view of knowledge and learning tools



3. Overview of the tools

Our approach to this toolkit was inspired and has been reinforced by the groundbreaking and highly popular work of Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell in their *Learning to Fly* series.⁶ In particular, we have found their Five Competencies Framework very useful in organising and applying tools within knowledge management and organisational learning initiatives. We believe that the approach addresses a fundamental need in knowledge and learning: the need for a conceptual framework such that the different dimensions of such an initiative can be simply communicated and easily understood.

We have used the model presented in Figure 1 to adapt the Five Competencies Framework, and have been encouraging organisations to use this as a starting point for developing their own knowledge and learning strategies. Groups and teams can easily apply the process to work out how well they are performing in terms of the Five Competencies, and identify their goals and priorities for improvement.

The rest of the toolkit uses the five competencies in the form of chapters, as follows: Strategy Development; Management Techniques; Collaboration Mechanisms; Knowledge Sharing and Learning Processes; and Knowledge Capture and Storage.

Strategy development

This competency relates to how an organisation might start to look at its knowledge and learning in a strategic manner. The tools presented provide different frameworks which can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate knowledge and learning initiatives.

1. The Five Competencies Framework

The first tool in this guide explains how to apply the Five Competencies approach, and therefore serves as a starting point for readers, to help establish clear rationale and entry points for using this toolkit.

⁶ Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone.

2. Knowledge Audit

Knowledge Audit provides a structure for gathering data, synthesising findings and making recommendations about the best way forward for knowledge and learning initiatives against a background of the broader structural, operational and policy factors affecting an organisation.

3. Social Network Analysis

Social Network Analysis has been called the most systematic way of analysing relationships and knowledge flows between individuals and groups. Properly undertaken, SNA can yield invaluable data about how to tailor and focus knowledge and learning activities to organisational needs.

4. Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change is a narrative-based mechanism for planning programmes of change. As so much of knowledge and learning is about change, and this change takes place in a variety of different domains, the MSC tool could prove invaluable.

5. Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping is a participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology which focuses on the contribution of a programme to changes in the actions and behaviours of the 'boundary partners'. Applied to knowledge and learning strategies, OM has a number of potential benefits.

6. Scenario Testing and Visioning

Both of these tools focus on the future of an organisation, and enable imaginative and creative ideas to play a central role in developing and rolling out knowledge strategies.

Management techniques

If leadership is the process of working out the right things to do, then management is the process of doing things right. Here are a range of simple approaches, from assessing managerial responses to mistakes, to assessing the forces for and against stated organisational changes, which might prove useful to managers working towards the learning organisation.

7. The SECI Approach

This approach, made popular by Japanese management specialists Nonaka and Takeuchi, is based on systematically managing the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge, through four easy-to apply-processes based on simple principles of group dynamics.

8. Blame vs Gain Behaviours

Managing a learning organisation requires a managerial approach to mistakes which is healthy and balanced, and which encourages staff to take certain risks and to be honest about the consequences of their actions. This simple process enables groups to reflect on their own approach to mistakes and errors, and how they might go about addressing these, through use of a series of generic 'Blame' or 'Gain' behaviours.

9. Force Field Analysis

Force Field Analysis enables teams to work out what their goals are, and systematically to identify the forces for and against achieving them. This is the classic change management tool developed by Kurt Lewin, pioneer of action research, and can be an empowering and energising tool for teams.

10. Activity-based Knowledge Mapping

All activities require different inputs and generate outputs; increasingly, these inputs and outputs are information based. This tool, which has been drawn from the field of 'business process re-engineering', enables the mapping of inputs and outputs for key activities, with a view to improving their efficiency. This provides managers with an in-depth understanding of the different processes they are overseeing.

11. Structured Innovation

This tool works by listing the characteristics of a specific problem, and brainstorming the possible variations. Done correctly, this tool enables groups systematically to generate new ideas and assess their potential. This is useful for managers who feel the need for more creativity.

12. Reframing Matrix

Everyone sees problems in different ways, and one of the key problems with knowledge strategies is that knowledge is in the eye of the beholder. This tool enables different perspectives to be generated, and used in management planning processes.

Collaboration mechanisms

When working together with others, the whole of our efforts often proves to be less than the sum of the parts. Why? Frequently, there is not enough attention paid to facilitating effective collaborative practices. The tools in this section can be applied to reflect on the workings of teams, and to help strengthen relationships and develop shared thinking.

13. Teams: Virtual and Face-to-Face

This tool enables teams to work through five stages towards a 'shared responsibility'. Either face-to-face or virtually, teams can cross the five stages assessing where they lie in terms of different areas, including atmosphere and relations; goal acceptance; information sharing; decision making; reaction to leadership; and attention to the way the group is working.

14. Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice enable similarly minded interacting people to work towards generating and collaborating on knowledge and learning initiatives in a variety of ways, through a number of overlapping functions.

15. Action Learning Sets

Action Learning Sets are a structured method enabling small groups to address complicated issues by meeting regularly and working collectively. This tool is geared especially learning and personal development at professional and managerial levels.

16. Six Thinking Hats

This tool offers a way out of the habitual thinking style by enabling participants to use different approaches and perspectives to analysing decision making. This is particularly useful in that it allows a broad and objective view of decisions, and one which covers more options and possibilities.

17. Mind Maps

Mind Maps are a graphic technique to enable participants to implement clearer thinking in their approach to many different tasks. It is useful both for individuals and for groups, and provides as non-linear method of organising information.

18. Social Technologies

Social Technologies cover a broad swathe of tools, all using technology to build collaboration and sharing of tacit knowledge. There are many different fora for this, chiefly internet-based tools but also including telecommunications, radio and face-to-face socialising.

Knowledge sharing and learning

So much of effective knowledge and learning is about two-way communication which takes place in a simple and effective manner, and applying simple techniques to try and build on past experiences to improve activities in the future. These essential tools are covered in this section.

19. Stories

Storytelling is an approach which can both allow for expression of tacit knowledge and increase potential for meaningful knowledge sharing, particularly by permitting learning to take place through the presence of a narrative structure.

20. Peer Assists

This tool encourages participatory learning, by asking those with experience in certain activities to assist those wishing to benefit from their knowledge, through a systematic process, towards strengthened mutual learning.

21. Challenge Sessions

Challenge Sessions are a structure framework geared towards solving problems by allowing participants to supplement their habitual thinking with new methods, centred around working towards dealing with problems that are made up of conflicting requirements or challenges.

22. After Action Reviews and Retrospects

The After Action Review facilitates continuous assessment of organisational performance, looking at successes and failures, ensuring that learning takes place to support continuous improvement in organisational learning and change.

23. Intranet Strategies

Intranets can have a great impact on knowledge management, particularly in the fields of information collection, collaboration and communication, and task completion. Following the necessary approach, this tool can substantially increase the likelihood of an effective, useful system within an organisation.

24. Email Guidelines

Email is one of the most commonly used communication tools in the modern business environment; there is an increased need nowadays to manage this tool to reduce the risk of overload. This tool helps to control this tool and therefore increase its effectiveness as a communication tool.

Knowledge capture and storage

Knowledge and information can leak in all sorts of ways and at all sorts of times. To make sure that essential knowledge is retained by an organisation requires, a range of techniques can be applied, from traditional information management tools such as shared drives, as well as more modern techniques such as blogs and knowledge based exit interviews.

25. Taxonomies for Documents and Folders

This tool has been in existence for many decades in the form of classification schemes and indexing systems, and still can have a great deal to offer in terms of structuring information for easier management and retrieval.

26. Exit Interviews

Exit Interviews represent a specific learning process, not just a way to leave a company, and one which highlights the importance of capturing and storing know-how. This can minimise the loss of useful knowledge through staff turnover and ease the learning curve of new staff, benefiting both the organisation and the leaving staff.

27. How To Guides

This tool enables the capture, documentation and dissemination of know-how of staff within an organisation, to help them make better and wider use of existing knowledge. The ultimate goal is to capture an effective sequence or process with enough accuracy so that it can be repeated with the same good results.

28. Staff Profile Pages

Using this tool, an electronic directory storing information about staff in a given organisation, can facilitate connections among people through systematising organisational knowledge and learning initiatives.

29. Blogs

A Weblog in its various forms enable groups of people to discuss electronically areas of interest in different ways, and to review different opinions and information surrounding such subjects.

30. Shared Network Drives

Shared Network Drives work in most organisations to store and categorise information. If used correctly, and under systematised good practices, they can enable better retrieval of knowledge and improved information sharing across an organisation.

Strategy Development

What's the use of running if you are not on the right road?
Indian proverb

1. The Five Competencies Framework

Introduction

In the influential book *Learning to Fly*, Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell (2001) describe five key organisational ‘competencies’. As already stated, we see these of being of high practical relevance for knowledge management and organisational learning initiatives. The **Five Competencies Framework** has been promoted widely and is now being used by many different teams or groups, to work out how well they are performing against organisationally established criteria for knowledge and learning, and to identify goals and priorities for improvement. The competency framework works on the principle that effective knowledge and learning is based on improving performance five important competency areas:

- Strategy development
- Management techniques
- Collaboration mechanisms
- Knowledge sharing and learning processes
- Knowledge capture and storage

Based on these competencies, Parcell and Collison have developed a framework to be worked through by groups and teams within a given organisation. This framework can be used to discover how well teams or groups believe they are performing against the pre-established criteria, and where they most wish to improve.

Detailed description of the process

The five competencies framework is an exercise enabling an organisation (or a group of organisations) to work out, in a simple and effective manner, what different elements have to **learn**, and what they have to share in the realm of organisational learning and knowledge management. Importantly, the framework also provides a common framework and language to support the knowledge and learning, and can be used to connect people with something to share to people with something to learn.

For each of the five competency areas outlined above, the framework describes five levels of performance, from basic to high. The framework is therefore a 5x5 matrix (see Figure 2). The first step is to get a group of stakeholders from across an organisation or team to work together to discuss relative strengths and areas for improvement in terms of knowledge and learning. The group should work to determine the Current Level for each of the competencies (use italics to highlight these) and the Target Level for each. The idea is to get the statement that best describes the organisation, rather than that the most exact. The target should be determined by projecting some reasonable time into the future – say, two years. The framework can also be used to determine the priorities for immediate action, through selection of the competency area which will yield greatest benefits if improved.

Key points/practical tips

- As stated in the introduction, this tool can be used to establish clear entry points and rationale for applying the range of tools contained in the present handbook.
- It is also a very good tool to support the improved communication and understanding of knowledge and learning strategies.

Example: CARE International

As part of a Partnership Programme Agreement (awarded by DFID), CARE International UK was looking to develop four regional knowledge networks, focusing on HIV/AIDS, private sector partnerships (PPPs), international financial institutions (IFIs) and civil society organisations (CSOs).

As part of a two-day training course to help with the knowledge and learning aspects of this work, the CARE team was introduced to the five competencies approach, as well as a number of other tools that would help build capacity in each area. Following this, the team decided to run a KM strategy session as part of a five-day conference in Quito, Ecuador, under the PPP theme. The core of this was to explain the five competencies framework, and to get participants to think through where the network was at present, and where it wanted to be. The workshop proved to be a resounding success with participants, and laid the groundwork for the operation of the network in the future.

Sources and further reading

- Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone. This tool is used here with kind permission of the authors. It has been adapted following applications by the author in a range of different settings in the development and humanitarian sectors.

Figure 2: Matrix for the five competencies framework

	STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT	MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES	COLLABORATION MECHANISMS	KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND LEARNING	KNOWLEDGE CAPTURE AND STORAGE
LEVEL 5 (HIGH)	Knowledge and learning are integral parts of the overall organisational strategy. A set of tools is available and well communicated, and the capacity to apply them is actively strengthened.	Managers and leaders recognise and reinforce the link between knowledge, learning and performance. Managers regularly apply relevant tools and techniques, and act as learning role models. Staff ToRs contain references to knowledge sharing and learning.	Collaboration is a defining principle across the organisation. A range of internal and external collaboration mechanisms operate, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities in terms of the organisational goals. Some have clear external deliverables while others develop capability in the organisation.	Prompts for learning are built into key processes ... Programme staff routinely find out who knows what, inside and outside the organisation, and talk with them. A common language, templates and guidelines support effective sharing.	Information is easy to access and retrieve. Selected information is sent to potential users in a systematic and coherent manner. High priority information assets have multiple managers who are responsibility for updating, summarising and synthesising information. Exit interviews and handovers are used systematically.
LEVEL 4	A knowledge and learning strategy exists, but is not integrated with overall goals. A set of tools for knowledge and learning <i>is</i> available and understood by most staff.	Management view knowledge and learning as everyone's responsibility. Managers increasingly ask for and exhibit learning approaches. There are rewards and incentives for using such approaches.	Networks are organised around business needs and have a clear governance document. Supportive technology is in place and is well used. External parties are being included in some networks.	'Learning before, during and after is the way things are done around here.' Beneficiaries and partners participate in review sessions. External knowledge plays a role in shaping projects.	Key information is kept current and easily accessible. One individual acts as the guardian of each information asset, and encourages people to contribute. Many do.
LEVEL 3	There are ongoing discussions about developing a knowledge and learning strategy. A wide range of tools are being used across the organisation.	<u>Knowledge and learning is viewed as the responsibility of a specific role or roles.</u> <u>Some managers talk the talk, but don't always walk the walk!</u>	<u>People are using networks and working groups to get results. Peers are helping peers across organisational boundaries</u> <u>Formal collaboration mechanisms are being created and recognised.</u>	<u>People can find out what the organisation knows. Some examples of sharing and learning are highlighted and recognised across the organisation. Some information translates across boundaries.</u>	<u>Specific groups take responsibility for their own information and begin to collect it in one location in a common format. Some is summarised for easy access by others. Searching information assets before starting activities is encouraged, as is sharing lessons afterwards. Some handovers take place.</u>
LEVEL 2	<u>Many people say that sharing knowledge is important to the organisations success. Some people are using some tools to help with learning and sharing.</u>	<i>Some managers give people the time to share and learn, but there is little visible support from the top.</i>	Ad hoc personal networking is used by individuals who know each other to achieve goals. This is increasingly recognised as vital to the organisation.	<i>People learn before doing and programme review sessions. They sometimes capture what they learn for the purpose of sharing, but in practice few do access it.</i>	<i>A few groups capture lessons learned after a project, and look for information before starting a project. There is potential access to lots of information, but it is not summarised.</i>
LEVEL 1 (BASIC)	<i>A few people express that knowledge is important to the organisation. Isolated individuals begin to talk about how important – and difficult – it is.</i>	Knowledge and learning viewed with scepticisms. Management think learning leads to lack of accountability. 'Knowledge is power' at the highest levels of the organisation.	<i>Knowledge hoarders seem to get rewarded. There are few cross-cutting collaborations. Silos are hard to break down.</i>	People are conscious of the need to learn from what they do but rarely get the time. Sharing is for the benefit of specific teams.	Some individuals take the time to capture their lessons, but do so in a confusing variety of formats. Most don't contribute to information assets, and even fewer search them. No exit interviews or handovers take place.

Italics: Where we are now

Underlined: Where we aim to be (in specified time)

Highlighted: Priority competency area

2. Knowledge Audits

Introduction

Taking a systematic and strategic approach to knowledge and learning can help to integrate the diverse activities of an organisation, and facilitate more productive processes of knowledge sharing and dialogue between internal and external stakeholders. Successful initiatives integrate information technology, human resources and information management in a coherent manner to strengthen institutional memory and cohesion, and to reduce unnecessary duplication of work, thereby increasing efficiency and effectiveness.

A well developed knowledge and learning strategy for development and humanitarian organisations will identify ways to improve how current and historical knowledge is used both within the organisation and outside it. The goal of such a strategy would be to make the work of the organisation more ‘joined up’, better coordinated and more coherent as a whole.

One potential approach to developing this strategy is to apply a systematic **Knowledge Audit** methodology, as developed by ODI. This methodology was arrived at through a theoretical and case-based investigation of the utilisation of knowledge in diverse policy processes. It has also been used to assess knowledge and learning strategies across a range of international agencies, including multilaterals, government agencies and NGOs (Ramalingam, 2005). The methodology provides a structure for gathering data, synthesising the findings, and making recommendations about the best way forward for knowledge and learning initiatives. It ensures recommendations are well grounded in broader structural, operational and policy factors affecting an organisation.

Detailed description of the process

Ideally, the strategy development would be in four distinct phases. The first stage would involve in-depth research and analysis of current institutional policies and practices, utilising interviews, workshops and focus groups. Specific questions to be explored would fall into the following categories:

Knowledge

- What are the core tasks and processes carried out by different groups and divisions within the organisation?
- What constitutes useful, applicable knowledge for the execution of these tasks and processes?
- How is this knowledge generated, identified, shared, stored and applied in core operations?
- How might improved generation, sharing, storing and application of knowledge be monitored?

Relationships and processes

- What existing and planned systems and processes can support the knowledge sharing and learning strategy, and how should they be deployed?
- What existing and planned organisational initiatives might influence and support the generation, sharing, storing and application of knowledge?
- What is the nature of key relationships within the organisation? How formal/informal are these relationships? How do they impact upon issues of knowledge and learning?

Organisational contexts

- How can human resources, information technology, information management and other support functions be better integrated to support the knowledge and learning ‘vision’?
- How might existing institutional structures support the KM strategy?
- How might leadership and governance support the KM strategy?

- What are the perceived costs and benefits of improved knowledge and learning?

External factors

- How does organisational knowledge and learning translate across the boundaries of the secretariat to include member states, dispute panels and the appellate bodies, other international agencies, civil society, and so on? (Specifically, how does the principle of ‘horizontal coordination’ work in practice and how can it be strengthened?)
- How might the political, economic, and cultural contexts in which the WTO secretariat operates impact upon the development and implementation of an effective knowledge and learning strategy?

Stage 1: These questions should be explored through a combination of approaches including face-to-face and telephone interviews; workshops and focus groups; electronic consultations and discussion groups.

Stage 2: Use the framework to generate recommendations as to how knowledge and learning tools can be incorporated to improve efficiency and effectiveness across the organisation in question. Research based on the questions posed previously should be used to develop a coherent set of ideas for application across all the different divisions and functions of the organisation.

Stage 3: This stage focuses on iterating the strategic conclusions, with recommendations being presented to stakeholders and refined as necessary.

Stage 4: Implementation of the strategy should be undertaken on a selected basis with a number of divisions or teams, accompanied by careful monitoring. Following this, there should be another cycle of refinement and rollout across the rest of the organisation.

Sources and further reading

- Ramalingam, B. (2005) *Implementing Knowledge Strategies: From Policy to Practice in Development Agencies*, ODI Working Paper 244, London: ODI.
- More information on conducting knowledge audits can be found on the NHS Toolkit: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/getting_started.asp.

3. Social Network Analysis

Introduction

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a research technique that focuses on identifying and comparing the relationships within and between individuals, groups and systems in order to model the real-world interactions at the heart of organisational knowledge and learning processes. Whereas an organisation chart shows formal relationships of function and responsibility, SNA aims to illuminate informal relationships: 'who knows whom' and 'who shares with whom'. This allows leaders to visualise and understand the diverse relationships that either facilitate or impede knowledge sharing. 'Because these relationships are normally invisible, SNA is sometimes referred to as an 'organisational X-ray' – showing the real networks that operate underneath the surface organisational structure' (see: www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement).

After social relationships and knowledge flows become visible, they can be evaluated, compared and measured. Results of SNA can then be applied at the level of individuals, departments or organisations to:

- Identify those (individuals and groups) playing central roles (thought leaders, key knowledge brokers, information managers, etc).
- Identify bottlenecks and those isolated.
- Spot opportunities to improve knowledge flow.
- Target those where better knowledge sharing will have the most impact.
- Raise awareness of the significance of informal networks.

Detailed description of the process

The SNA process involves information collection by means of questionnaires and/or interviews. Data targeted are those regarding relationships within a defined group or network of people. Then, using a software tool designed for the purpose, responses are mapped. Analysis of data arising from the responses can go on to offer a baseline. Using this baseline, it is then possible to plan and prioritise changes and interventions geared towards improving social connections and knowledge flows within the group or network.

There are various key stages involved:

- Identification of the target network (e.g. team, group, department).
- Background data collecting, obtained through interviewing managers and key players regarding specific needs and problems.
- Outlining and clarifying objectives and scope of analysis, and determining the level of reporting.
- Formulating hypotheses and questions.
- Developing the survey methodology and the questionnaire.
- Using these tools to interview the individuals in the network to identify relationships and knowledge flows.
- Using a mapping tool to map out the network visually.
- Review of the map and of problems and opportunities highlighted, by means of interviews and/or workshops.
- Design and implementation of actions to bring about desired changes.
- Mapping the network again after an appropriate period of time.

Key points/practical tips

It is important that SNA involves knowing what information to gather in the first place. As a result, it is vital to put a great deal of thought into the design of the survey and questionnaire. Effective questions typically focus on a variety of factors, such as those that follow (taken from www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement):

- Who knows whom and how well?
- How well do people know each others' knowledge and skills?
- Who or what gives people information about a specific theme/relationship/process?
- What resources do people use to find information, get feedback/ideas/advice about a specific theme/relationship/process?
- What resources do people use to share information about theme/relationship/process?

Example: SNA in Mozambique humanitarian relief

In February 2000, Mozambique suffered its worst flooding in almost 50 years: 699 people died and hundreds of thousands were displaced. Over 49 countries, 30 INGOs and 35 local organisations provided humanitarian assistance. A team of researchers used SNA methods to examine the structure of inter-organisational relations among the 65 NGOs involved in the flood operations. The results showed a correlation between the central role of an organisation in the social network (i.e. the number and strength of connections with other organisations) and the numbers of beneficiaries served, specifically during the emergency period immediately following the flooding. This association was shown in turn to be affected by other factors, such as NGO type, sector of engagement and provincial presence. As an example, with the exception of the Mozambican Red Cross (which was the most central member of the network), local NGOs in general remained peripheral to the coordination processes. This suggests that local civil society capacity for responding to *future* disasters had not been developed over the course of the crisis, and that the response may have increased dependence on INGOs. Interestingly, the association between network position and beneficiary numbers did not hold during the post-emergency recovery period, a fact which was linked to the observed reduction of coordination levels during this phase.

By using social network analysis to determine how the network structure affects inter-organisational coordination and humanitarian aid outcomes, the study showed that the success of humanitarian aid operations ultimately depends on the ability of organisations to work together, and that working together was built on knowledge sharing, joint operations and projects, in an appropriate inter-organisational network structure.

Sources and further reading

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- NHS Website: www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement.
- The International Network of SNA, with a comprehensive list of resources, see: www.ire.org/sna.
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- Perkin, E. and J. Court (2005) *Networks and Policy Processes in International Development: A Literature Review*, ODI Working Paper 252, London: ODI.

4. Most Significant Change (MSC)

Introduction

The **Most Significant Change** (MSC) technique is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation. It is participatory because many project stakeholders are involved both in deciding the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data. It is a form of monitoring because it occurs throughout the programme cycle and provides information to help people manage it. MSC contributes to evaluation because it provides data on impact and outcomes which can be used to help assess the performance of the programme as a whole.

Essentially, the process involves the collection of significant change (SC) stories emanating from the field level, and the systematic selection of the most important of these by panels of designated stakeholders or staff. The designated staff and stakeholders are initially involved by ‘searching’ for project impact. Once changes have been captured, various people sit down together, read the stories aloud and have regular and often in-depth discussions about the value of the reported changes. When the technique is successfully implemented, whole teams of people begin to focus their attention on programme impact.

MSC has had several names since it was conceived, each emphasising a different aspect. Examples are: ‘Monitoring-without-indicators’ – MSC does not make use of predefined indicators, especially ones which have to be counted and measured; or the ‘story approach’ – the answers to the central question about change are often in the form of stories of who did what, when and why, and the reasons the event was important.

Detailed description of the process

- The first step in MSC generally involves introducing a range of stakeholders to MSC and fostering interest in and commitment to participating. The next step is to identify the domains of change to be monitored. This involves selected stakeholders identifying broad domains – for example, ‘changes in people’s lives’ – that are not precisely defined as are performance indicators, but deliberately left loose to be defined by the actual users. The third step is to decide how frequently to monitor changes taking place in these domains.
- SC stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as participants and field staff. The stories are gathered by asking a simple question such as: ‘during the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the programme?’ It is initially up to respondents to allocate a domain category to their stories. In addition to this, respondents are encouraged to report why they consider a particular change to be the most significant.
- The stories are then analysed and filtered up through the levels of authority typically found within an organisation or programme. Each level of the hierarchy reviews a series of stories sent to them by the level below and selects the single most significant account of change within each of the domains. Each group then sends the selected stories up to the next level of the programme hierarchy, and the number of stories is whittled down through a systematic and transparent process. Every time stories are selected, the criteria used to select them are recorded and fed back to all interested stakeholders, so that each subsequent round of story collection and selection is informed by feedback from previous rounds. The organisation is effectively recording and adjusting the direction of its attention – and the criteria it uses for valuing the events it sees there.
- After this process has been underway for some time, perhaps a year, a document is produced including all stories selected at the uppermost organisational level in each domain of change over the given period. The stories are accompanied by the reasons for selection. The programme funders are asked to assess the stories in the document and select those which best represent the sort of outcomes they wish to fund. They are also asked to document the reasons for their choice. This information is fed back to project managers.

- The selected stories can then be verified by visiting the sites where the described events took place. The purpose of this is twofold: to check that stories have been reported accurately and honestly, and to provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information about events seen as especially significant. If conducted some time after the event, a visit also offers a chance to see what has happened since the event was first documented.
- The next step is quantification, which can take place at two stages. When an account of change is first described, it is possible to include quantitative information as well as qualitative information. It is also possible to quantify the extent to which the most significant changes identified in one location have taken place in other locations within a specific period. The next step after quantification is monitoring the monitoring system itself, which can include looking at who participated and how they affected the contents, and analysing how often different types of changes are reported. The final step is to revise the design of the MSC process to take into account what has been learned as a direct result of using it and from analysing its use.

In sum, the kernel of the MSC process is a question along the lines of: ‘Looking back over the last month, what do you think was the most significant change in [particular domain of change]?’ A similar question is posed when the answers to the first question are examined by another group of participants: ‘From among all these significant changes, what do you think was the most significant change of all?’.

Key points/practical tips

MSC is an emerging technique, and many adaptations have already been made. These are discussed in Davies and Dart (2005). In sum, there are 10 steps:

- How to start and raise interest
- Defining the domains of change
- Defining the reporting period
- Collecting SC stories
- Selecting the most significant of the stories
- Feeding back the results of the selection process
- Verification of stories
- Quantification
- Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring
- Revising the system

Example: MSC in Bangladesh

In 1994, Rick Davies was faced with the job of assessing the impact of an aid project on 16,500 people in the Rajshahi zone of western of Bangladesh. The idea of getting everyone to agree on a set of indicators was quickly dismissed, as there was just too much diversity and too many conflicting views. Instead, Rick devised an evaluation method which relied on people retelling their stories of significant change they had witnessed as a result of the project. Furthermore, the storytellers explained why they thought their story was significant.

If Rick had left it there, the project would have had a nice collection of stories but the key stakeholders’ appreciation for the impact the project would have been minimal. Rick needed to engage the stakeholders, primarily the region’s decision makers and the ultimate project funders, in a process that would help them see (and maybe even feel) the change. His solution was to get groups of people at different levels of the project’s hierarchy to select the stories they thought were most significant and explain why they made that selection.

Each of the four project offices collected a number of stories and was asked to submit one story for each of the four areas of interest to the head office in Dhaka. The Dhaka head office staff then selected one story from the 16 submitted. The selected stories and reasons for selection were communicated back to the level below and the original storytellers. Over time, the stakeholders began to understand the impact they were having and the project's beneficiaries began to understand what the stakeholders believed was important. People were learning from each other. The approach, MSC, systematically developed an intuitive understanding of the project's impact that could be communicated in conjunction with the hard facts.

Rick's method was highly successful: participation in the project increased; the assumptions and world views surfaced, in one case helping resolve an intra-family conflict over contraceptive use; the stories were used extensively in publications, educational material and videos; and the positive changes were identified and reinforced.

To date, although the application of MSC has been mostly confined to NGO programmes and other not-for-profit organisations, corporations are also recognising that issues such as culture change, communities of practice, learning initiatives generally and leadership development could benefit from an MSC approach. (This example is taken from www.anecdote.com.au/archives/2006/04/evaluating_the.html.)

Sources and further reading

- Davies, R. and J. Dart (2005) *The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique; A Guide to Its Use*, see: www.mande.co.uk/docs/MSCGuide.pdf.
- MSC website and mailing list, see: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MostSignificantChanges>.
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5. Outcome Mapping

Introduction

As development is essentially about people relating to each other and their environments, the focus of **Outcome Mapping** is on people. The originality of the methodology is its shift away from assessing the development impact of a programme (defined as changes in state: for example, policy relevance, poverty alleviation, or reduced conflict) and toward changes in the behaviours, relationships, actions or activities of the people, groups and organisations with which a development programme works directly. This shift significantly alters the way a programme understands its goals and assesses its performance and results. Outcome mapping establishes a vision of the human, social and environmental betterment to which the programme hopes to contribute and then focuses monitoring and evaluation on factors and actors within that programme’s direct sphere of influence. The programme’s contributions to development are planned and assessed based on its influence on the partners with whom it is working to effect change. At its essence, development is accomplished by, and for, people. This is, then, the central concept of outcome mapping. Outcome mapping does not belittle the importance of changes in state (such as cleaner water or a stronger economy) but instead argues that for each change in state there are correlating changes in behaviour.

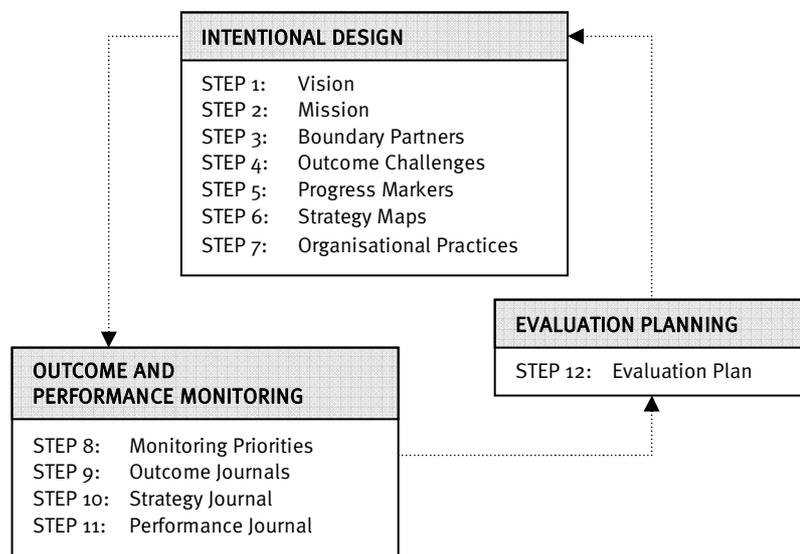
Detailed description of the process

Intentional Design helps a programme establish consensus on the macro-level changes it will help to bring about and plan the strategies it will use. It helps answer four questions: Why? (What is the vision to which the programme wants to contribute?); Who? (Who are the programme’s boundary partners?); What? (What are the changes that are being sought?); and How? (How will the programme contribute to the change process?).

Outcome and Performance Monitoring provides a framework for the ongoing monitoring of the programme’s actions and the boundary partners’ progress toward the achievement of outcomes. It is based largely on systematised self-assessment. It provides the following data collection tools for elements identified in the Intentional Design stage: an Outcome Journal (progress markers); a Strategy Journal (strategy maps); and a Performance Journal (organisational practices).

Evaluation Planning helps the programme identify evaluation priorities and develop an evaluation plan. Figure 3 illustrates the three stages of outcome mapping.

Figure 3: The three stages of outcome mapping



The process for identifying the macro-level changes and designing the monitoring framework and evaluation plan is intended to be participatory and, wherever feasible, can involve the full range of stakeholders, including boundary partners. Outcome mapping is based on principles of participation and purposefully includes those implementing the programme in the design and data collection so as to encourage ownership and use of findings. It is intended to be used as a consciousness-raising, consensus-building and empowerment tool for those working directly in the programme. Outcome mapping introduces monitoring and evaluation considerations at the planning stage of a programme, and moves away from the notion that monitoring and evaluation are done *to* a programme. Instead, it actively engages groups and teams in the design of a learning-oriented plan, with self-reflection as a core principle.

Key points/practical tips

Outcome mapping is a planning, monitoring and evaluation tool developed by IDRC of Canada (www.idrc.ca). It focuses on the following key points:

- **Behavioural change:** Outcomes are defined as changes in the behaviour, relationships, activities, or actions of the people, groups and organisations with which a programme works directly. These outcomes can be logically linked to a programme's activities, although they are not necessarily directly caused by them.
- **Boundary partners:** Those individuals, groups and organisations with which the programme interacts directly and with which the programme anticipates opportunities for influence. Most activities will involve multiple outcomes because they have multiple boundary partners.
- **Contributions:** By using outcome mapping, a programme is not claiming the achievement of development impacts; rather, the focus is on its contributions to outcomes. These outcomes, in turn, enhance the possibility of development impacts – but the relationship is not necessarily a direct one of cause and effect.

Example: Knowledge sharing programme

For example, a knowledge sharing programme's objective may be to provide communities with access to better information by means of an intranet system. Traditionally, the method of evaluating the results of this programme would be to count the number of potential users of the system, and to measure changes in the level of access after the system is installed. A focus on changes in behaviour begins instead from the premise that the intranet is a focal point for staff knowledge sharing behaviours, and that it will not be used without people perceiving there to be quality information available. The programme's outcomes are therefore evaluated in terms of whether those responsible for knowledge sharing not only have, but also use, the appropriate tools, skills and knowledge to update and review information on the intranet. Outcome mapping provides a method for knowledge and learning programmes to plan for and assess the capacities that they are helping to build in people, groups and organisations. Outcome mapping does not attempt to replace the more traditional forms of planning, monitoring and evaluation, which focus on changes in condition or in the state of wellbeing. Instead, outcome mapping supplements these other forms by focusing specifically on related behavioural change.

Sources and further reading

- Earl, S., F. Carden, and T. Smutylo (2001) *Outcome Mapping; Building Learning and Reflection into Development Programs*, International Development Research Centre (IDRC), see: www.idrc.ca/en/ev-9330-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html.
- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- The website for a dedicated community of practice for users of outcome mapping worldwide is currently being finalised: www.outcomemapping.ca.

6. Scenario Testing and Visioning

'Scenario testing's greatest use is in developing an understanding of the situation, rather than trying to predict the future' (Caldwell, 2001).

Introduction

Scenario Testing is a group learning activity. The basic premise can be used more widely in all kinds of settings, whether generating a knowledge strategy paper, (e.g. outline three possible future scenarios for the organisation in the introduction), a workshop, or an email debate. Generally, scenario testing would deliver three scenarios: a positive (or optimistic), negative (or pessimistic), and neutral (or middle-of-the-road) scenario. By actively using 'scenarios', several concerns and outcomes can be addressed at the same time. Participants are able to:

- Identify general, broad, driving forces, which are applicable to all scenarios.
- Identify a variety of plausible trends within each issue or trend (trends that vary depending on your assumptions so you get positive and negative perspectives).
- Combine the trends so you get a series of scenarios (for example, mostly positive trends identified in relation to an issue would give a positive scenario).

Scenarios are a way of developing alternative futures based on different combinations of assumptions, facts and trends, and areas where more understanding is needed for your particular scenario project. They are called scenarios because they are like scenes in the theatre: a series of differing views or presentations on the same general topic. Once you see several scenarios at the same time, you can better understand your options or possibilities (seminar on futures techniques, from the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences).

Visioning is similar to scenario planning. Visioning is a collective exercise, but can also be adapted and used in various other communication activities. The main objective is to make the problem and solution visual. It follows the age-old communication advice: 'show, don't tell'.

Collective visioning exercises, carried out in a group, are used to define and help achieve a desirable future. Visioning exercises are regularly used in strategic planning and allow participants to create images that can help to guide change in an organisation. The outcome of a visioning exercise is a medium-to-long-term plan, generally with a three to five-year horizon. Visioning exercises also provide a frame for a strategy for the achievement of the vision. Alternatively, some visioning tools may be used to promote thought and encourage discussion of future resource use and planning options, without the need to create a future-orientated document.

Detailed description of the process

Scenario testing

- Invite participants who have knowledge of, or are affected by, the proposal or issue of interest.
- Invite participants to identify the underlying paradigms or unwritten laws of change; trends or driving forces and collect into general categories (economy, socio/political, etc.); and wildcards or uncertainties.
- Consider how these might affect a situation, either singly or in combination, using these steps:
 - Review the big picture
 - Review general approaches to future studies
 - Identify what you know and what you don't know
 - Select possible paradigm shifts and use them as an overall guide
 - Cluster trends and see which driving forces are most relevant to your scenario
- Create alternative scenarios (similar to alternate scenes in a play) by mixing wildcards with trends

and driving forces; keep the number of scenarios low (four is ideal because it avoids the 'either/or' choice of two, and the good/bad/medium choice of three).

- Write a brief report that: states assumptions and a future framework; provides observations and conclusions; gives a range of possibilities; and focuses on the next steps coming out of this study. Each scenario should be about one page.

Visioning

In a typical visioning exercise, a facilitator asks participants to close their eyes and imagine they are walking around the organisation as they would like to see it in five years. What do they see? What do the offices look like? Where do people gather? How do they make decisions? What are they eating? Where are they working? How are they travelling? What is happening with external stakeholders? Where is the hub of the organisation? How do knowledge and learning fit into the picture? What do you see if you are a fly on the wall in various organisational settings?

People record their visions in written or pictorial form: in diagrams, sketches, models, photographic montages and written briefs. Sometimes, a professional illustrator helps turn mental images into drawings of the city that people can extend and modify (see: www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/2_16_visioning.html). Invite the group to comment on these choices and to discuss what was easy and what was difficult about the process, what they learned, and how they might use the game in the future.

Key points/practical tips

- Use when integration between issues is required.
- Use when a wide variety of ideas should be heard.
- Use when a range of potential solutions are needed.
- Visioning encourages participation for developing a long-range plan.
- Visioning is an integrated approach to policymaking. With overall goals in view, it helps avoid piecemeal and reactionary approaches to addressing problems. Visioning uses participation as a source of ideas in the establishment of long-range organisational policy. It draws upon deeply held feelings about overall directions of organisations to solicit opinions about the future.
- When completed, visioning presents a democratically derived consensus.

Special considerations/weaknesses:

- Organisation of the visioning exercise can be costly.
- Vision can be difficult to transfer into strategy and policy.

Example – Scenario planning: IRC water

A 'trend identification' meeting was carried out at the beginning of 2005 as part of IRC's process of strategic planning. The trends reflected the factors considered the most important to IRC and its vision. To identify these, IRC looked at possible developments in five different fields:

- General development trends, not specific to the water sector but which might have an impact;
- Financial trends in the water sector;
- Implications for approaches to working within the sector;
- Information-related trends; and
- Water and sanitation content trends (a more general analysis).

Factors were initially identified during a brainstorming workshop by IRC staff, and were then elaborated and fleshed out by a small team. One key limitation was been the lack of time to analyse beyond national average data, which tend to hide national variations in key factors. For example, some states

in India are as poor and underdeveloped as sub-Saharan Africa, but this is not evident in the national statistics. Based on this analysis, and drawing on material in the trend analysis, four different scenarios emerged for possible future operating environments for the sector. These indicated a variety of conflicting directions in which the water, sanitation and hygiene sectors could develop in order to achieve the MDGs.

Scenario 1: Business as usual – many gain, many left behind. Strong Dutch support to the sector, predominance of bilateral aid with a strong construction emphasis within the sector.

Scenario 2: WASH dream – but beware of the capacity cowboys. Strong Dutch support to the sector, predominance of bilateral coordinated aid and a strong emphasis on knowledge within the sector.

Scenario 3: SWAPs succeed – but instability and emergencies soak up aid. Strong Dutch support to the sector, increase in multilateral aid and focus on hardware provision.

Scenario 4: WASH nightmare. Dutch disengage, MDGs left in the dust. Little Dutch support to the sector and Africa left to find its own way.

These four scenarios have been written with the intention of being as different from one another as possible, based on a combination of the most important and, at the same time, uncertain trends. It is important while reading to bear in mind that these are just stories – in some cases exaggerated (although not impossible) ones. The question is not ‘are they right?’ or ‘do I agree with everything in them?’ or ‘aren’t they too radical?’ Rather, it is ‘are they possible?’ It is necessary to explore different potential futures to be sure that a chosen strategy (or strategies) is sufficiently robust for an organisation to achieve its vision. If these extremes are not considered, and then some of them happen, it is then that an organisation can indeed find itself badly wrong.

It is also important to understand how the stories were created. The broad lines – the big differences – come from the important and uncertain factors. Into these are woven the other trends – especially the important but certain ones. So, for example, all four stories share a strongly developed Asia, a Latin America that is more or less as it is now, and development in sub-Saharan Africa that is lagging behind. Three reflect scenarios in which the Dutch remain an important sector actor – but with radically different behaviour. A fourth represents a scenario in which the Dutch decide to withdraw from the sector and from aid more generally.

This example is drawn from www.irc.nl/content/download/24277/273359/file/OP41_WASHScenarios.pdf.

Example – Visioning: MYRADA in Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka

One growing application of visioning is the technique of appreciative enquiry. This lets practitioners move beyond traditional problem-centred methods, such as like participatory problems and needs analysis, to identify and build on past achievements and existing strengths within a group or community, establish consensus around a shared vision of the future, and construct strategies and partnerships to achieve that vision. The International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) has been doing a great deal of work in applying this visioning tool. One particular project involved working with a partner called MYRADA in two southern Indian states, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka. The project tested the effectiveness of appreciative inquiry as a method for helping community groups design and carry out projects that contribute to sustainable development and secure livelihoods.

IISD worked with MYRADA and a network of NGOs and community groups, using appreciative inquiry to plan and carry out village-level projects that emphasised the promotion of gender equity, the diversification of income-generating opportunities, and the improvement of local environmental conditions. By working with community groups from three regions, each facing distinct challenges, the project was able to identify and document the most effective methods of applying appreciative inquiry in different circumstances. During the project, over 804 people from 70 different organisations, including some from Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Burma, received training in appreciative inquiry. The approach generated great enthusiasm and cooperation in developing a group vision built on the

collective strengths and aspirations of its members. It also produced strategic plans by which local people would work to turn their visions into reality. In particular, the tool had an immediate observable effect on participants, and presents great potential as a tool to promote ownership of change processes at the local level.

For more information, see: www.iisd.org/ai.

Sources and further reading

Scenario testing

- Coastal CRC's Citizen Science Toolbox: www.coastal.crc.org.au/toolbox/index.asp.
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- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
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Visioning

- Ames, S. C. (1993) *The Agency Visioning Handbook: Developing A Vision for the Future of Public Agencies*, A Hands-on Guide for Planners and Facilitators in State and Federal Natural Resource Agencies, Arlington, Virginia: US Fish and Wildlife Service.
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- New Economics Foundation and UK Participation Network (1998) 'Participation Works: 21 Techniques of community participation for the 21st century', see: www.neweconomics.org/gen/uploads/doc_1910200062310_PWA4.doc.
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- US Environmental Protection Agency (2002) 'Green Communities Where Do We Want To Be?', see: www.epa.gov/greenkit/3tools.htm.

Management Techniques

*Tell me and I'll forget. Show me, and I may not remember.
Involve me, and I'll understand*
Native American Proverb

7. The SECI Approach

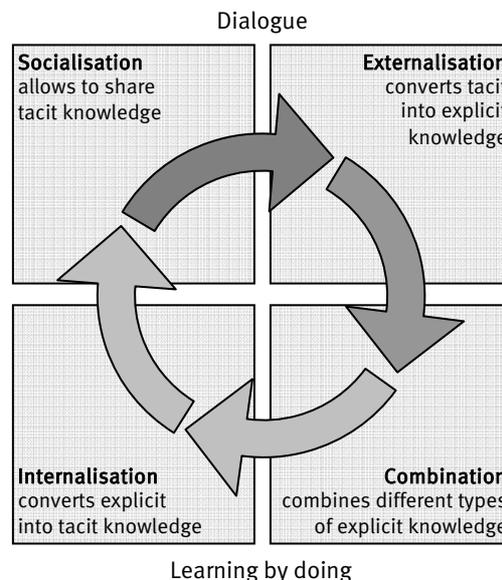
Introduction

In their highly influential book, *The Knowledge Creating Company*, Japanese business academics Nonaka and Takeuchi examine the processes required for effective knowledge creation. They define knowledge creation as the result of the spiralling process of interaction between tacit knowledge (or know-how, which is hard to express but can be demonstrated) and explicit knowledge (which can be articulated in words).

There are four key processes through which tacit and explicit knowledge interact, namely, socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation. Together, these processes make up the **SECI** principles (see Figure 4 below), which provide a set of pointers that can be used by managers to ensure that they are facilitating effective knowledge and learning in their ongoing projects and programmes.

Detailed description of the process

Figure 4: The SECI approach



Socialisation consists in sharing tacit knowledge with others by way of mentoring (sharing internal knowledge, skills and insights). Tacit knowledge can be socialised by mentoring, imitation, observation and practice, all of which result in ‘shared knowledge’.

Externalisation creates conceptual knowledge and is the process of converting tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is conceptualised through images or words; in this case, writing transforms tacit knowledge into an explicit form. This externalised mode of ‘knowledge conversion’ is produced as a result of a dialogue between people who transform tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge.

Combination is a mode of knowledge conversion which involves the combining of different types of explicit knowledge. This happens when people exchange knowledge, for instance via documents, telephone and meetings.

Internalisation converts explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. It consists in ‘learning by doing’, which is a process that occurs when the previous modes of knowledge conversion (socialisation,

externalisation and combination), are internalised in people's minds as tacit knowledge, which is represented by mental images or models.

Key points/practical tips

- The SECI approach explains in a clear way how knowledge has first to be generated and codified in order to get transferred. In other words, there is no way that knowledge can be transferred if it has not first been generated as well as put into a transferable format.
- The approach clearly explains how tacit and explicit knowledge have to be exchanged and transformed in order that new knowledge is generated.
- Not all tacit knowledge can be converted into explicit knowledge, and so the principles need to be guided by a clear sense of realism.

Example: The learning partnership for Mindanao

In the Philippines, competition for scarce development funding and worsening social problems have intensified the need for civil society to learn from mistakes and generate new knowledge in a timely fashion. In the latter part of 2003, a learning partnership involving eight organisations was brought together by the lead institution's interest in testing and validating the notion that bridging sectors can lead to increased resources and commitment to reduce poverty and increase equity. Bridging was defined as a method of coordinating the energy, interests and resources of multiple and diverse actors/stakeholders in a way that builds trust and stimulates collaborative action. One key application was to bring together key actors to address the conflict issue on the island of Mindanao. Addressing the sources of conflict and decades of neglect for the welfare of the Muslim population in Mindanao requires a continued, comprehensive and integrated approach from all sectors. The collaborating organisations piloted an approach towards the development of a replicable methodology that could be applied in other municipalities and regions of the Philippines, and in other countries. A key element here was how to establish the connection between experience in the field and theory development. The system for managing knowledge creation was built on the SECI principle, which had the benefits of: i) ensuring that staff participating in the initiative had the opportunity to reflect on their experience and heighten their own learning; ii) ensuring that the new approach did not become an isolated process and that learning permeated within each institution as well as in the learning partnership; and iii) generating a robust methodology for replication elsewhere. See: www.cpi.cam.ac.uk/pccp/PartnMatters3.pdf.

Sources and further reading

- A SECI tutorial: www.thecore.nus.edu.sg/cpace/ht/thonglipfei/nonaka_seci.html.
- Nonaka, I. and N. Konno (1998) 'The Concept of "Ba": Building foundation for Knowledge Creation', *California Management Review* 40(3), Spring.
- Improving Research Knowledge Technical Transfer, Final Report, downloaded from www.westminster.ac.uk/builtenv/maxlock/KTweb/Report/Chap4.pdf.
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8. Blame vs Gain Behaviours

Introduction

Blame vs Gain Behaviours is a very simple tool that can help managers reflect on their own attitudes and responses to mistakes. As stated in the ALNAP 2002 Annual Review:

‘Defensive reasoning’ is one that may have particular relevance to the Humanitarian Sector, with its vocational nature and high levels of personal and professional commitment. Argyris’s work over many years has shown that individuals develop defensive routines to protect themselves from threatening situations, such as ‘critically examining their own role in the organization’. These routines limit their ability to discover ‘how the very way they go about defining and solving problems can be a source of problem in its own right’. In short they block the ability to learn to see or do things differently...

The culture of an organisation can serve to reinforce ‘defensive routines’ and inhibit learning. To quote Argyris (1991) directly:

... if learning is to persist, managers and employees must also look inward. They need to reflect critically on their own behaviour, identify the ways they often inadvertently contribute to the organization’s problems, and then change how they act.

Argyris demonstrated that skilled professionals were particularly good at using defensive reasoning because they had never learned how to learn from failure. At the point that mistakes happen, such people become defensive, screen out criticism, and put the ‘blame’ on anyone and everyone but themselves. This stands in clear opposition to the need for openness and self-critical analysis that is required for effective learning.

A number of ‘blame behaviours’ and ‘gain behaviours’ (Table 1) have been identified (ALNAP, 2002) which can be used by groups to examine and address defensive routines.

Detailed description of the process

- Step 1: Use a flipchart or projector to show the Blame vs Gain Behaviours to the assembled group. Read out each Blame behaviour and the corresponding Gain behaviour, and ask for comments on each one as they are read out.
- Step 2: Ask participants to volunteer examples of when they had been on the receiving end of blame behaviours or gain behaviours, and ask for their reasoning as to why this happened and with what consequences. Capture the points on flipchart sheets. Don’t worry if things build slowly – this is an inherently uncomfortable subject!
- Step 3: Repeat Step 2 for when the participants had *demonstrated* blame or gain behaviours. Ask for reasons.
- Step 4: Get the group to reflect collectively on whether blame behaviours are always unjustified, or if gain behaviours are always appropriate. Try and get a shared idea on what an appropriate balance would be.
- Step 5: Brainstorm ideas for taking a more balanced approach to dealing with mistakes across the organisation. Consider using Force Field Analysis (Tool 11) to reflect on the forces for and against the required changes.

Table 1: Blame vs gain behaviours

Blame behaviours	Gain behaviours
Judging <i>'You were wrong.'</i>	Exploring <i>'What happened?'</i>
Showing emotion <i>'I'm furious with you.'</i>	Remaining calm <i>'Try not to worry about it.'</i>
Reacting to what you think happened <i>'You should have ...'</i>	Finding out exactly what happened <i>'Let's take this one step at a time.'</i>
Blaming people for getting it wrong <i>'You should never have let this happen.'</i>	Focusing on the process that allowed the mistake <i>'What could have been done differently?'</i>
Finding fault <i>'You only have yourself to blame.'</i>	Providing support <i>'This must be difficult for you but don't forget this has happened to us all.'</i>
Focusing on effects <i>'This is going to cause enormous problems for me.'</i>	Focusing on causes <i>'What I want to focus on is all the things that enabled this to happen to us all.'</i>
Assuming the person should feel guilty/be contrite <i>'You really only have yourself to blame.'</i>	Assuming the person wants to learn <i>'What are the main lessons for us?'</i>
Seeing mistakes as something that must be avoided <i>'This must never happen again.'</i>	Seeing mistakes as part of a learning process <i>'We can learn a lot from this.'</i>

Example: Humanitarian managers as learning managers

As part of a three-day training course for an African NGO delivering healthcare services to refugees, the RAPID team facilitated an analysis of blame and gain behaviours adopted by the participants at different points in their operational work. The participants were quite slow to respond to the blame behaviours, because of the inherently uncomfortable nature of the subject matter but then slowly started to debate the issues and the organisational constraints. It was established that blame or gain within the context of the specific organisation was less important than being fair. In particular, when blame behaviour was demonstrated, it was often justified on the basis of repeated mistakes, or the seriousness of the problem that was created by the mistake. Similarly, specific situations such as staff negligence could not be dealt with through such a framework. For some participants whose work was predominantly in conflict zones, there was an admitted difficulty in maintaining a calm and rational perspective towards errors. Finally, the fear of potential donor backlash against serious mistakes was raised as a major reason for blame behaviours.

Sources and further reading

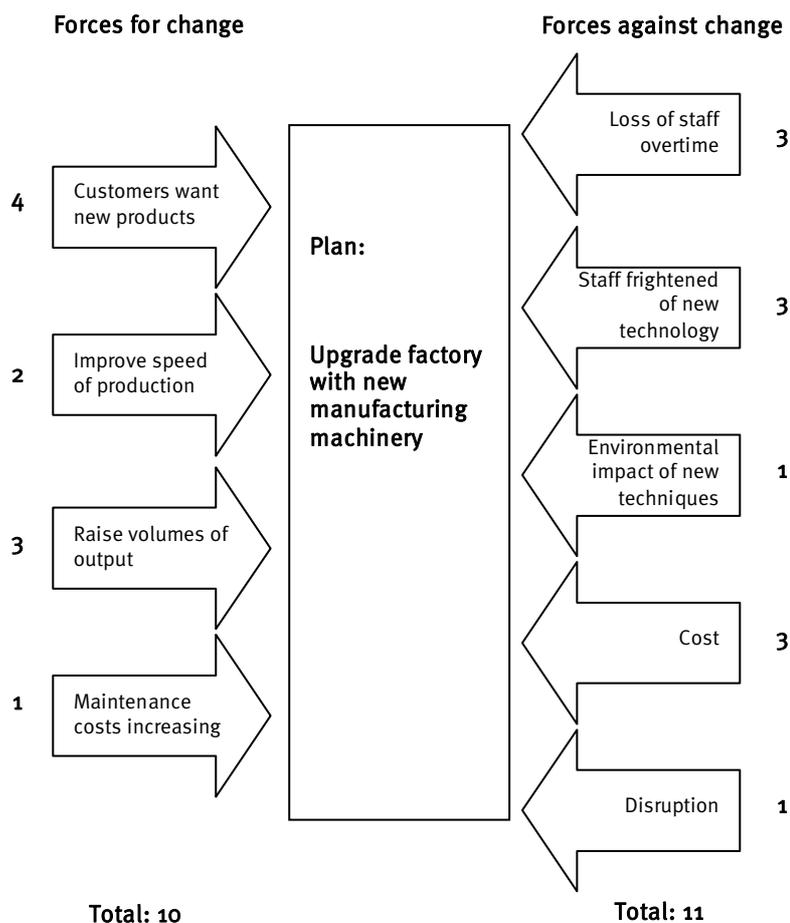
- ALNAP (2002) Annual Review, see: www.odi.org.uk/alnap/AR2002/chapter2a.htm.
- Argyris, C. (1991) 'Teaching Smart People How To Learn' in *Harvard Business Review* (May – June). Boston, MA: Harvard Business School.
- Pearn, M., C. Mulrooney and T. Payne (1998) *Ending the Blame Culture*, Aldershot: Gower Publishing Ltd.

9. Force Field Analysis

Introduction

Force Field Analysis was developed by Kurt Lewin (1951) and is widely used to inform decision making, particularly in planning and implementing change management programmes in organisations. It is a powerful method of gaining a comprehensive overview of the different forces acting on a potential organisational change issue, and for assessing their source and strength.

Figure 5: Force field analysis example



Detailed description of the process

Force field analysis is best carried out in small group of about six to eight people using flipchart paper or overhead transparencies so that everyone can see what is going on. The first step is to agree the area of change to be discussed. This might be written as a desired policy goal or objective. All the forces in support of the change are then listed in a column to the left (driving the change forward), whereas all forces working against the change are listed in a column to the right (holding it back). The driving and restraining forces should be sorted around common themes and then be scored according to their 'magnitude', ranging from one (weak) to five (strong). The score may well not balance on either side. The resulting table might look like the example above (this figure comes from www.psywww.com/mtsite/forcefld.html).

Throughout the process, rich discussion, debate and dialogue should emerge. This is an important part of the exercise and key issues should be allowed time. Findings and ideas may well come up to do with

concerns, problems, symptoms and solutions. It is useful to record these and review where there is consensus on an action or a way forward. In policy influencing, the aim is to find ways to reduce the restraining forces and to capitalise on the driving forces.

Example: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) adapted force field analysis, adding an extra element of the organisation's control over a situation. For example, in an attempt to improve success in afforestation and reforestation programmes, the agency in question might list all the driving forces and restraining forces. It then rates each force by its importance and by the degree of control it exerts over that force. The totals are then calculated and a table developed (Table 2). This means that for each force, the higher the total of importance and control, the more impact the agency *should* have in trying to address that force. In addition, if the agency can find some forces that explain others, the effectiveness of its actions will be greater. For example, suppose that 'improved operational planning' can reduce 'losses to fires and grazing' as well as 'poor procedures for hiring and paying field workers'. Because it has these cross-impacts, in this example, the agency decided to give special attention to 'operational planning'.

Table 2: Force field analysis for success in afforestation and reforestation programmes

	Importance	Agency control	Total
Driving forces			
Rising prices of wood products	2	2	4
Genetically improved planting stock	2	4	6
Improved operational planning	4	5	9
Increasing public support	2	2	5
Restraining forces			
Decreasing agency budget	2	2	5
Irregular annual precipitation	5	1	6
Poor procedures for hiring and paying field workers	4	4	8
Losses to fires and grazing	5	3	8

Sources and further reading

- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- One case study comes from *PLA Notes* (1999) Issue 36, pp 17-23 from IIED, see: www.worldbank.org/participation/PRSP/plna/plan_03604.pdf.
- Another case details the use of force field analysis in a school situation to assess the potential to change from teacher-centred methods of working to greater pupil participation in planning: www.crossroad.to/Quotes/brainwashing/force-field.htm.
- For original literature of force field analysis, see: Lewin, K. (1951) *Field Theory in Social Science*, New York: Harper and Row.
- Simple step-by-step guides to carrying out force field analysis, with examples of the use of force field analysis in management, see: www.mindtools.com/forcefld.html.
- Simple step-by-step guides to carrying out force field analysis, with examples of the use of force field analysis in psychology, see: www.psywww.com/mtsite/forcefld.html.
- For a brief overview, see: www.mycoted.com/creativity/techniques/forcefieldanal.php.
- Examples of the application of force field analysis in change management, see: www.accel-team.com/techniques/force_field_analysis.html; in health (MSH and UNICEF), see: <http://erc.msh.org/quality/example/example5.cfm>.
- For computer software to conduct force field analysis, see: www.skymark.com/resources/tools/force_field_diagram.asp.

10. Activity-based Knowledge Mapping

Introduction

Activity-based Knowledge Mapping is a tool which enables knowledge inputs and outputs to be linked in a systematic fashion to ongoing organisational activities and processes – from office mail to strategic reviews. Activity-based knowledge mapping enables tasks and activities to be in terms of both the overall organisational process – to understand how activities are ordered and why – as well the requirements and dependencies for an activity – who performs the activity, what inputs are required and how knowledge and information flows support the tasks.

This results in a series of diagrams that visually display knowledge within the context of a business process. In other words, the map shows how knowledge is currently used within a given process and sources of this knowledge, and points to how improvements can be made. If undertaken and applied correctly, activity-based knowledge mapping and workflow approaches can help to identify key activity-based priorities for improving knowledge and information flows within a group or department.

Detailed description of the process

Activity-based knowledge map is created in a facilitated workshop, which will vary in length depending on the nature of process. The key steps are as follows:

Determine the process to be analysed: The workshop should start with open discussion of the process and a brainstorm of the different activities making up that process. This process brainstorm may be undertaken prior to the workshop to save time, with the details of the process provided for comments to the workshop participants.

Prioritise key activities and focus the discussion around key activities. Factors to consider in prioritisation are: the number of people across the organisation involved in undertaking an activity; the effectiveness or otherwise of the activity; the ‘tacit’ knowledge needed to undertake the activity; etc.

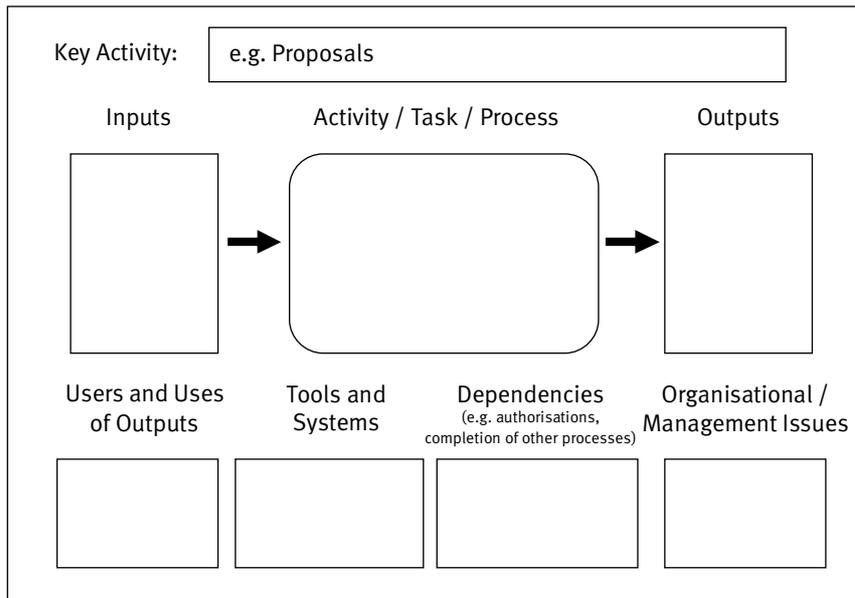
Map key activities: Using the template provided, analyse each of the priority activities and fill in the relevant boxes, using the following guidelines.

- The name of a given task or process (e.g. dissemination) should be entered into the central box. Distinct sub-activities should be entered below.
- Then consider the main resources or inputs needed to carry out this task. Enter these and any specific attributes (e.g. ‘through management guidance’ etc.) in the boxes on the left. Include people as well as departments, documents, knowledge etc.
- Now list the outputs generated through this activity in the right-hand box, again with important attributes, in particular trying to identify how the activity has ‘added value’ to the inputs.
- There are then four related boxes to fill out: first, the main users and uses of the outputs; next, the systems and tools that support the activity; then, any critical dependencies; and finally, organisational and management issues.
- Pointers: within each box, order each item in terms of its relative importance. If different outputs relate to different people, systems etc., linking arrows may be useful.

Analyse findings: Invite participants to analyse the activity-based knowledge map, using probing questions, such as: What knowledge seems most critical to this process? What knowledge is missing?

Application of findings: Brainstorm how the knowledge maps can be used to make improvements in activities across the organisation. Identify applications as individual, group or team, and organisation wide. Conclude with an action plan, documenting tasks, owners, and timeframes.

Figure 6: Process mapping template



Key points/practical tips

Facilitation: The facilitator should be expert in group facilitation and knowledge mapping techniques, and have expertise in the development of business processes.

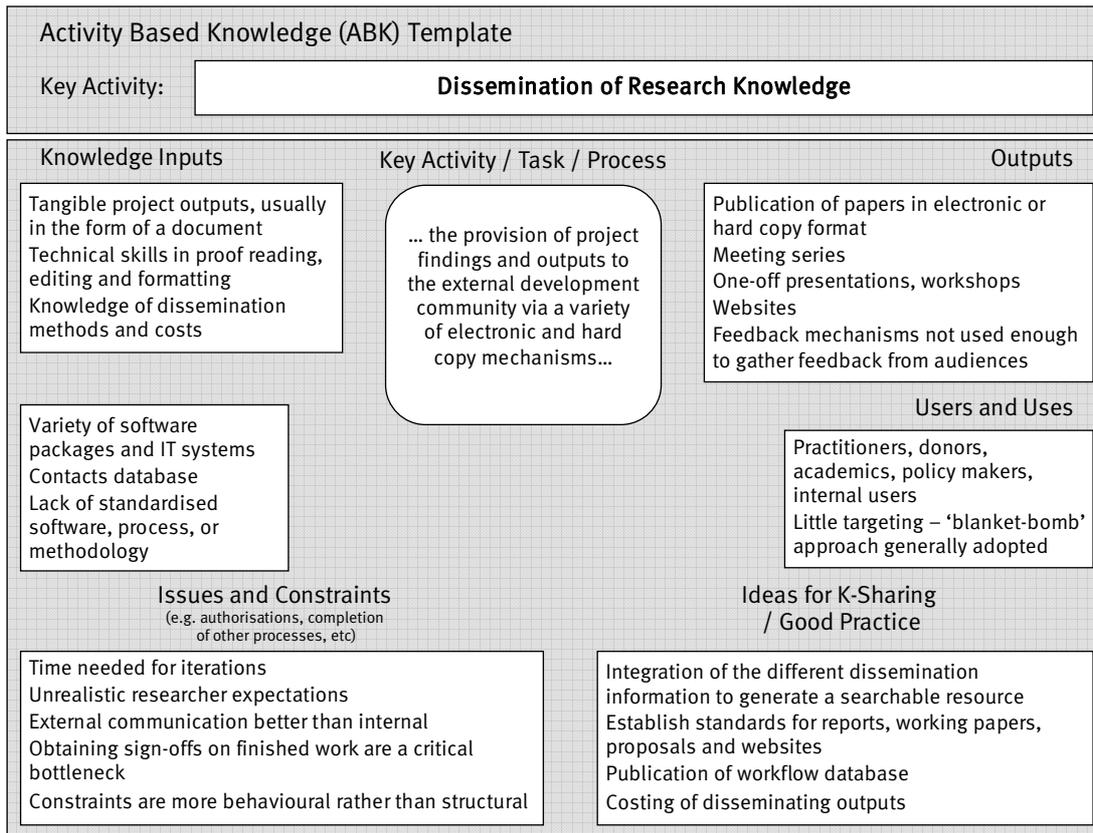
Ownership: A senior staff member should be assigned as a responsible owner for the end product. This person should be committed to achieving the result, and be willing to allocate resources (people and money) both to the workshop and the work afterwards. Champions should be identified within the workshop. Assign responsibility to a working group and provide them with the necessary authority to make changes internally, and to represent the group or department when dealing with organisation-wide constraints or bottlenecks.

The **analysis** phase of the workshop is crucial to the success of the effort. The facilitator needs to formulate questions that provoke answers enhancing the knowledge map and that also help to define and develop the deliverable.

Example: Knowledge Audit at ODI

As part of a Knowledge Audit (see Tool 2) at ODI, teams of administrators were brought together to reflect on the knowledge they use that is most important to organisational life. This was an important process because administrative knowledge is frequently undervalued and, further, there are not very many effective way of mapping it. The participants decided to focus on two main areas of work: 'bid development' and 'dissemination', and used activity-based knowledge mapping to identify the key inputs and outputs for these processes, as well as ideas for how this should be taken forward. Figure 7 shows the 'dissemination of research knowledge' template, as filled out by participants. As a result of this workshop, a working group was formed to take forward the recommendations, and to help the administrators work together better. There was also greater clarity on the 'must haves' for the knowledge management strategy, and 'administrative knowledge' was accorded a primary place in the strategy, alongside the more obvious research-based knowledge.

Figure 7: Activity-based mapping template for preparing bids



Sources and further reading

- Plumley, D. (2003) ‘Process-Based Knowledge Mapping: A Practical Approach to Prioritizing Knowledge in Terms of its Relevance to a Business or KM Objective’, see: www.kmmag.com/articles/default.asp?ArticleID=1041.

11. Structured Innovation

Introduction

Structured Innovation is a term to describe the combination of two simple and common approaches to thinking about the elements of a particular problem or issue, which together form the basis for systematically innovating and generating new ideas. These two simple techniques are attribute listing and morphological analysis. The approach was developed by a Swiss scientist called Fritz Zwicky in the 1940s and 50s as a method for systematically structuring and investigating the total set of potential combinations and approaches to solving multi-dimensional, non-quantifiable, problems. The rationale is described below (on the www.mycoted.com website):

... Imagine you have a product that could be made of three types of material, in six possible shapes, and with four kinds of mechanisms. Theoretically there are 72 (3x6x4) potential combinations of material, shape and mechanism. Some of these combinations may already exist; others may be impossible or impractical. Those left over may represent prospective new products. This method of can be extended to virtually any problem area that can be structured dimensionally ...

This approach can be used by groups for developing new kinds of programmes, services and strategies within development and humanitarian organisations.

Detailed description of the process

The first step is get the group to work together to list the attributes of the programme, service or whatever it that is being developed. Attributes are elements, properties, qualities or dimensions of the thing being scrutinised. As an immediate example, a list of the attributes of this toolkit might include: i) its length; ii) layout and design; iii) content; iv) accessibility; v) format; vi) quality; vii) relevance; viii) applicability; ix) potential user base; x) demand; and xi) production costs.

The next step builds on the attributes in a systematic manner. Using the attributes previously listed as column headings, the group should draw up an options table. The table should then be used to brainstorm as many different variations of the attribute as possible, and these should be written down in the relevant columns. The final table should ideally show many possible variations for each attribute.

The next step is to use the table to think through new ways of addressing the problem at hand. This can either be done by deliberately selecting interesting combinations, or by selecting one entry from each column randomly. Mixing one item from each column leads to new combinations of attributes, leading to potential new products, services or strategies. Finally, the potential innovations need to be evaluated in terms of practicalities, usefulness and potential constraints. Those which pass this process can be piloted in the live environment.

Example: Mainstreaming social development at SDC

In order to develop activities to be undertaken as part of a communications strategy for mainstreaming a social development programme at Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the RAPID team undertook this process. The attributes we identified were as follows:

- Reason/benefit: Why is the client communicating?
- Content: What is the client communicating?
- Audience: To whom is the client communicating?
- Channel: How is the client communicating?
- Frequency/timing: When and how often is the client communicating?

These were set out as column headings on an options table, and variations brainstormed as shown below:

Figure 8: Options table for knowledge sharing activities, with two ideas generated through the structured innovation approach

Reason/benefit	Content	Audience	Channel	Frequency/timing
<i>Profile building</i>	Results and outcomes of project	General public	Press/TV	Annual
<u>Awareness raising</u>	Political and social conditions	Policymakers	Publications	<u>Monthly</u>
Influencing and shaping public debate	Vision and mission of project	Beneficiaries	Internet/email	Weekly
Changing attitudes	<u>Beneficiary perspectives</u>	Researchers	Personal networks	Daily
Contributing to academic debate	<i>Opportunities to get involved with project</i>	<i>Other agencies</i>	Conferences or meetings	Timed with specific policy windows
	Need for additional funds	Donors	<u>Bulletin boards/newsletters</u>	Scattershot
	Progress update	<u>Staff in own organisation</u>	<i>Community of practice</i>	<i>Ongoing</i>

NB: *Idea 1 in italics, Idea 2 underlined.*

Looking across the table from left to right, interesting new activities might have been:

Idea 1 (marked by italicised text): Communication of opportunities to get involved with other agencies via a shared community of practice, as a means of building cross-organisational collaboration. (This was generated by deliberately selecting one entry from each column.)

Idea 2 (marked by underlined text): Sharing beneficiaries' perspectives on the project with staff via a monthly newsletter. (This idea was generated through randomly selecting of one entry from each column.)

Obviously, some of these may have been practical novel ideas for the programme, whereas some were not. This is where experience and knowledge of the team was vital in testing out ideas.

Sources and further reading

- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- Mycoted is a website in Wiki format which is dedicated to improving creativity and innovation for solving problems worldwide. It is open to all, and can be written by all. See: www.mycoted.com.
- Also see: www.mindtools.com.

12. Reframing Matrix

Introduction

A **Reframing Matrix** is a simple technique that helps you to look at organisational problems from a number of different viewpoints, and expands the range of creative solutions that you can generate. The basic approach relies on the fact that different people with different experiences approach problems in different ways. This technique helps groups to put themselves into the mindsets of different people and imagine the solutions, or problems, they would come up with regards to a key question or problem.

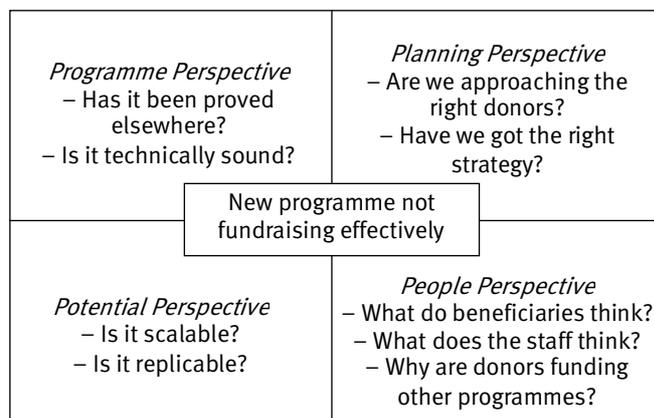
Detailed description of the process

First, put the question to be asked in the middle of a grid. Use boxes around the grid for the different perspectives. This is simply an easy way of laying out the problem. Two different approaches to the reframing matrix are demonstrated here, but it is important to note that many different techniques can be utilised. The first approach, which is called the Four Ps, relies on looking at a problem by following the different perspectives that may exist within a development or humanitarian organisation:

- Programme perspective: Are there any issues with the programme or service we are delivering?
- Planning perspective: Are our business or communications plans appropriate?
- Potential perspective: Is it scalable and replicable?
- People perspective: What do the different people involved think?

An example of this approach is shown in Figure 9 below, as applied to the problem of a new programme which has not been fundraising effectively.

Figure 9: Reframing matrix example: a new programme not fundraising effectively



The second approach to using a reframing matrix is to look at the problem from the viewpoints of different specialists. The way that a doctor, for example, looks at a problem would be different from the approach a water engineer would use, which would be different from a fundraiser's perspective.

In humanitarian and development work, it may be useful think through the potential perspectives of different internal and external stakeholders, for example (see Table 3).

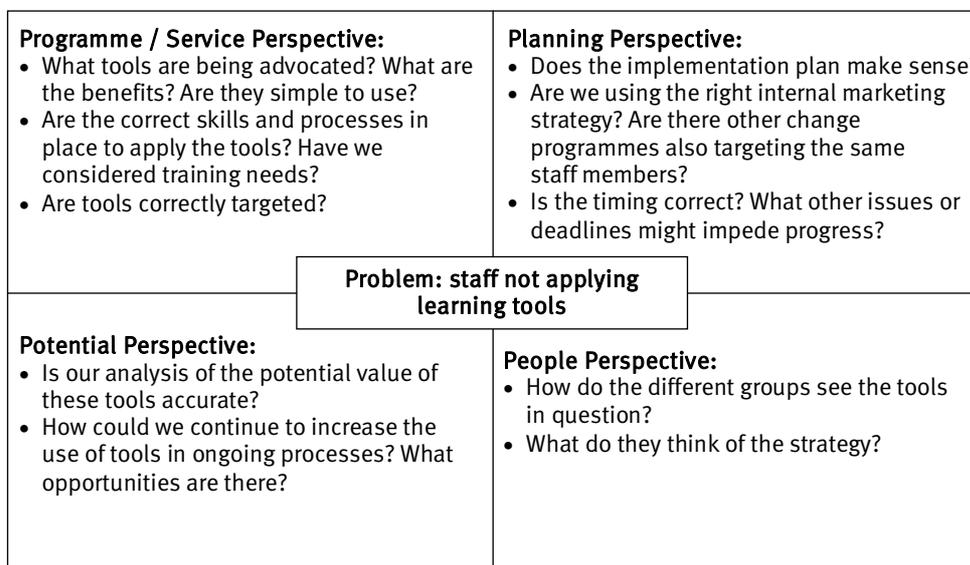
Table 3: Different perspectives of stakeholders

Head Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fundraising officer • Programme Manager • Senior Director • Evaluator 	How would each of these actors perceive this problem or idea?
Field Office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Manager • International Field Officer • National Field Officer 	What would they see as the drawback or benefit?
Beneficiaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Women • Children • Men • Elderly 	What might they see as the potential benefits and drawbacks?
Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Donors • Implementing partners • Strategic partners 	What solutions might they offer?
		How relevant are these to our situation?

Example: Developing a knowledge and learning strategy

A major NGO is trying to develop a knowledge and learning strategy through systematic application of a number of tools, but there are concerns about the internal environment and how conducive it may be to the recommended changes. By thinking through the situation where the tools see low take-up, and then brainstorming why this might be from the perspective of the Four Ps, the management team is able to pre-empt some of the key obstacles and constraints. They can then work to make sure the implementation plan addresses these issues in a strategic fashion, thereby facilitating buy-in across the organisation and its stakeholders.

Figure 10: The Four Ps



Sources and further reading

- Morgan, M. (1993) *Creating Workforce Innovation*, Sydney: Business and Professional Publishing.
- Also see: www.mindtools.com.

Collaboration Mechanisms

Knowledge is like the baobab tree, no one individual can embrace it
Ghanaian Proverb

13. Teams: Virtual and Face-to-Face

Introduction and detailed description of the process

Team development has been described in terms of five stages, beginning with a simple ‘membership’ group, and working through ‘confrontation’ to a ‘shared-responsibility’ group (Bradford and Cohen, 1998).⁷ Bradford and Cohen suggest that the different stages of groups differ in terms of the following characteristics:

- Atmosphere and relationships
- Understanding and acceptance of goals
- Listening and information sharing
- Decision making
- Reaction to leadership
- Attention to the way the group is working

Table 4 below shows how these characteristics vary over the course of the group development process. This can be used to identify where a group is located along these different dimensions, and where it needs to get to in order to operate more effectively.

Table 4: Stages of group development

	Membership	Sub-grouping	Confrontation	Differentiation	Shared responsibility
Atmosphere and relations	Cautious, feelings suppressed, low conflict, few outbursts	Increasing closeness within sub-groups, cross-group criticism, false unanimity	Hostility between sub-groups	Confident, satisfied, open, honest, diverse	Supportive, open, expressive, varied; disagreement resolved promptly
Goal acceptance	Low, fuzzy	Increasing clarity, misperceptions	Up for grabs, fought over	Agreed on by most	Commitment to overarching goal
Information sharing	Intense, but high distortion and low disclosure	Similarities within sub-groups not as great as perceived	Poor	Reasonably good	Excellent, rapid, direct
Decision making	Dominated by active members	Fragmented, deadlocks, to the boss by default	Dominated by most powerful, loudest	Based on individual expertise, often by boss in consultation with subordinates	By consensus, collective when all resources needed, individual when one is expert (not necessarily the boss)
Reaction to leadership	Tested by members, tentative	Resisted, often covertly	Power struggles, jockeying for position	General support, individual differences in influence	Highly supportive, but free to disagree on issues
Attention to way group is working	Ignored	Noticed but avoided, discussed outside meetings in small groups	Used as weapon against opponents	Alternates between uncritical or over-compulsive discussion	Discussed if needed, to aid work accomplishment; anyone can initiate

⁷ This is seen by some as a more complete version of the ‘forming, storming, norming, performing’ process that Bruce Tuckman popularised in the 1960s.

Interestingly, the work of Duarte et al (2001) for the CGIAR organisations strongly indicates that face-to-face teams and virtual teams develop through similar processes. Note the comparison between the two types in Table 5 below from Duarte et al (page 6):

Table 5: Face-to-face vs virtual teams

Face-to-face teams	Virtual team
A small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable.	A small number of people with complementary skills who are committed to a common purpose, set of performance goals, and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. [Virtual team] members work across at least two of the following boundaries: time, distance, organisation, or culture. They also use electronic communication and collaboration technology as their primary means of interaction.

The same authors suggest that virtual teams have the following aspects:

- Senior leadership recognises that virtual teaming is a preferred and useful way of working.
- Adequate resources exist for some face-to-face interaction, especially in the start-up phase.
- There is a commitment to, and resources available for, training and other ongoing development activities.
- There is a common platform for electronic communication and collaboration technology.
- Team leaders see themselves as critical to facilitating the team’s success.
- Team members share a basic level of competence in use of technology, working across cultures, project management and time management (especially with competing projects), and the ability to network across time, distance, and organisation.

Example: Application to Food Security

Maxwell (2001) applied the team development process to the institutional problems faced by food security efforts. Using a narrative structure, he explained how typical food security planning efforts were hampered by ineffective team working and management approaches that tend towards a more ‘solo hero’ mould. In this situation, managers carry the burden for motivation and decision making, and groups are membership based, with weak leadership, low commitment to goals, and frequent conflict. Using the five stages, it is essential for managers to analyse the state of the development of the group, and help move teams towards the shared responsibility approach. This is a move towards the organizational culture required for the kinds of multi-sectoral, multi-disciplinary enterprises that are so common to development and humanitarian efforts.

Key, here, is an understanding that changing the character of groups is not an easy task. There are frequently problems of status, professional pride, cultural background and so on, which underlie conflict. Nonetheless, conscious changes in group dynamics can be seen to have a positive impact on performance of a team.

Sources and further reading

- Bradford, D. and A. Cohen (1998) *Managing for Excellence*, New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Duarte, D., L. Spink and S. Song (2001) *Strengthening Virtual Collaboration and Teamwork*, Alexandria, VA: The Organizational Change Program for the CGIAR Centers.
- Maxwell, S. (2001) ‘Organizational Issues in Food Security Planning’ in S. Devereux and S. Maxwell (eds) *Food Security in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: ITDG Publishing.
- Read more about the ‘Forming, Storming, Norming, Performing’ Approach at: www.businessballs.com/tuckmanformingstormingnormingperforming.htm.

14. Communities of Practice

Introduction

Etienne Wenger, author of the seminal book *Cultivating Communities* defines **Communities of Practice** (CoPs) as follows: ‘... groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis’.

As this definition implies, communities can be very different from each other. Some of the dimensions along which they might be assessed include: membership composition (e.g. very homogeneous or very diverse ones); dispersion (small and community focused, international virtual networks); and purpose (very closely defined purpose or broad and far-reaching). This definition would also include many things that are not CoPs, for example, project teams and so on. Communities and networks are distinct from other kinds of collaborative mechanisms, as shown in Figure 11 below. The key distinguishing characteristics are that membership of a CoP is voluntary, and their goals and objectives tend, on the whole, to be fluid rather than determined by management objectives.

Figure 11: Communities/networks compared with other collaborative mechanisms

	Purpose	Membership	Glue	Duration
Network / Community	Exchange knowledge	Self select	Passion, identification with group	Duration
Work Group	Deliver product / process	Managerial agreement	Job and common goal	Until restructured
Project Team	Accomplish specific task	Assigned or selected	Project milestones and goal	Project completion
Informal Networks	Pass on relevant information	Friends, acquaintances	Mutual need	As long as need exists

Many knowledge and learning initiatives are focused on supporting and fostering communities to ensure effective creating and sharing of knowledge. CoPs confer benefits on both organisations and individuals. They do this through performing the following, overlapping functions (Court and Mendizabal, 2005):

- **Filters** ‘decide’ what information is worth paying attention to and organise unmanageable amounts of information. For example, the Development Executive Group is an international forum which provides and exchanges information on project and employment opportunities.
- **Amplifiers** help take little known or little understood ideas and make them more widely understood. Advocacy or campaigning NGOs such as the Jubilee Campaign are amplifying networks. The FairTrade Foundation, for instance, works through a network of those licensed to use the brand to amplify the fair trade message.
- **Convenors** bring together people or groups of people. For example, Coalition 2000 in Bulgaria brings together CSOs, government institutions, the private sector and donors in various coordinated initiatives to fight corruption.
- **Facilitators** help members carry out their activities more effectively. For example, the MediCam network in Cambodia gives members access to services and facilities such as meeting rooms, a

specialised library, communication means, training opportunities and access to policymakers and donors.

- **Community builders** promote and sustain the values and standards of the individuals or organisations within them. The Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) promotes best practice and minimum standards of learning accountability and performance among humanitarian agencies.
- **Investor/providers** offer a means to give members the resources they need to carry out their main activities. The African Capacity Building Foundation, for instance, provides technical assistance, skills and funding to its policy research partners.

Communities usually carry out several functions simultaneously. However, different functions require different structures for maximum effectiveness. Networks designed for – and effective at – one role may not be good at others. Introducing new functions might compromise the original objectives. Specific networks will need to consider carefully how many and which functions they can carry out successfully.

Detailed description of the process

There is a rich literature on networks and communities, which covers a variety of different methods and approaches. The NHS toolkit suggests that there are three phases that should be considered: birth, development and growth, and closure (see: www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement).

Phase 1: Birth

Communities of practice emerge in an organic fashion and cannot in general be managed into existence. They can, however, be fostered, by identifying areas where knowledge might be better shared and used. Once this has been identified (e.g. administrative knowledge within an organisation), a number of questions should be addressed:

- **What** is the knowledge focus of the community? Is it based on a professional discipline, or does it focus on some specific issue or opportunity?
- **Who** can contribute to the community? Who are the experts, the facilitators, the movers and shakers? Should invitation be open or by invitation?
- **What** are the common needs and interests of the group? What is the group interested in? What benefits do they expect through joining the community?
- **What is the purpose** of the community? What needs or problems need to be addressed? What does community want to achieve? How will the community benefit the organisation? What are its values and ways of working? How will it be structured and organised? How will it obtain resources? Can terms of reference be developed?

Communities are often best launched with a meeting or workshop to enable face-to-face contact and the initiation of relationships within the context of the new community. This also provides an opportunity to work through the detail associated with the questions above and to clarify objectives and the terms of reference.

Phase 2: Development and growth

There is a need to ensure that, after the initial excitement, the CoP maintains interest and commitment. The community coordinator should be seeking to maintain the life of the community by ensuring face-to-face meetings, arranging social events, rewarding contributions, introducing new and challenging perspectives, and getting external perspectives. Member turnover will always be an issue, and ongoing recruitment will be required to maintain the energy. Roles and responsibilities should be rotated between members over time. There is also a need to ensure that there is support for participation in the network from the wider organisation, which should be achieved by aligning goals of the CoP with the wider organisational goals. Support should be in terms of both freeing up time and recognising the contributions of the community.

At the development and growth stage, the CoP should be taking a greater role in managing knowledge that is at the heart of the community. This includes creating knowledge maps, organising resources, identifying knowledge gaps, and so on. Here, well established frameworks for creating and sharing knowledge are particularly important. The key at this stage is not to stifle social relationships at the heart of the network by the imposition of too strong a managerial imperative. This brings about the real challenge – to develop the community and the practice simultaneously. Community development requires strengthening the coordinator (spokesperson, organises, coordinates), facilitator (facilitates interactions within the community) and knowledge manager (explicit knowledge resources management). Training and support for this may be required. Practice development takes inputs and outputs: the resources the community uses and develops. These consist not only of information and knowledge such as documents, databases, a website, etc. but also of processes and practices within the community.

Phase 3: Closure

Communities and networks can come to an end naturally as its members come to an end-point of the purpose. In other cases, the community may fragment into multiple smaller communities based around particular specialist subjects. When a community fades, it is important to celebrate its life and achievements, and to ensure that the relevant body of knowledge is captured and transferred.

Key points/practical tips

A DFID good practice guide boils these down to the following sets of questions (DFID, 2004):

- Starting-up a network:
 - Have you double-checked your reasons for starting a community/network?
 - When should this network become active?
 - What type of network will yours be?
 - What kind of facilitation will your network need?
 - What kinds of behaviours and activities are appropriate to a facilitator?
 - What tools and channels of communication can you use for facilitating a network?
- How to involve external participants in networks:
 - Be clear what the network is for before involving external participants.
 - Who exactly are the external participants going to be?
 - Who hosts the network?
- Sustaining a network:
 - What resource has the network got?
 - What makes your network valuable to its members?
 - How could you revive a faltering network?
 - Handing over the role of facilitator.
- What will happen when your network has done its job?

Example: Solution Exchange, an initiative of the UN agencies in India

To harness the vast tacit knowledge of development practitioners across India, the UN offices in India created Solution Exchange, a free, impartial space where professionals were able to share their knowledge and experience. Members represent a wide range of perspectives from government, NGOs, donors, private sector and academia. They are organised into communities of practice built around the framework of the MDGs. Through moderated email groups, members interact on an ongoing basis, building familiarity and trust, gaining in knowledge that helps them contribute more effectively – individually and collectively – to development challenges. Today, eight communities are up and running: Maternal and Child Health; Education; Work and Employment; Gender; Decentralization; AIDS;

Water and Environmental Sanitation; and Food and Nutrition Security. Membership has grown dramatically and at the time of writing stands at almost 4,300 subscriptions from across the country.

By the end of 2007, the project will have established 12 to 14 communities organised around these targets, demonstrating how CoPs can significantly enhance the effectiveness of national development efforts. Community members participate in Solution Exchange's personalised Research Service: members post questions on the community's mailgroup about development challenges they face, to which other members respond while the moderation team researches the issues. This tacit and expert knowledge is brought together in a summarised Consolidated Reply and circulated to the community, normally within 10 working days. The project also builds community identity and member affiliation through face-to-face meetings, community news updates and, in future, a community webpage. Additional features being introduced tap into the power of communities: group work to tackle larger development challenges and e-discussions to generate collective insights on a topic of interest. For example, in 2005, the AIDS CoP hosted a nationwide e-consultation as an input into the next phase of the National AIDS Control Programme, which generated over 300 contributions to the national policymaking body.

This example is drawn from www.solutionexchange-un.net.in/index.htm.

Sources and further reading

- Court, J. and E. Mendizabal (2005) *Networks: More than the latest buzzword*, ODI Opinion 57.
- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- Perkin, E. and J. Court (2005) *Networks and Policy Processes in International Development: A Literature Review*, ODI Working Paper 252, London: ODI.
- The RAPID Networks website at www.odi.org.uk/RAPID/Projects/PPA0103, which has a special focus on the role of networks in bridging research and policy.
- Wenger, E. (2002) *Cultivating Communities Practice*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University.
- Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone.
- DFID Good Practice Guide (2004), see: www.livelihoods.org/info/tools/Networks.pdf.
- NELHS Guide to Communities of Practice, see: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/cop_toolkit.asp.

15. Action Learning Sets

Introduction

Action learning is a structured mechanism for working in small groups to address complicated issues. **Action Learning Sets** are made up of between six and eight people who meet together regularly over a reasonable time period and ‘present’ and collectively work on problems faced in ongoing practice. The group will then help the ‘presenter’ work on that problem through supportive but challenging questioning: encouraging a deeper understanding of the issues involved, a reflective reassessment of the ‘problem’, and an exploration of ways forward.

Action learning sets are particularly appropriate for professional and managerial-level learning and personal development work. The most common applications fall into two categories:

- A work-based project in which action learning set members are involved and are able to influence the outcomes by their actions.
- An issue that concerns how specific action learning set members operate in the work context (e.g. creating partnerships), and one which they wish to improve and which could benefit from the support and challenging of the other set members.

Detailed description of the process

Figure 12: Action learning set process

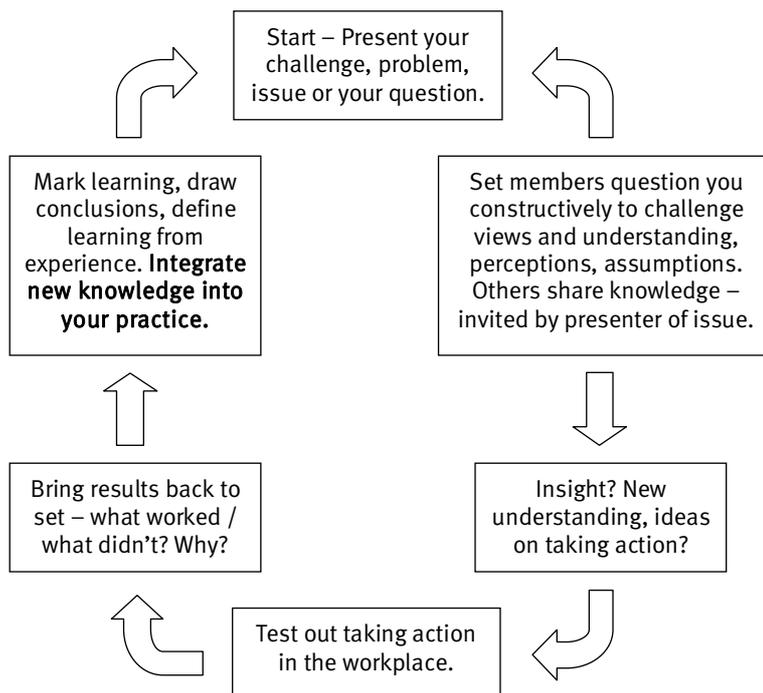


Figure 12 (www.natpact.nhs.uk/cms/316.php) shows how the action learning process is a cyclical one, starting at the top of the diagram and moving round systematically, giving each member the opportunity to present a problem and comment on others.

Key points/practical tips

- Action learning sets are most effective when the commitment is voluntary.
- Action learning sets should focus on real-life practice-related problems, ones which are more open-ended in nature and which do not have a right or wrong answer.
- The ground rules for action learning sets should include:
 - Being honest with oneself and others;
 - Respecting others and their viewpoint;
 - Taking responsibility for our own actions.

Example: BOND action learning set programme

In 2002-03, BOND set up the Learning Practitioners Initiative, a pilot programme for NGO staff with a specific brief in the area of organisational learning/knowledge management/staff development. Nine individuals from various NGOs worked in two facilitated groups on practical organisational learning issues, using a process of action learning over a period of a year. The action learning sets were supplemented by two workshops in which all participants came together to focus on issues of common concern arising from the sets.

A review of the pilot initiative provided the following feedback from participants:

[... meeting together with others from different organisations doing similar roles] ... provided a very useful combination of objectivity (since others were not part of my organisation) and understanding of the work area to which the issue was related (because they performed similar roles). The themed nature of the sets meant that I was learning useful things related to my role all the way, regardless of whether or not it was my turn to present...

Sources and further reading

- Liz Goold and David Harding run the BOND Action Learning Programme which focuses on UK NGOs, see: www.bond.org.uk/lte/alsets.htm#aboutal.
- See also NatPaCT website: www.natpact.nhs.uk/cms/316.php.

16. Six Thinking Hats

Introduction

This tool enables groups to look at a decision from several points of view. It was created by Edward de Bono in his book *Six Thinking Hats* and is an important and powerful technique. The tool is used to look at decisions from a number of important perspectives. This forces participants to move outside a habitual thinking style and helps achieve a more rounded view of a situation.

Many successful people think from a very rational, positive viewpoint: this is part of the reason they are successful. Often, though, they may fail to look at a problem from an emotional, intuitive, creative or negative viewpoint. This can mean that they underestimate resistance to plans, fail to make creative leaps, and do not make essential contingency plans. Similarly, pessimists may be excessively defensive; more emotional people may fail to look at decisions calmly and rationally.

If you look at a problem with the **Six Thinking Hats** technique, you will be able to solve it using all approaches. Your decisions and plans will mix ambition, skill in execution, public sensitivity, creativity and good contingency planning.⁸

Detailed description of the process

You can use six thinking hats in meetings or on your own. In meetings, it has the benefit of blocking the confrontations that happen when people with different thinking styles discuss the same problem. Each hat is a different style of thinking. These are explained below:

White hat: Objective, neutral thinking in terms of facts, numbers and information. With this thinking hat you focus on the data available. Look at the information you have, and see what you can learn from it. Look for gaps in your knowledge, and try either to fill them or take account of them. This is where you analyse past trends and try to extrapolate from historical data.

Red hat: Emotional, with judgements, suspicions and intuitions. 'Wearing' the red hat, you look at problems using intuition, gut reaction and emotion. Also, try to think how other people will react emotionally. Try to understand the responses of people who do not fully know your reasoning.

Black hat: Negative, sees risks and thinks about why something will not function. Using black hat thinking, look at all the bad points of the decision. Look at it cautiously and defensively. Try to see why it might not work. This is important because it highlights the weak points in a plan, allowing you to eliminate them, alter them, or prepare contingency plans to counter them. Black hat thinking helps to make your plans 'tougher' and more resilient. It can also help you to spot fatal flaws and risks before you embark on a course of action. Black hat thinking is one of the real benefits of this technique, as many successful people get so used to thinking positively that often they cannot see problems in advance. This leaves them under-prepared for difficulties.

Yellow hat: Positive, optimistic, clear, effective and constructive. The yellow thinker helps you to think positively and to put concrete suggestions on the table. It is the optimistic viewpoint that helps you to see all the benefits of the decision and the value in it. Yellow hat thinking helps you to keep going when everything looks gloomy and difficult.

⁸ A variant of this technique is the Reframing Matrix, Tool 10 in this guide, which looks at problems from the point of view of different professionals (e.g. doctors, architects, sales directors, etc.) or different customers.

Green hat: Creative, seeks alternatives. The green hat is where you can develop creative solutions to a problem. It is a freewheeling way of thinking, in which there is little criticism of ideas. Provocation is an essential part of the green thinking. A whole range of creativity tools can help you here.

Blue hat: Thinking about thinking. The blue thinker's role is to keep an overview of what thinking is necessary to scout the subject. The blue thinker is responsible for giving summaries, surveys and conclusions. The blue thinker keeps the discipline and brings the discussions back on to the right track. The blue hat stands for process control: this is the hat worn by people chairing meetings. When running into difficulties because ideas are running dry, they may direct activity into green hat thinking. When contingency plans are needed, they will ask for black hat thinking, etc.

Key points/practical tips

Six thinking hats is a good technique for looking at the effects of a decision from a number of different points of view. It allows necessary emotion and scepticism to be brought into what would otherwise be purely rational decisions, opening up the opportunity for creativity within decision making. The technique also helps, for example, persistently pessimistic people to be positive and creative.

Plans developed using the thinking hats technique will be sounder and more resilient than would otherwise be the case. It may also help you to avoid public relations mistakes, and spot good reasons not to follow a course of action before you have committed to it.

Example: Six hats for post-tsunami reconstruction

Under pressure from donors, media and beneficiaries, those working in housing and settlement efforts in Sri Lanka after the tsunami used the six hats approach in order to plan and implement reconstruction efforts more effectively. The German government, through its Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), is supporting key Sri Lankan governmental organizations in facilitating and implementing the housing and reconstruction process.

The Sri Lankan and German counterparts jointly conducted the planning of the entire project, including its outcomes and key activities. The joint project planning sessions commenced with the six thinking hats methodology, which was used to generate a shared sense of the key issues in the reconstruction process that needed to be further explored and practically addressed. For more, see: www.tafren.gov.lk/portal/index.jsp?sid=3&nid=14&y=2005&m=8&d=1.

Sources and further reading

- Mind Tools, see: www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTED_07.htm.
- De Bono, E. (1999) *Six Thinking Hats*, New York: Back Bay Books.
- Edward de Bono's webpage, see: www.edwdebono.com.

17. Mind Maps

Introduction

Mind Maps are a powerful graphic technique that can be applied to all aspects of life where improved learning and clearer thinking will enhance performance and effectiveness. It is a non-linear way of organising information and a technique that allows capture of the natural flow of ideas. It can be applied by individuals or by groups, to improve simple tasks, such as writing a memo, and to more complex tasks, such as getting a shared perspective of a complex project.

Detailed description of the process

Figure 13: Mind mapping process

Step 1: Centre first. Our linear, left-brain education system has taught us to start in the upper left-hand corner of a page. However, our mind focuses on the centre ... so mind mapping begins with a word or image that symbolises what you want to think about placed in the middle of the page.

Step 2: Lighten up! Let go of the idea of hunger, solving the entire problem, or writing a report that everyone will love. This is simply a brain dumping process that helps stimulate new ideas and connections. Start with an open, creative attitude.

Step 3: Free associate. As ideas emerge, print one or two word descriptions of the ideas on lines branching from the central focus. Allow the ideas to expand outward into branches and sub-branches. Put down all ideas without judgment or evaluation.

Step 4: Think fast. Your brain works best in five to seven minute bursts, so capture that explosion of ideas as rapidly as possible. Key words, symbols and images provide a mental shorthand to help you record ideas as quickly as possible.

The diagram illustrates the four steps of the mind mapping process. Step 1 shows a central 'Mind-mapping' node. Step 2 adds a 'Lighten Up' node with a lightbulb icon. Step 3 adds 'Free Associate' and 'add branches' nodes, with further sub-branches for 'expand ideas' and 'sub-branches'. Step 4 adds a 'Think Fast' node with a star icon and notes 'capture explosion of ideas' and 'use keywords and symbols'.

Step 5: Break boundaries. Break through the mentality that says you have to write on white paper with black ink or pencil. The bigger the paper, the more ideas you'll have. Use different colours and styles.



Step 6: Judge not. Put everything down that comes to mind even if it is completely unrelated. If you are brainstorming ideas for a report on the status of agriculture in Zambia and you suddenly remember you need to pick up your cleaning, put down 'cleaning'. Otherwise your mind will get stuck like a record in that 'cleaning' groove and you will never generate those great ideas.



Step 7: Keep moving. Keep your hand moving. If ideas slow down, draw empty lines, and watch your brain automatically find ideas to put on them. Stand up and mind map on a flip chart to generate even more energy.



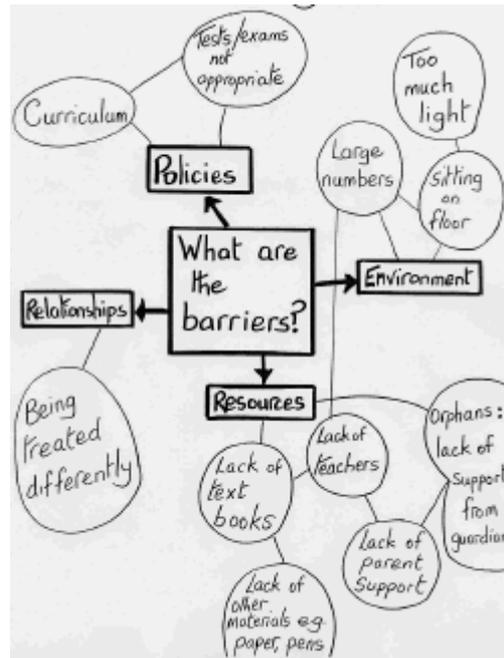
Step 8: Allow organisation. Sometimes, you see relationships and connections immediately and you can add sub-branches to a main idea. Sometimes you don't, so you just connect the ideas to the central focus. Organisation can always come later; the first requirement is to get the ideas out of your head and onto the paper.



Example: Access to education in Tanzania

As part of a DFID-funded action-learning project, 'Understanding Community Initiatives to Improve Access to Education', a workshop was held in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania. One of the key questions was 'What are the barriers to children's participation and learning?' Working in groups, participants were asked to 'map' out the barriers they faced in their schools. This was a group brainstorming activity where the barriers identified were organised into a diagram, or mind map. Some maps were organised into themes, such as resources or environment. Others were more random, and the connections between the barriers were marked on later with arrows, or different coloured pens. The main issues arising could be picked out from the resulting visualisations.

Figure 14: Mind maps in Tanzania



This example is taken from www.eenet.org.uk/action/tanzania_report.shtml.

Sources and further reading

- Buzan, T. (1995) *The Mind Map Book*, London: BBC Books.
- These graphics were taken from the Americans for the Arts: Animating Democracy, resources available at: http://www3.artsusa.org/animatingdemocracy/resources/resources_002.asp.
- For more information, visit www.mindtools.com and check out the free mind mapping software called Freemind – it is easy to use and can prove invaluable when organising complex projects.

18. Social Technologies

Introduction

There are an ever increasing number of tools that are described by the term **Social Technologies**. All of these have one thing in common: the use of technology to try and build collaboration and sharing of tacit knowledge. The term is often used to describe new tools based on the internet; however, we should not forget other equally important tools which do not require a web-platform: mobile telephone communications, radio services and other face-to-face socialising methods.

Detailed description of the processes

E-dialoguing and e-conferencing enables the easy sharing of ideas, information and news. These communications can be synchronised by date and time, or can take place over days and even months. These communications are facilitated by email and web technologies. Email discussions, or lists, can use email to discuss issues. These are either of a hub-and-spoke model whereby daily messages to a moderator are compacted into a single daily message, or they are a free-for-all, whereby all messages are seen by all members of the list. Tolerances and preferences vary by individual. Some email discussions take the form of e-conferences, which are planned around component discussions and pre-prepared short papers on themes and topics. Discussions may be run using both the web and email. Conferences can have a home page which participants visit and post their contributions, and subsequently receive an email detailing either all or a summary of the messages posted.

Internet messaging services provide users with a virtual ‘chat-room’ where people can talk in groups or on a one-to-one basis. Chats could be seen as voluntary unmoderated discussions; although they can be moderated, this is only done rarely. IM services provide privacy options that allow users to share information more freely than in chat rooms or e-conferencing. Internet messaging services have now evolved into a more complete application, providing video and voice communication to its users thus significantly reducing communication cost.

Digital workspaces use email and the web in order to create a virtual common area for distributed project teams to work together. The software tools enable the development of research project plans, project management, and the sharing of documents across organisational boundaries. These platforms often offer several services including: to do lists, personal information managers, collaborative editors, business-oriented chat-interface and customer resource management applications. They generally allow integration with a variety of other applications, notably the Microsoft Office suite.

Arising in response to the difficulties of using weblogs in a collaborative context, a **Wiki** is a website where any user has the right to create, edit and delete content. System abuses are avoided by a revision control system that tracks changes, enabling reverting to previous versions. The potential of Wikis as open knowledge exchange systems is illustrated by the rise of Wikipedia which started in January 2001 as a ‘multilingual project to create a complete and accurate open content encyclopaedia’. The usefulness of the Wiki relies on its ability to aggregate knowledge from the users themselves. Wikis can be used to develop and update information that is useful for many users who, individually, only hold parts of it.

Video streaming can turn a structured e-discussion into a video conference. This can be used to provide a useful primary source on key events. The same can be done with audio records of such events.

Podcasting is a method of distributing multimedia files, such as audio programmes or music videos, over the internet for playback on mobile devices and personal computers. The term podcast, like ‘radio’, can mean both the content and the method of delivery. The host or author of a podcast is often referred to as a ‘podcaster’. Podcasting’s essence is about creating content (audio or video – videocasting) for an audience that wants to listen or watch when they want, where they want, and how

they want. It can be used outside the internet to reach more people by providing, for example, rural radio stations with a stream of pre-recorded podcasts on new agricultural techniques or market information.

A **weblog** (usually shortened to **blog**, but occasionally spelled web log or weblog) is a web-based publication consisting primarily of periodic articles, usually in reverse chronological order. Early weblogs were simply manually updated components of common websites. However, the evolution of tools to facilitate the production and maintenance of web articles posted in a chronological fashion made the publishing process accessible to a much larger, less technical, population. Ultimately, this resulted in the distinct class of online publishing that produces blogs we recognise today. See Tool 28 for more details.

Social network services are online spaces that allow different groups of people to come together under shared interests or causes. Their uses range from online dating and political activism to debating research interests. Most social network services include some of the other social technologies to enhance connectivity and promote peer-to-peer communications. Their usefulness to research and policy influence relate to their ability to develop and sustain social and professional networks, share knowledge between members and provide access or entry points to key individuals and spaces. These spaces provide a range of social networking tools that allow users to expand their social networks to those of their friends and colleagues; as well as to search through the network's space for individuals with similar interests. Spaces like the igloo and dgroups have been specifically created to enhance the social networks of professionals in the international development and governance sector. The network provides access to personal blogs of the members, specialised libraries and a clearing house for relevant links and external services. A more popular version of this type of social technology is LinkedIn, which is targeted at business relationships.

E-learning is a web-based (as opposed to computer-based) application for long distance and on-demand learning and includes the use of other communication technologies such as email, internet forums, collaborative software, and classroom management software; as well as hardware devices such as mobiles and PDAs (in this case it is sometimes called M-learning – for mobile learning). E-learning for international development allows individuals to gain access to technical and professional education. It reduces the traditional costs (printed materials) and outreach limitations of distance learning. In most cases, e-learning sessions are designed to fit professionals and are therefore accessible on an on-demand basis – allowing users to engage in their own time.

Sources and further reading

- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.

Knowledge Sharing and Learning

Learning is like rowing upstream: not to advance is to drop back
Chinese Proverb

19. Stories

Introduction

A great deal has been written about stories in knowledge and learning strategies. **Storytelling** has numerous advantages over more traditional organisational communication techniques. First is that it enables articulation of emotional aspects as well as factual content, and thus allows expression of tacit knowledge that might otherwise be difficult to share. Secondly, in providing the broader context in which knowledge arises, storytelling can increase the potential for meaningful knowledge sharing. By grounding facts in a narrative structure, learning is more likely to take place, and being passed on. This guide aims to provide a set of pointers for using story telling in a workshop format, using the template developed by Sparknow Consulting (www.sparknow.net).

Potential applications of narratives are:

- Team or community-building exercises;
- Breaking down barriers between multidisciplinary or multi-cultural teams;
- Workshop warm-ups;
- Trip debriefs;
- Personal project reviews;
- Entertainment and fun;
- Monitoring systems (see Most Significant Change, Tool 4).

Detailed description of the process

This workshop format was developed by the innovative consultancy Sparknow, and has been used in a range of settings globally. The RAPID team has applied this in workshops in donor agency headquarters, in research study interviews, and with humanitarian aid workers returning from the field. The principle is that everyone can think of (positive/negative) changes of which they have been a part; this enables individuals, pairs and groups to learn about these in a structured fashion.

Table 6: Story template for use in workshop process

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Title of story• Name of original teller• Name of listener/understander• Landscape: <i>set the scene in time and space</i>• Dwelling place: <i>precise location where action occurred</i>• Characters: <i>cast list, descriptive attributes and roles in story</i>• Challenge: <i>problem or task that triggered the action</i>• Action: <i>sequence of events before, during and after your turning point</i>• Turning point: <i>the moment when the change happens</i>• Resolution: <i>ending, including moral, lesson learned or message</i>• Key visual hooks: <i>mnemonics to assist partner retelling the story</i> |
|--|

- Introduce the workshop and theme for storytelling. This could be focused on a specific theme (e.g. change in organisational management techniques), or on a range of themes. The key is to provide a context in which participants think about and select the story they are going to share.
- Get participants to reflect on the change process, and details before, during and after.
- Ask participants to pair up and share their stories.
- Ask each participant to interview their partner, and write down the story, using the story template as a guide. This should enable more capture of detail.

- Ask the pairs to find another pair, and ask each participant in the new group of four to take turns telling their partner's story to the larger group.
- Ask the group to identify any common points or contradictions across the stories.
- Ask each group to present back to the whole group in plenary.

Key points/practical tips

This highlights key factors in using stories for change, whether social or institutional. The story:

- Needs to be simple and powerful;
- Should be in response to demand, and timed with specific opportunities;
- Should provide a solution to both immediate and broader problems;
- Should be targeted at people with the power to make decisions and change things;
- Should play to what is already in people's minds.

Example: Knowledge management at the World Bank

After almost 20 years at the World Bank, Steve Denning used a 10-minute story to trigger change. In his own words (www.destinationkm.com/articles/default.asp?ArticleID=541):

... we were drowning in information, managing it very inefficiently, and if we cleaned it up we would save a lot of money. But it occurred to me that we'd still not be a very relevant organization. The World Bank had been a lending organization most of its life, and we were facing private-sector banks that were lending much more than we were. At that time, people were asking themselves if we had a future at all. So I started to ask myself a different question: Suppose we were to share our knowledge? We had over 50 years' worth of know-how about what works in development and what doesn't. Inside the organization, if you knew who knew what stuff, you could have lunch with them and find out, but if you didn't know them you were in trouble. If you were outside, you didn't have a prayer. But if we were to make it easy for anyone in the world to find out what we know, we could become relevant and useful ...

In response to this situation, Denning told the following story:

In June 1995, a health worker in Kamana, Zambia, logged on to the Centers for Disease Control website and got the answer to a question on how to treat malaria. This story happened, not in June 2015, but in June 1995. This is not a rich country, it is Zambia, one of the least developed countries in the world. It is not even the capital of the country; it is six hundred kilometres away. But the most striking aspect of the picture is this: our organization isn't in it. Our organization doesn't have its know-how and expertise organized in such a way that someone like the health worker in Zambia can have access to it. But just imagine if it had! We could get ourselves organized so that professionals have access to the resources needed. Just in time and just enough.

Denning was named Programme Director and assigned the task of making the Bank a knowledge organisation. The programme caught the attention of the leadership of the Bank, and saw the Bank being re-branded 'the Knowledge Bank' in the 1996 inaugural speech of Bank President James Wolfensohn. This is an example of what Denning (2000) calls 'springboard stories'.

Sources and further reading

- Examples of storytelling in the development sector and further afield, see: www.sparknow.net.
- For more on storytelling techniques and the different possible reasons for using storytelling in organisations, see Steve Denning's website: www.stevedenning.com.
- For a look at how storytelling can be used for effective external communications, see Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.

20. Peer Assists

Introduction

In *Learning to Fly* (Parcell and Collison, 2001), the learning cycle is described as made up of three elements:

- Learning before doing, or the process of learning before undertaking a task, activity or project
 - facilitated by Peer Assists
- Learning during doing, or the process of learning whilst undertaking a task, activity or project
 - facilitated by After Action Reviews (Tool 22)
- Learning after doing, or the process of learning after undertaking a task, activity or project
 - facilitated by Retrospects (Tool 22)

The **Peer Assist** is a tool which supports ‘learning before doing’ processes. Using the same principles as scientific peer review, it begins with the premise that, for any given activity, someone else has done something that is at least broadly similar. In order to use the peer assists, a team or group first needs to identify the right group of people, and then uses a systematic method to benefit from their insights/experience. If conducted effectively, peer assists can promote learning, and be used to strengthen mutual learning between people and groups within an organisation.

Detailed description of the process

- **Develop a clear definition of the problem** to be addressed. It may be worthwhile doing some background research on whether similar issues have been, or are being, faced elsewhere. The definition should include a set of hoped-for outcomes from the peer assist process. Step 1 will help focus the peer assist meeting, and will also provide a long list of potential participants.
- **Enlist participants.** Participation can be generated either through open invitation or selection. In general, it is worth getting a good mix of people playing a range of roles across different locations, and from different positions in the organisational hierarchy, with the proviso that peer assist work best when there is some common ground, and scope for open honest interactions. Consider including people from outside, but only if this will not disrupt internal sharing. It may be worth bringing in outside experts after the internal process has been completed.
- **Time the meeting carefully.** The peer assist meeting should take place early enough to ensure that: i) the required participants are given enough notice and are available, and ii) the lessons can be applied effectively by the team calling the peer assist.
- **Run the peer assist meeting.** Effective peer assist meetings comprise six parts.
 - Part 1 – the learning team presents context, history and ideas regarding the task or issue at hand. This should occur in an open and flexible manner to enable redefinition in the session.
 - Part 2 should allow the participants to consider the problem, and discuss issues of interest – namely, what has been covered, and what hasn’t been covered.
 - Part 3 should be a session in which participants consider what the learning team might need to know to address the problem and where might they find that knowledge.
 - Part 4 of the meeting should be for the participants to reflect on what has been learned from the others and to examine options. Again, the learning team should not be the focus here.
 - In Part 5 of the meeting, the participants should present feedback to the learning team and answer specific questions. This should be informal, and deal with what has been learned, what options there are and experiences elsewhere. Begin with the positive and then move on to options to do things differently. When presenting what has worked elsewhere, participants should be encouraged to describe rather than prescribe.
 - In Part 6, the team who called the peer assist should acknowledge the contribution of the participants. There should be a commitment to a timeline for delivery of an action list of key lessons

learned, and what the learning team are going to do differently as a result. Finally, all the participants should be invited to reflect on what they learned, and how they might apply it going forward.

- **Develop a set of lessons and related options** to shape the learning team's decision-making process and provide pointers to future actions. This document should be shared with the peer assist participants for final comments and suggestions, and then placed in a publicly accessible area such as an intranet.

Key points/practical tips

- Ensure everyone is clear about the purpose of the peer assist and their roles:
 - Learning team listens in order to understand and learn;
 - Participants share knowledge and experience to help resolve the challenge without adding to the workload.
- Participants should be given briefing materials in advance so they have time to prepare.
- As well as the participants themselves, an external facilitator and note-taker are essential. In particular, the facilitator should be from outside the teams concerned, in order to make sure the diverse needs of the participants are met.
- Allow time for the teams to socialise. Rapport is essential for open learning.
- Although the peer assist process is designed to provide input for a specific purpose or project, consider who else might benefit from the lessons learned. Always look out for opportunities to share and reuse knowledge and learning.

Example: ODI civil society engagement peer assist

As part of a very important proposal which had potential implications for the whole organisation, the RAPID team at ODI called a peer assist to gather together experiences of different researchers working with Southern civil society organisations. The range of people was diverse, with over 20 different thematic experts present, which was a few more than is usually considered ideal for a PPA. The session was facilitated very carefully, using the peer assist process. The outcome was a set of ideas for the substance of the proposal, as well as a list of previous projects of relevance, further internal contacts and useful external contacts. Key participants also shared documents of relevance, and an intranet page was created to store all of these in one location. A number of participants volunteered to be on a panel at a later stage to help bolster different areas of the proposal. Follow-up interviews were also conducted to capture stories of successful ODI engagement with this increasingly important group of stakeholders. Overall, it was one of the most extensive and systematic internal learning exercises conducted at ODI. The outcome was that ODI was awarded a Partnership Programme Agreement by DFID, the first time a research institute had ever done so. The ideas generated at the peer assist have since helped shape the resulting multi-year, multi-million pound Civil Society Partnerships Programme.

Sources and further reading

- NHS Guide to Peer Assists: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/peer_assists_toolkit.asp.
- Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone Publishing.

21. Challenge Sessions

Introduction

It is well established that groups and individuals think by recognising and reacting to patterns, with most reactions emerging as a result of building on past experiences in a logical and linear fashion. In other words, the underlying assumption is that the future will correlate with the past. Although such thinking is a necessity in certain situations, individuals and groups often get stuck in such modes of thinking, and do not attempt to think beyond them. When a different or new challenge is posed, the manner in which people are conditioned to think means it is difficult to adjust.

The need to apply this understanding in a simple and systematic manner has led to the development of the Challenge Session: a structured problem-solving framework which aims to create changes in the way that groups or individuals think about and solve problems. The roots of the approach are in the work of a Russian patent officer Genrich Altshuller, who undertook a study of 200,000 patents to look for the basic principles and patterns in the world's most innovative products. He found that each of the most successful patents primarily solved an 'inventive problem', defined as those made up of conflicting requirements, or challenges. This idea was taken and expanded by de Bono, who made it famous in his lateral thinking techniques.

Detailed description of the process

The basis of a challenge session, then, is to generate a series of challenge statements, defined as deliberately provocative statements about a particular situation. These are usually generated by taking accepted wisdoms – things which are taken for granted about a particular situation – and treating them as though they were not true. This initially calls for a suspension of judgment, and the uncritical use of specific challenge statements to generate ideas about solving the problem. This logical 'reversal' helps individuals and groups move away from conventional modes of thinking, and provides a starting point for original, creative thinking.

As an example, we could make a statement that modern organisations should not have a physical library. In many situations, this would not be a good idea! However, this leads one to think of an organisation with distributed collections on bookshelves which means that staff have to walk around the building, potentially talking to others as they go. This could contribute to strengthening informal interactions, which are at the heart of effective knowledge and learning within an organisation. With this particular example, there are potential issues, namely, security and stock maintenance, which would also need to be addressed if this challenge statement were to become reality. The process for a challenge session is as follows:

- **Identify the problem:** This should ideally be a well defined problem or issue faced by a team or organisation.
- **Brainstorm a series of challenge statements:** This may be done by the whole group or sub-groups.
- **Use the challenge statements to generate new ideas:** Address the following checklist:
 - What are the consequences of the statement?
 - What are the possible benefits?
 - What special circumstances would be required to make it a sensible solution?
 - What are the principles needed to support it and make it work?
 - How it would work as a step-by-step process?
 - What would happen if a sequence of events was changed?
- **Prioritise the best ideas.** Use pilots to test them out in the live environment.
- **Rollout more widely.**

As with other lateral thinking techniques, use of challenge sessions does not guarantee production of good or relevant ideas. Frequently, though, it can help generate completely new ideas and concepts. The key is effective facilitation of the group through the creative thinking process.

Example: The EUFORIC network

A Europe-wide network of development practitioners asked ODI to help facilitate a session on networking. There were over 40 participants from very different organisations, speaking different languages. The overriding objective was to develop a set of ideas for use in the strategy of the EUFORIC network in the future. The challenge statements were as follows:

- **Challenge 1:** European development organisations and professionals do most of their effective networking with institutions and people that are similar to themselves.
- **Challenge 2:** For European development organisations and professionals, effective networking is largely the result of individual rather than institutional relationships.
- **Challenge 3:** European development organisations and professionals do most of their networking for funding purposes.
- **Challenge 4:** European development organisations and professionals within them do most of their effective networking in an unplanned and opportunistic manner.

The room was divided into groups asked to address these issues in terms of:

- Level of agreement/disagreement
- Consequences of challenge statement being true/false
- Benefits
- Approaches to overcome the problem
- Interesting examples and lessons from own experience

After addressing the issues, the teams were asked to write up the key lessons on flipchart paper. The other participants were invited to mark their favourites, thus identifying areas of key relevance.

Sources and further reading

- De Bono, E. (1993) *Serious Creativity: Using the Power of Lateral Thinking to Create New Ideas*, New York: Harper Business.

22. After Action Reviews and Retrospects

Introduction

Organisational learning requires continuous assessment of organisational performance, looking at successes and failures, ensuring that learning takes place to support continuous improvement. The **After Action Review** is a simple tool to facilitate this assessment. It works by bringing together a team to discuss task, event, activity or project, in an open and honest fashion.

The systematic application of properly conducted AARs across an organisation can help drive organisational change. As well as turning unconscious learning into tacit, it helps to build trust among team members and to overcome fear of mistakes. When applied correctly, AARs can become a key aspect of the internal system of learning and motivation.

Detailed description of the process

There are many different ways to conduct AARs. The simplicity at the heart of the tool means there is much potential to experiment with the process and find the right ways that will work best with the group and the work item under review. The whole process should be kept as simple and as easy to remember as possible. The essence of the AAR is, however, to bring together the relevant group to think about a project, activity, event or task, and pose the following simple questions.

Table 7: After action review questions

Question	Purpose
What was supposed to happen? What actually happened? Why were there differences?	These questions establish a common understanding of the work item under review. The facilitator should encourage and promote discussion around these questions. In particular, divergences from the plan should be explored.
What worked? What didn't? Why?	These questions generate reflection about the successes and failures during the course of the project, activity, event or task. The question 'Why?' generates understanding of the root causes of these successes and failures.
What would you do differently next time?	This question is intended to help identify specific actionable recommendations. The facilitator asks the team members for crisp and clear, achievable and future-oriented recommendations.

A **Retrospect** follows the AAR format, but involves asking the following more detailed questions:

- What did you set out to achieve?
- What was your plan to achieve this?
- How did this change as you progressed?
- What went well and why?
- What could have gone better?
- What advice would you give yourself if you were to go back to where you were at the start of the project?
- What were the two or three key lessons you would share with others?
- What next for you in terms of this project?
- Can you think of a story that summarises your experience of work on this project?
- What should we have learned from this project a year from now?
- Are there any lessons for you personally?

Key points/practical tips

- Post the questions up on flipchart sheets prior to the session, with answers then written on the sheet as the session progresses. The completed sheets can then be stuck up around the room to serve as a reminder of the progress.
- Participants are participants, not a passive audience. The facilitator should prepare leading questions and may have to ask it of several people. The questions can be asked on an individual or a team basis. The team mechanism is ideal, but if suggestions are slow coming, the facilitator could go around the room asking each individual to express one thing that worked and one thing that did not.
- If there are issues with either openness or time, it may be worthwhile to gather ideas first and then facilitate the discussion in the group environment.
- Ideally, an uninvolved note-taker should be asked to minute the session. This will enable better capture of the learning.
- The actionable recommendations should be as specific as possible. For example, an AAR following a workshop could have the following recommendation: 'Make more time to understand the audience.' A better SAR would be 'Make contact with the organising body representative and ask about the range of participants before planning the workshop.'
- Participants of an AAR should include all members of the team. A facilitator should be appointed to help create an open environment, promote discussion and draw out lessons learned.
- AARs should be carried out immediately, while the team is still available and memories are fresh. It is recommended that AARs be incorporated at key points during a project, activity, event or task in the early planning stage, although they are often completed at the end.
- AARs can be conducted almost anywhere, and will vary in length. For example, a 15-minute AAR can be conducted after a one-day workshop, or a much longer meeting could be held to reflect on the strategy development process throughout a large organisation.

Example: Joint AAR by CARE and WVI, with OXFAM GB and CRS, April 2005

This workshop was a consolidation of a number of country-level learning activities following the crisis caused by the tsunami of 26 December 2004. The AAR focused mainly on the four most affected countries: Indonesia, India, Sri Lanka and Thailand, with additional participation by staff from CARE Somalia. The primary purpose was to explore ways in which participant organisations could jointly improve their performance and quality of work by reflecting back on their activities and actions. It presented an opportunity for participants from various organisations to discover for themselves what happened and why, and how to build on strengths and improve on areas of weakness, as well as exploring ways in which they might collaborate more effectively together.

During the workshop, participants discussed best practices and lessons learned in country groups and then discussed these across three themes: accountability, capacity and coordination. Of the best practices discussed over the two days, five were selected as having been most crucial to improving response time and effectiveness:

- Having existing capacity to respond;
- Making linkages at community level with local structures and community leaders;
- Having consistent leadership in the development of strategic plans;
- The existence of a longer-term planning and fundraising strategy; and
- The use of humanitarian standards such as Sphere.

The top lessons learned from an interagency perspective included:

- The need for early social/economic analysis which would aid programming and programme monitoring, for joint rapid assessments;
- A central role for community consultation and participation; and

- The importance of preparedness planning, notably the need to build local capacity for emergency response.

Time was then spent action planning on how to work collaboratively on the first three of the lessons learned. Participants returned to their countries with plans for how to take forward the lessons from the workshop collaboratively.

Reflecting on the workshop, participants said that as the starting point for a longer process of collaboration, it had been very useful. Participants generally felt that it had helped in reinforcing closer working relationships between NGOs; many suggested that the process should be opened up to wider representation, not only from different organisations, but also from outside. It was also anticipated that the outputs of the workshop would be a valuable input into the planned multi-agency evaluation and other emerging projects and working groups.

This example is drawn from: www.humanitarianinfo.org/SriLanka/infocentre/reference/docs/Care_Evaluation.pdf.

Sources and further reading

- Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone.
- Whiffen, P. (2001) 'Seizing Learning Opportunities at Tearfund', *Knowledge Management Review*, November/December.
- NHS Website: www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement.

23. Intranet Strategies

Introduction

The role of **Intranets** in knowledge management cannot be underestimated. As with all tools described here, they need to be applied carefully and in response to clearly specified needs. In the development and humanitarian world, what is clearly evident is the highly disproportionate level of resources available to invest in such tools. But whether the organisation is a globe-spanning donor with its own dedicated satellite space, or a local NGO whose field staff have to use internet cafes to go online, there are some core principles and processes. And if these are followed, they substantially increase the likelihood of an effective, useful system.

To begin with, there need to be clear-cut reasons and a supporting strategy for an intranet deployed in an organisation. The all-too frequent ‘me too!’ approach has resulted in many so-called information graveyards which are seldom updated or accessed. At the other end of the spectrum, some intranets can be elevated to the position of a ‘magic bullet’ that will put paid to all possible organisational ailments. Both approaches are understandable, but flawed.

At the outset, it is worth establishing exactly how an intranet might benefit your organisation. Three of the most frequent applications (Lash, 2003) are:

- Information collection
- Collaboration and communication
- Task completion

While it is clear that no intranet will focus on only one of these applications, most successful intranets have a primary focus on one approach, with others playing a supporting role. This needs to be determined by the overall organisational strategy for knowledge and learning, and each has different resource implications, as we shall see later.

Detailed description of the process

Information collection intranets are used to find and organise all of the information that resides within an organisation, essentially acting as a front-end to a large repository of knowledge. There could be document libraries, individuals’ computer files, financial and statistical data, supplier information, databases, and other information that was previously only available to selected people or groups within an organisation. Access to this information reduces confusion and duplication, increases productivity, and improves decision making. In a system wholly geared towards information collection, individuals contribute and have access to a wealth of information, but do not use the system to interact with other contributors.

Collaboration and communication intranets enable organisational units and staff members to connect with others within the company, and to initiate or participate in essential information flows. In contrast with the information collection intranet, collaboration and communication intranet promotes dialogue, debate, learning, and helps to facilitate face-to-face communications. Such an approach may be useful in decentralised organisations or groups, and when geographic locations can stand in the way of face-to-face communication. Typical features might include: discussion forums, internal bulletins, surveys, corporate calendars, team workspaces, and employee and project team pages.

Activity-based intranets facilitate the completion of tasks and actions. For example, the intranet may be used to reserve rooms, raise purchases, change human resources information, fill out and submit timesheets, purchase supplies, take online classes, and complete necessary forms. This kind of system reduces the time spent on often-repeated administrative tasks, and increases the time available to do core tasks.

Drawing from White (2003), there are at least nine key activities which should be taken into account if an intranet is going to meet the organisational objectives:

- **Develop a two to three-year intranet strategy**, based on considerations of content and process requirements, technology and other resources, and governance mechanisms. This strategy should include a clear set of objectives for the intranet which are monitored, and regular reviews of the strategy.
- **Obtain a sponsor**. Ensure there is senior management sponsorship, and that the sponsor has budget control. Without senior sponsorship, the intranet will not be seen as an organisation-wide tool, and will not have sufficient resources allocated to it.
- **Match information to business needs**. The intranet needs to match existing and future organisational needs, and not just be a random collection of information. Establish the appropriate balance between information collection, collaboration and communication, and activity-based approaches.
- **Recognise authorship**. The roles, skills and responsibilities for contribution and maintenance should be included in job descriptions and reviews. Intranet contribution is not a hobby, but should be recognised and rewarded.
- **Provide access to the external environment**. The intranet should provide access to external information, such as donor and partner information, country-specific reports, funding information, research websites, databases, etc.
- **Develop clear information ‘architecture’**. This should be as simple and easy to communicate as possible, and ideally should not replicate the existing organisational structure. A clear thematic and information type taxonomy should be applied.
- **Undertake regular usability testing**. There should be regular and systematic feedback loops from users to ensure the information and the system as a whole can meet changing user needs.
- **Establish a marketing strategy**. Promote the intranet through a strong brand identity and internal marketing plan, with a focus not just on the ‘new information’ but how the tool can be applied in day-to-day work.
- **Assess the impact**. The performance of the intranet needs to be measured against objectives, using surveys, success stories and failure stories.

Example: Christian Aid

In 2000, Christian Aid approved a new four-year corporate plan, which included a commitment to changing and modernising its office systems and working practices. An audit of the charity’s communication and collaboration practices showed that the organisation was very silo based. As the knowledge manager put it: ‘It was becoming increasingly difficult for staff to share information with each other or collaborate in teams using the legacy systems. By 2004, we estimated that the charity had more than one million documents on its network drives with many duplicated documents and redundant files. The problem was made worse by the fact that Christian Aid staff working away from the main office had no access to the wide area network (WAN) and were entirely reliant on email and their C drives.’

The initial reaction was to consider an intranet to address these issues, but it was agreed that an intranet solution without a fundamental change of culture towards document sharing and record management would fail to deliver the expected results. There followed a systematic change programme, based on separate software applications. Following a partial implementation, the strategy was revised to utilise a single intranet solution and therefore cut the costs of licensing, implementation, and integration.

For examples, see: <http://nightingalesangatwcc.typepad.com/tajikistan>.

Sources and further reading

- Council for Health Research on Development: <http://cohred.org/cohred/content/733.pdf>.
- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI, especially for more information on the use of websites in communications strategies.
- Lash, J. (2003) 'Three Strategies to Intranet Development' www.digital-web.com/articles/three_approaches_to_intranet_strategy/.
- Stein, M. and M. Osten (2001) 'Organizational Knowledge Assets to Power your Internet Strategy', Dot Org, Issue 5, see: www.dotorgmedia.org/Publications/Publications.cfm?ID=49&c=18.
- White, M. (2003) 'Creating an Effective Intranet', downloaded from www.intranetfocus.com/information/effectiveintranets.pdf.

24. Email Guidelines

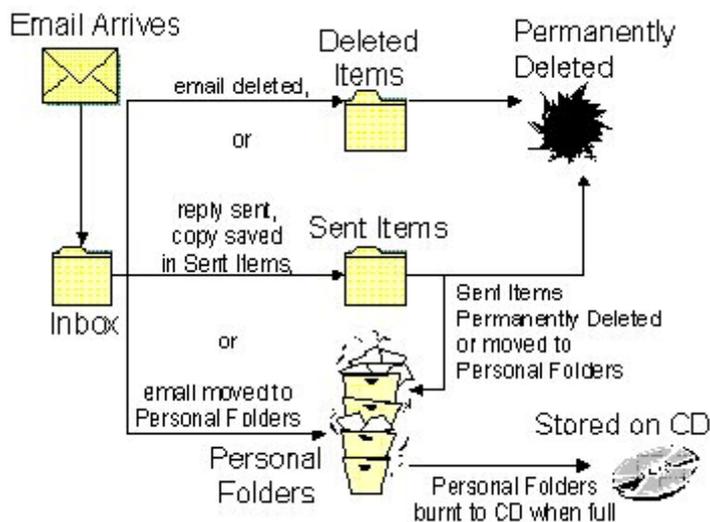
Introduction

Electronic mail, or **Email**, is one of the most commonly used communication tools in the modern business environment, increasing the speed and ease with which information can be shared by users across the globe. Although an essential business tool for many, the explosion in the use of email has led to 'email overload', as many people are unable to deal effectively with the volume of emails that they receive. This section of the toolkit gives some ideas on how to control the volume of emails that you receive, as well as how to make the most out of email as a communication tool.

Detailed description of the process

Check your emails regularly and, once you have read them, replying or actioning as required, you should either delete them or store them in mail folders. Check through these folders occasionally to remove any stored messages that are no longer required. If you are not going to be checking your emails for any length of time, an automatic response message can be a good way of informing correspondents that their mail will not be read immediately. An example of a procedure for dealing with emails is given below (see: www.usq.edu.au/users/hoeyw/email_best_practice.htm).

Figure 15: Procedure for dealing with email



It can be helpful to set up an email policy across your organisation. There is a range of administration tools available through various Email software packages, such as Outlook, Pegasus, Eudora and Groupwise; these help users to administer their accounts. The guidelines should be accompanied by training on the range of tools that your organisation's software includes.

As part of the guidelines, consider a company-wide policy on bulk unsolicited or 'spam' emails, including appropriate anti-spam software such as 'block lists' or 'Bayesian filters'(which calculate the probability of a message being spam based on its contents), together with a policy of deleting spam emails without responding. For guidance on the best software to protect your systems, refer to an organisation such as BestPrac.org. Include staff training alongside your guidelines, and back this up with the latest anti-virus software.

Key points/practical tips

Before you compose an email, consider if there is a more appropriate way of communicating. If email is the most appropriate, it is important make the purpose of the email clear and ensure that you are sending it to the relevant people. Ask yourself:

- **Why do I need to send this email?**
 - State the purpose of the email concisely in the 'subject' field so that readers do not have to open the email to know what it is about.
 - Use a layout that is easy to understand, including bullet lists, one idea per paragraph, etc. Use simple language wherever possible.
 - If there are many action points, summarise these at the end in a numbered list, showing who needs to take which actions by when.
 - If your organisation has a high volume of email traffic, agree on guidelines and alternatives to the use of emails (such as staff notice boards in a shared office space, newsletters, etc).
- **Who needs to receive this email? What actions (if any) do they need to take on reading this email?**
 - If actions are required from the readers, include them in the 'to' mail header; if you are sending the email for their reference, include them in the 'cc' (carbon copy) mail header but make it clear why they should see the email; if you want to copy someone in but do not want the other recipients to know that they are copied, use the 'bc' (blind copy) mail header. You can also use the 'bc' header if you want to send yourself copies of messages so that you can store them in appropriate folders later.
- **What attachments do I need to add to this email? Do all of the recipients need to read these?**
 - Only add attachments that cannot be circulated more effectively through other means: consider putting them on the internet and sending the URL by email, for example.
 - If there are multiple attachments, provide a sentence on each which says who needs to read it and which order they should read them.
 - Do not send attachments that your recipients will not have the software to open.
 - Beware of sending large attachments to those with limited server capacity.
- **Is this a priority email?**
 - Avoid overusing the 'priority' email option. If the information contained in the email is urgently required, make sure the 'subject' reflects the content of the email.
 - If a response or immediate action needs to be taken then include 'response required by ...' or 'action required' in the subject field. If the email is for reference only, mark this either in the subject field or at the start of the email.
 - Be cautious in the use of 'read receipts': if you want to know if someone has read your email, ask them to confirm receipt.

Sources and further reading

- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- Plain English campaign, see: www.plainenglish.co.uk.
- Waterford Technologies Best Practice Email Management Guide, downloaded from www.waterfordtechnologies.com/pdf/BestPractices.pdf on 11 May 2005.
- Essential Email Filing Practices, downloaded from www.usq.edu.au/users/hoeyw/email_best_practice.htm on 12 May 2005.

Capturing and Storing Knowledge

The palest ink is better than the best memory
Chinese Proverb

25. Taxonomies for Documents and Folders

Introduction

Taxonomies have been used for many decades in the information management field. They are the basis of classification schemes and indexing systems such as the Dewey Decimal System. With the advent of the internet, there has been increased interest in using taxonomies for structuring information for easier management and retrieval. At their simplest, taxonomies are nothing more than systems for naming and organising things. One of the simplest applications is based on naming conventions – standard rules to be applied to documents and the physical and electronic folders storing these documents. This example demonstrates the value of taxonomies: they provide an interface for staff in an organisation to access information and knowledge relevant to their work and interests, and also to understand how to contribute to knowledge bases. Within development and humanitarian organisations, taxonomies can give a particular perspective on the organisation. Possible taxonomies include:

- Countries
 - e.g. Ethiopia, India, etc.
- Regions
 - e.g. sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, etc.
- Programme theme
 - HIV/AIDS, trade, gender, livelihoods, etc.
- Donors
 - Bilateral, foundations, etc.
- Document types
 - Proposal, project report, beneficiary feedback, etc.

Each of these categories can be used to signpost valuable knowledge and support better decision making. Implementing a simple but effective set of taxonomies can provide the basis for successful systems for information storage and capture, as well as for the overall knowledge and learning strategy. The key applications of taxonomies for development and humanitarian organisations are:

- Signposting and searching for files and folders on an intranet or shared drive;
- Classifying and searching for different kinds of staff expertise;
- Classifying and searching for different kinds of projects and programmes.

Users can use these taxonomies to access the information or experts they require, through the hierarchy of information. Of course, some users may prefer to search for information using dedicated search engines. In this situation, taxonomic searches might be supplemented by searches at different levels within the system. You may be able to search an entire intranet, or navigate to staff, programme or document-type levels and conduct a search within that category.

Detailed description of the process

Developing a taxonomy involves finding an appropriate breakdown for the diverse forms of information contained and used by different actors within an organisation.

- Start with a general category for the area of work being addressed, e.g. programme theme.
- Establish the subcategories for this category. These can be developed by answering the question ‘what types of [e.g. programme themes] are there?’
- Repeat the process of division, based on the planned application of the taxonomy, and the users concerned. The division used should be consistent with the expectations of the users, otherwise it becomes hard for them to navigate the system intuitively.

- For example, if the taxonomy is to be used for senior management or communications staff searching different projects in preparation for a press release, the taxonomy could be based on geography (and then region, and then country), type of project (and then advocacy, service delivery, etc.), team involved (development, humanitarian relief, conflict prevention).
- By contrast, a project information system for use by project staff should be based on the categories and subcategories of information with which the staff member is likely to be familiar. This might include proposals, project initiation documents, budgets, background materials, relevant research reports, timelines, progress reports, final reports.
- Decide on standard terms. These should follow the same logic and consistency across different types of item, following the same pattern for similar situations so that, once learned, the user can reasonably predict how it will apply in a new situation. As an example, standard terms can be applied to:
 - Use of standard naming conventions for organisation sub-units and people:
 - As an example, a organisation may decide to always use ‘HIV/AIDS Team’ or ‘Gender Team’ rather than ‘HIV/Aids Programme’ or ‘Gender Unit’.
 - e.g. always use ‘Navin Patel’ rather than ‘N Patel’.
 - Use of standard names for projects and activities:
 - e.g. always use ‘Advocacy and Communications’ rather than just ‘Advocacy’.
 - Use standard common terms for document types across units:
 - e.g. always use ‘Budget Report’ instead of ‘Financial Report’.
 - e.g. always use ‘Progress Reports’ instead of ‘Progress Updates’.
- Establish and share simple rules to encourage consistent practice and provide guidance on how to use different taxonomies. Example of rules for documents might include:
 - Use one of these standard terms: Agenda; Report; Letter; Project schedule; Meeting Minutes.
 - Do not use terms such as ‘Presentation on...’ in a title because different document types are already identified (e.g. as .ppt in the document title).
 - Do not use the document creator’s name in the title.
 - Use structured titles in pre-specified formats which draw on the taxonomies, e.g., for standard document types, combine elements of a title to give the most useful information first, bearing in mind the folder structure and titling; for example, for a letter: topic – recipient – letter type.

Example: The OECD Macrothesaurus

Perhaps the most systematic collection of standard terms in the development sector is the now-discontinued OECD Macrothesaurus. Although work on this was ceased in 1998, it is still available online and – despite the odd anachronism – is still widely applicable today.

The discontinued version is available at <http://info.uibk.ac.at/info/oecd-macroth> and provides guidance for themes, document types, countries, regions, and so on. This is a good starting point for developing an organisational specific taxonomy.

Sources and further reading

- Online guide to building taxonomies: <http://knowledgemanagement.ittoolbox.com/documents/popular-q-and-a/building-a-taxonomy-2056>.

26. Exit Interviews

Introduction

Exit Interviews are usually thought of as a rather formal interview between a manager and staff member leaving an organisation, focusing on the latter's reasons for leaving. Increasingly, however, exit interviews are a label for a specific learning process emphasising the importance of capturing and storing know-how. Obviously, it is impossible to capture all of the knowledge of any individual, but exit interviews are designed to minimise the loss of useful knowledge through staff turnover and ease the learning curve of new staff. If conducted appropriately, they can benefit both the organisation and the leaving staff. The organisation captures the leaver's useful knowledge, hopefully in an accessible form. The leaver gets to reflect on their role, and hopefully leave on the positive note of leaving a positive impact on the team or organisation. Conducting exit interviews can also be highly therapeutic, especially for staff who are leaving volatile or violent environments.

Detailed description of the process

The ideal focus of the learning-based exit interview is on knowledge that is most useful to the next person, or for others doing similar jobs. Because face-to-face interactions are central to such exit interviews, ideally between the leaver and potential learners, the management of the exit interview process must be initiated as early as possible after it is known that the person is leaving.

- Identify who in the organisation might benefit from the leaver's knowledge and what they will need to know from that person.
- Consider who currently accesses the person's knowledge and what they need to know from the replacement staff. Think about documented explicit knowledge (in files, documents and emails) as well as tacit knowledge (know-how), which needs to be explained.
- Develop a plan in a participatory way to ensure knowledge can be captured and documented during the leaver's notice period. This requires a review of key tasks, drawing from a ToR in consultation with the leaving staff. An Activity-based Knowledge Mapping (Tool 8) could prove useful, providing a framework for conversations about how key tasks are undertaken, what inputs and outputs are involved, obstacles and bottlenecks, etc. Internal and external networks and other sources of knowledge should also be discussed. For explicit knowledge, the leaver should move relevant files – hard and electronic – into shared folders or a document library. Ideally, they should be clean up and organise all files and draw up a related set of notes for their successor.

Key points/practical tips

- Get the leaver involved from the outset. Ask them for their inputs on how the organisation might best benefit from their knowledge, experience, contacts, etc., prior to departure.
- While HR need to be involved in the process, it may be best that knowledge-focused interviews are undertaken by a relevant peer or subject expert, as long as they are appropriately skilled and trained.
- If at all possible, there should be an overlap period between the leaver and their successor so that a 'live' handover can be done; this may need to be in the form of a temporary member of staff who acts as a 'bridgehead'.
- Exit interviews are usually only appropriate for employees who resign voluntarily or retire, rather than those who are fired or made redundant.
- There is a real need to be clear about who will use the knowledge gathered and how it will be used, before you begin to gather it; the purpose of the interview is not to gather knowledge per se but to gather useful knowledge that will actually be used.
- The less knowledge your organisation captures on a regular basis, the more it will need to capture

at exit. It is possible to capture this on an ongoing basis, through tools such as Social Network Analysis (Tool 3), Activity-based Knowledge Mapping (Tool 8) and How To Guides (Tool 26).

Example: Exit interviews and handovers at the BMZ

‘...The need for a quality procedure for job handovers within the BMZ is made particularly urgent by the fact that staff operate as “all-rounders” and frequently change jobs within the ministry. The “all-rounder” principle means that individuals have to be able to familiarise themselves rapidly with new subject areas. The faster this process of familiarisation can take place, the faster they can become operational in their new job.

Staff statistics from 2000 and 2001 show that over 70 people in the executive and professional grades alone change job each year and must be familiarised with their new tasks. That is 20% of people working in these civil service grades. Statistically, the entire staff of the BMZ moves round once every five years. Handover procedures have, until now, varied widely and have not always done enough to ensure that knowledge is preserved.

Handovers provide a systematic basis for improving institutional learning within the BMZ, something that will benefit both the ministry and individual employees but has been lacking to date. It allows the BMZ greater productivity and continuity in discharging its duties. It also provides valuable support to staff members in tackling the special challenge of rapidly developing the skills needed when taking on a new post. ...

The quality of the handover will depend in practice on the care each individual takes over it, on the ideas they have and also on the time pressures they face when the changeover occurs. The aim of the regulation is therefore to outline a handover procedure that allows the relevant knowledge to be preserved without a disproportionate amount of working time being taken up. Clearly, however, a good handover does require time, and this should be taken into account when planning work ...’

The German Ministry for International Development (BMZ) has released a summary of its experience of utilising handovers which can be viewed on the KM4Dev website: www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=244.

Sources and further reading

- This tool was drawn from the NHS KM Toolkit, which can be viewed online at: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/getting_started.asp.
- A useful webpage on exit interviews is www.businessballs.com/exitinterviews.htm.

27. How To Guides

Introduction

Developing a **How To Guide** is an increasingly important process, as it enables the know-how of staff within an organisation to be captured, documented and made available to others. The simple aim is to help organisations make better and wider use of existing knowledge by drawing it out from selected people and making it available to a wider group. The ultimate goal is to capture an effective sequence or process with enough accuracy so that it can be repeated with the same good results. In development and humanitarian organisations, 'how to guides' can be used for a wide range of situations. The key is only to spend time developing these guides when there is a clear need and/or an articulated demand.

Useful 'how to guides' might be: i) related to programming or projects to address a specific problem, issue or challenge, e.g. HIV/AIDS or gender; ii) contain knowledge about a relationship with a particular type of stakeholder, e.g. donors; iii) give knowledge about key operational processes, e.g. fundraising or negotiation; iv) offer knowledge about a key system, technology or piece of equipment, e.g. how to access the intranet while travelling; or v) provide knowledge about the organisational culture and the internal infrastructure.

Detailed description of the process

Although there is no set formula for developing a 'how to guide', there are general guidelines (drawn from www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/harvesting_toolkit.asp):

- **Focus:** Decide on what specific knowledge and expertise you want to capture, and be clear about what the benefits will be. You may need to focus on the knowledge that is most important to the success of the organisation, relative to goals and objectives.
- **Understand the audience:** Establish who will be using the 'how to guide' before you start the research process, to ensure you pitch your research at an appropriate level of complexity. Consider other aspects of your audience that may be relevant, e.g. numbers, location, current knowledge, access to ICTs, etc.
- **Find the knowledgeable sources:** Identify the people who have the know-how you are seeking to capture. A staff pages system could be a good start, if you have one. Otherwise, ask people working on similar issues, or scan organisational literature.
- **Choose appropriate researchers and the right questions:** The researchers should be people with strong communication, interpersonal and interviewing skills, such as recruiters, trainers, counsellors etc. Get these people to work in workshop format with the knowledgeable sources and ask them to talk about what they do, when they do it, how they do it and why they do it. A tape recorder or note-taker is essential. It might also be worth having a potential user of the 'how to guide' present in order to ensure the right questions are being asked. This could also be done in a separate workshop of potential users.
- **Organise, package and share:** Once the information has been gathered, it can then be edited, organised and presented (or 'packaged') into the form that best meets the needs of the users. This may be a checklist, a manual or a set of guidelines which can then be made available either in hard copy or via an electronic medium.
- **Apply, evaluate and adapt:** 'How to guides' can sometimes result in documents that are never accessed or are quickly obsolete. In order to counteract this, it is necessary to track use and regularly update the information.

Key points/practical tips

- 'How to guides' will only work when people share their experiences in an open fashion, so targeting knowledge that is a clear source of internal status or power could lead to a poor resource.

- Not all know-how can be captured, and some believe that knowledge collection through tools such as ‘how to guides’ is far less useful than a well connected internal network. In reality, a balance must be sought between the ‘collection’ and ‘connection’ approaches.

Example: ‘How to guide’ used by UNDP in the Europe and CIS Region

In the UNDP region of Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, ‘how to guides’ are used for project and programme design as an aid in development of programmes, projects or initiatives. The aim is to present readers with a concise overview of main debates and issues in the selected area, as well as a framework for developing projects and programmes conforming to the latest international good practice. The guides consist of three elements: i) introduction of an issue; ii) synthesis of methodological and strategic approaches for programming; and iii) a checklist for programme and project development. This last part forms the bulk of the guide, covering the main issues that need to be taken into consideration and presenting a range of FAQs (questions typically posed by programme officers, project and programme managers and others tasked with project development of implementation in the area), and sets out concise and practical responses. The final section sets out references, useful reading materials, web resources and UNDP project and programme contacts for further information.

Sources and further reading

- NHS Toolkit: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/harvesting_toolkit.asp.
- UNDP’s WaterWiki: <http://europeandcis.undp.org/Waterwiki>.

28. Staff Profile Pages

Introduction

Organisational **Staff Profile Pages** systems are electronic directories which store information about staff in a given organisation. In addition to providing information such as names, job titles, groups and contact details, staff pages include details about knowledge, skills, experience and interests, and even hobbies. As these systems are electronic, they are especially valuable in organisations that have geographical or other barriers to personal connections. For this reason, they are often used as the cornerstone point of systematic knowledge and learning initiatives in development and humanitarian organisations. At their most useful, staff pages have the potential systematically to facilitate connections that might otherwise happen only randomly, leading to valuable new collaboration opportunities. On a day-to-day level, effective staff pages enable and improve the brief, fluid connections across an organisation that are at the heart of the learning organisation.

Detailed description of the process

- **Identify user perspectives:** Find out how the different teams and individuals might use the system, for what reasons, and when. A particular need is to consider the multiple uses to which the system may be put, as well as potential differences between intended and actual uses.
- **Determine the appropriate level of participation and control:** It is essential to establish from the outset whether inclusion on the system should be compulsory or voluntary, and whether to create and manage entries centrally or allow individuals to create and update their own. Most successful pages are based on the voluntary and decentralised approach, allowing staff to personalise their entries. Some systems aim for a halfway house between centralised and decentralised approaches, by providing a core set of data, which expands on the basic concept of the staff directory, but leaving users free to add details as they see fit.
- **Create a template and taxonomy for the information:** When creating a template for the system (see Figure 16 below), it is important to consider ease of data entry, data amendment and data retrieval. A common language or taxonomy describes information in essential fields, such as those relating to expert knowledge, experience, countries, areas of work and interests (see Tool 30). Fixed terms and options for these fields may be appropriate, so that users can select from a menu or a selection of tick-boxes.
- **Broadening the scope:** Staff pages should be easily linked to other components of the KM system, for example, collaborative working tools, trip report systems, project databases or email systems, to allow easy access to electronic information of the organisation. They might also be expanded to include details of communities, teams, external suppliers, partners, and so on.
- **Develop guidelines and provide training:** Data protection laws mean that staff pages must comply with relevant requirements. As such, a clear HR policy on the correct use of the system is crucial. These policies and guidelines should be provided to current staff and new joiners in the form of manuals and training courses, so that current and new staff are able to understand the system and are encouraged add their entry. Leavers should also be reminded to update their entry accordingly, subject to their own preferences for contact after moving on.
- **Launch the tool and gain 'buy-in':** There is a need for internal marketing of any staff pages system, to encourage participation and use. Useful initial mechanisms include launches at staff meetings, putting up posters and nominating champions to promote the system in different areas of the organisation. Another useful tool is to ensure senior management are all involved with the pilot rollout, thus leading the rest of the organisation by example. As with all knowledge and learning tools, the benefits must be made apparent at every stage.
- **Monitoring ongoing use and promotion of the tool:** There is the need and the potential to track the ongoing use of electronic pages, and the reporting requirements for this should be considered as early as possible. Effective measuring can help promote the tool across the organisation, and

help strengthen internal networks. Gathering and sharing the best success stories of using the system can help build participation on an ongoing basis.

- **Maintenance:** Owing to the continual changes in staff composition and location, and additions to personal knowledge and skills, updating the system regularly is particularly important in development and humanitarian organisations. Links to other systems (e.g. HR systems and project information systems) should allow data such as job details, contact information and current work to be updated automatically. Where individuals create their own entries, it may be necessary to send regular reminder emails about updating the system, with a reporting mechanism to highlight those who are lagging behind.

Figure 16: Staff pages template

Name
Job title
Department or team
Photograph
Contact information
A brief job description
Current and previous projects
Trip reports
Areas of current knowledge and expertise (selected from a pre-defined list of subjects / terms; people may also rank their knowledge, e.g. from 'extensive' to 'basic')
Areas of interest
Countries of interest
Key contacts – both internal and external, e.g. key donors, valuable partners, etc.
Membership of internal and external communities of practice or other networks
Relevant professional qualifications
Personal profile: hobbies and interests, holidays, etc.
An uploaded CV (multiple versions possible)

Example: Aid people directory

The aid world is characterised by high turnover and rapid redeployment. www.aidpeople.org is a website set up to serve as an inter-organisational staff pages, the main focus of which is to find former colleagues and others facing similar issues or with similar interests. The focus of the site is explicitly on signposting people rather than information. The site also has supporting tools such as blogs and discussion fora to enable users to benefit from the experience of others. At the time of writing, the site was being launched, with the ambition of developing a member base of 25,000 in the first year. If even half this number is reached, it could prove a significant resource for the humanitarian sector.

Sources and further reading

- Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone.
- NHS Toolkit: www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/white_pages_toolkit.asp.

29. Blogs

Introduction

A **Weblog** (also known as a web log or a 'blog') is a web application on which dated entries are posted on a webpage on a particular topic. Weblogs can vary in form from sites maintained by one individual to multiple contributor weblogs where information is posted by approved contributors after editor approval: many weblogs allow the creation of a community of interest based on the particular topic of the blog. A 'blogstorm' or 'blog swarm' happens when there is an explosion of interest, or posting of opinions and information around a particular subject. Weblogs were originally set up by web professionals; today, most webloggers (or 'bloggers') do not need a technical background and sites can be relatively easily set up and maintained.

Detailed description of the process

Before setting up a weblog, consider what form is appropriate for your needs: according to Wikipedia there are 16 types of weblog, including the following:

- Personal weblog: online diary or journal posts written by friends connected.
- Thoughtful weblog: an individual's (or small group's) thoughts on a topic.
- Topical blog: concentrate on a particular specialised topic.
- News blog: a news compendium on a particular subject.
- Collaborative/collective/group blog: involves multiple contributors on a particular topic, although can be a selected group or open to anyone.
- Political blog: includes the watch blog in which an author(s) critiques what he/she/they see as consistent errors or bias in an online newspaper or news site.
- Legal blog: often referred to as blawgs, these sites discuss law and legal affairs.
- Directory blog: often collect numerous websites with interesting content on a topic.
- Corporate blog: employees post official or semi-official blogs about their work.
- Advice blog: sites that provide expert technical advice.
- Format blogs: sites with a specialist form of presentation, such as images or videos, or on a particular theme. Examples include audio, photography and video ('vlog') weblogs.

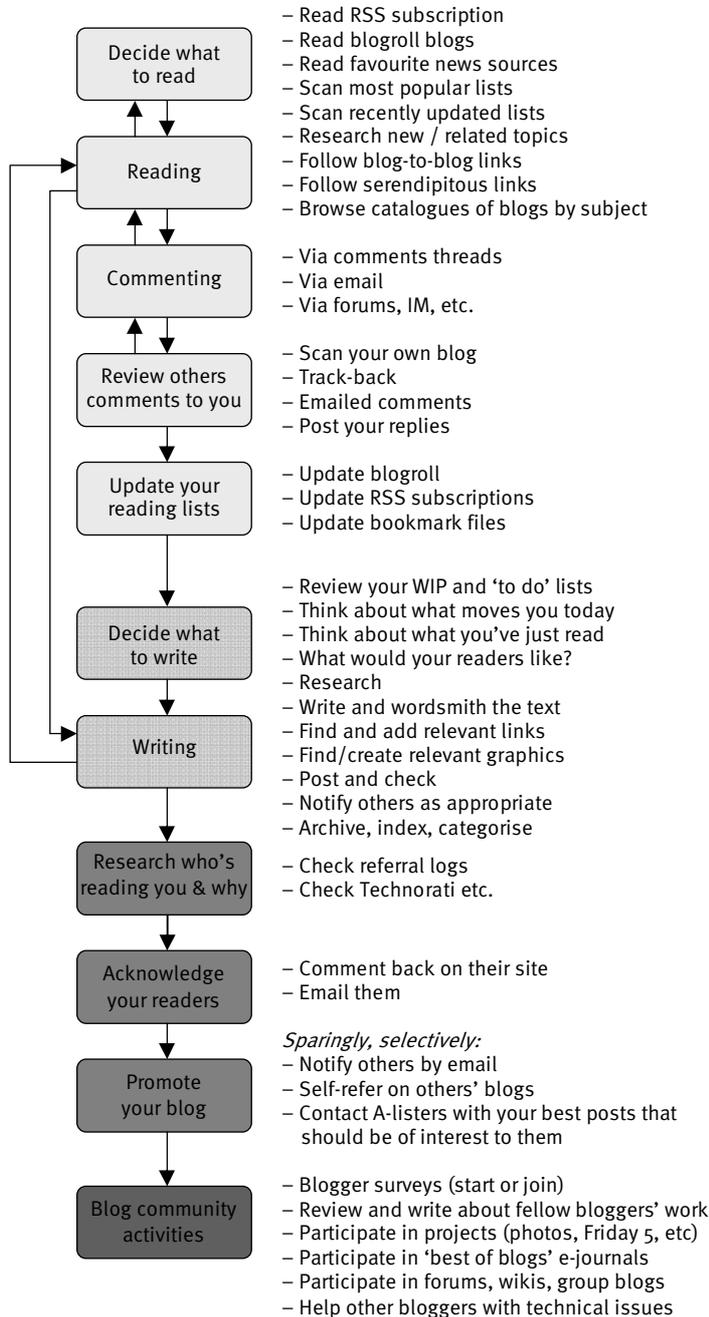
Browse through the range of software packages to select the most appropriate for you: a range of packages have sprung up including GreatestJournal, Pitas, Blogger, LiveJournal and Xanga (Wikipedia) and web hosting companies and online publications also provide blog creation tools such as Salon, Tripod and Bravenet. These provide varying levels of support and functionality, so select the package that best suits your skills and requirements. For more advanced bloggers, there are a range of server-side software tools to publish on their own website or a third-party site, or to host a group of blogs (see Wikipedia for further details) such as Nucleus CMS, Movable Type and WordPress. Weblogs can also be programmed using PHP, CGI or other server-side software, which allow more freedom of creativity but can be more complicated to set up and maintain.

A list of questions to ask yourself when evaluating weblog software includes (Blood, 2002):

- Can you easily identify how to create and delete an entry?
- Can you easily change the way the site looks?
- How do you add the name of your weblog to the page?
- Does this service offer clear instructions?
- Is it easy to find help when you need it?

- Do you need to read the instructions before you can actually use the service, or are many of the available functions easily understandable just by looking?
- Are there user forums where you can ask questions?

Figure 17: The blogging process



The format of your weblog should match the purpose for which it is intended: formats vary from simple bullet lists of hyperlinks to article summaries with user-provided comments and ratings. Features common to many blogs include ‘blogrolls’ (list of other blogs that are linked separately from any article) and feedback comment systems or ‘threads’ (a comment system which allows users to post their own comments). Not all blogs have comment systems, and some have a closed commenting system which requires approval from the blog owners.

It is important to ensure that links are not lost from weblogs, and many sites archive older entries and generate a ‘permalink’ for individual entries, a type of a type of Uniform Resource Locator (URL)

designed to refer to a specific information item and to remain unchanged permanently, or at least for a lengthy period of time (Wikipedia). Permalinks became ‘the first – and most successful – attempt to build bridges between weblogs’. You can also use a ‘track-back’ facility so that blogs refer to each other.

Example: Blogging in international development

According to the authors of the first World Bank foray into blogging, blogs have a role to play in the international aid system.

‘Blogging improves the quality of debate. For instance, an article in the Washington Post, “The Rise of a Market Mentality Means Many Go Hungry in Niger” in August 2005 drew furious responses from bloggers. That’s nothing new, of course: people have always read newspaper articles and grumbled to their spouses over the breakfast table. The difference is that now commentators can find each other, track the debate, air their differences and discover more about the facts behind the story. Blogging technology makes it easy to collect comments and see who is citing your ideas. Readers are able to chase the debate across the internet at the click of the mouse, and contribute to it themselves – no matter if they are a CEO in New York or a student in a Nairobi internet café. Meanwhile, new research and opinion-forming analysis is quickly disseminated and discussed – and the number of new blogs is doubling every five months or so. This changes the terms of the development debate, too. If you typed “World Bank Blog” into Google in the summer of 2005, you’d have found that the most popular result was “WorldBankPresident.org”, a free-standing site dedicated to discussing the successor for then-President James Wolfensohn and criticising the Bank’s selection methods. This apparently independent site was regularly checked by many Bank staff as well as journalists seeking a convenient way to read all the gossip. Next blog down was Friends of the Earth’s “World Bank blog”, documenting their protests and the reasons behind them at the World Bank’s spring meetings.

A backroom effort, followed by a campaigning site: the World Bank itself was nowhere to be found. The World Bank, and other development organisations such as UNDP and DFID, will have to work with this new technology, as many large corporations are trying to do. But the playing field is much more level than it was even a year ago. Being a big organisation counts for very little in the booming world of blogs – what counts is quick, relevant content. And if the playing field is being levelled within the developed world, just wait until the developing world starts to play the game. It’s already happening: during this summer’s Live8 campaign, some African bloggers started to complain that the concerts were irrelevant, patronising, or worse. Even just a couple of years ago, such dissenting voices from Africa would never have been heard. Huge sites, such as Harvard’s Global Voices Online, are gathering together the output of “bridge bloggers” who read local blogs and comment in English. Some countries, such as Iran, have vast blogging communities; others are tiny but growing very fast.

It has never been easier for journalists to pick up voices from the developing world – or even for you and us to do so from our desks. People all over the world are talking, but only now can we hear what they’re saying.’

This example is drawn from www.id21.org/viewpoints/blogsOct05.html.

Sources and further reading

- Blood, R. (2002) *The Weblog Handbook: Practical Advice on Creating and Maintaining your Blog*, Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, see: www.rebeccablood.net.
- Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.
- Perrone, J. (2004) ‘What is a Weblog?’, posted on www.guardian.co.uk/weblogarticle/0,6799,394059,00.html and accessed on 12 May 2005.
- Wikipedia Encyclopedia, a free online encyclopedia, provides information on weblogs at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weblog>.

30. Shared Network Drives

Introduction

In most organisations' computer networks, there are a series of **Drives** used for the storage of information. These are often divided up into the following categories:

- A corporate-wide shared drive, containing documents relevant to the whole organisation;
- A branch, or group shared drive, containing documents relevant to a single organisational unit;
- A personal drive (for example, a P: or U: drive), containing documents relevant only to individuals.

It is necessary to identify clear and acceptable use policies for all three categories of drive. Good practices in managing electronic documents should be initiated in both the user workspace and the corporate space and, like so much in this area of work, begins and ends with the individual.

Detailed description of the process

Implement 'publish and point' across the organisation: This is a method of controlling the duplication of a document being circulated. Instead of attaching the document to an email message, which gives each recipient an individual copy, a read-only version of the document is placed on a shared drive – 'published' – and a 'pointer' or shortcut is emailed to alert intended recipients. Recipients can then retrieve the document from the shared drive as required. This will help to encourage a culture of sharing documents and lead to users thinking more carefully about the most appropriate method for publishing information to recipients and to treat these consistently as formal corporate documents. It will also reduce the amount of multiple working copies in the folders of many individuals.

Establish a general filing structure: Where there is a significant number of electronic documents stored on a shared network drive, a basic general filing structure should be established. Where there are group or project-based filing structures, these should aim to conform to the principles of the general filing structure to prevent divergent practices and application. The general filing structure on network drives should:

- Use simple but logical structures which meet the needs of both the organisation and the users;
- Not use individual names or position titles for directory or folder names;
- Use names which identify logical elements, such as business functions and activities or theme: sub-theme relationships.

The need for good filing structures in a shared network drive is primary, but end users should also be encouraged to use consistent filing structures in their own group and personal workspaces. This will help with the coordination between working papers and formal finalised documents, and will ease retrieval and access across all workspaces for the individual.

Use of a common terminology is essential to integration: Planning the use of shared drives should be done in conjunction with thinking about naming conventions.

- Work towards consistent use of common terminology across all groups and units of the whole organisation;
- Develop formal liaison mechanisms between those responsible for records at the local level to establish and enforce these conventions;
- Where feasible, make terminology in the shared network folder structure consistent with terminology in the paper filing system.

Build links to the paper filing system: The organisation of a shared network drive can usually be made to reflect the paper filing structure so that electronic documents are stored in a manner

compatible with their paper counterparts. This may be achievable by building a hierarchical 'folder within folder' structure using Windows, to simulate the structure of a paper file plan. Some considerations are:

- Electronic structures tend to be broader and flatter – have less depth – than their paper counterparts; it is important to control the number of levels to retain usability: in general, no more than about four or five levels to a hierarchy;
- Alphabetical folder titles are generally more usable in the electronic environment than are numerical file or classification reference numbers;
- Paper filing systems tend to use longer names than are comfortable in a Windows environment, resulting in poor file directory displays.

Control over folder creation: Where the folder structure on shared drives is formalised, there is a need for clearly articulated rights and responsibilities for folder creation, potentially allocated to specific roles.

- The extent to which individuals/workgroups are able to create electronic folders themselves;
- Mechanisms for guiding and controlling the use of terminology.

Balancing drive usage: Extending disciplined management to shared network drives will eventually involve decisions on appropriate technological support platforms and network bandwidth, and coherent policies and procedures will need to be developed. Consideration should be given to:

- The risk of lost documents in a shared network environment, where more reliability is expected;
- The need to provide back-up storage;
- The implications of shared storage for network traffic and bandwidth requirements;
- Clear identification of material that should be entrusted to a shared drive and material that should be entrusted to the non-shared environment.

Disposing of documents: In all cases, 'good housekeeping' of both shared and personal drives is essential to maintaining long-term viability, removing material which should no longer be kept, whether classed as document or record. Guidance is needed for removing:

- Unnecessary duplicates of final documents;
- Working copies which are no longer required;
- Documents which have no continuing value.

Users of local drives and personal areas of a network drive should also be encouraged to perform basic housekeeping. Regular use of the Windows Explorer 'find' facility for documents created and modified in a given period of time, will help ensure that locally held files are deleted or copied to the relevant shared drive as appropriate. Local drives should not be used for long-term storage of corporate level documents.

Example: Tearfund shared drives

During 2001, Tearfund established a shared drive on its server with the explicit purpose of supporting learning. The shared drive is organised with a folder for each of Tearfund's 15 departments, in which there are five sub-folders: 'About', 'Policy', 'Strategy', 'Learning' and 'Archive'. All activities, projects and correspondence are organised within the sub-folders and each department has an assigned activity administrator responsible for ensuring the folders are correctly and consistently used across departments. The 'Learning' sub-folder allows the results of all learning (from 'peer assists', 'learning affairs' or 'learning reviews') to be located and retrieved at head office. The introduction of an intranet was planned in order to make the shared drive structure more widely accessible (see: www.odi.org.uk/alnap/AR2002/chapter3a.htm#current).

Sources and further reading

- Managing Electronic Documents on a Local Area Network (LAN), available on www.acarm.org/documents/issue33/Smith.pdf.
- Managing Electronic Documents, see: http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/downloadFile?contentID=HMCE_CL_001555.

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The Overseas Development Institute's Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) programme undertakes research, advisory and public affairs work on the interface between research and policy to promote more evidence-based development policy and practice. Knowledge and learning is at the heart of the RAPID approach. This toolkit is aimed at those working on development and humanitarian efforts, from researchers to practitioners, from administrators to policymakers. There are 30 tools and techniques, divided into five categories: Strategy Development, Management Techniques, Collaboration Mechanisms, Knowledge Sharing and Learning Processes, and Knowledge Capture and Storage.