

Action learning on assessing organisational capacities

PSO THEMATIC LEARNING PROGRAMME ON OA

Action learning on assessing organisational capacities

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Participating organisations



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Acknowledgements

"Thus it is that action learning does not pretend to supply the subject with much fresh cognitive knowledge; it is sufficient to help him use more effectively what he already has, and to reinterpret the experiences of yesterday in the light of tomorrow."

Reg Revans

Inspired by the above, the experiences of this thematic learning program on assessing organisational capacity confirm that the quality of action learning largely depends on the contributions by a wide variety of participants. It is their rich experiences and their willingness to share and be vulnerable that has made this joint program into a success. And since each participant took part as a representative of an organization, we must also applaud the leadership of these organizations that has shown the courage to create more space for learning in these accountability-oriented times: TEA Alliance (MCNV and WorldGranny), War Trauma Foundation, Light for the World, Woord & Daad and Red een Kind, Bravo!

In this respect our gratitude also goes to the representatives of partner-NGO and partner-CSO that added the invaluable "Southern and Eastern" perspective. Their contribution deepened the joint learning process and made the lessons more meaningful and relevant to all.

Special thanks go to Jos Brand and Marguerithe de Man (SIOO) who have tirelessly inspired, coached and facilitated the process, and to skillfully accompany the "reversed OA".

Jenny Pearson guided many of the joint reflections and her "fly on the wall" exercises will stick in the minds of the participants in the years to come.

Last but not least, Mayke Harding and Petra Staal must be commended for their personal commitment as coordinators. They managed to create the indispensable enabling environment from within an troubled organization that will soon cease to exist.

Many fruits from this program have already been picked, and I am convinced that this overall publication of the findings will allow many more to be picked by a wider audience of internationally active civil society organizations.

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Introduction

Why do we do organisational assessments the way we do them? What do we mean by organisational assessment and who benefits anyway? How can we establish a common language between us and a set of shared values to guide us? How does organisational assessment contribute to meaningful change? What is this 5C framework and how best can we use it? Which model or tools are worth using, and how do they contribute to the process?

Motivated by nagging questions such as these, six Dutch Development NGOs¹ and our Southern partner organisations embarked on an action learning journey to reflect on our organisational assessment (OA) practices together. Facilitated by PSO, this initiative, known as the Thematic Learning Programme on Organisational Assessments (TLP OA), ran from May 2012 till November 2012.

We began by formulating a central learning question and agreeing on the methodology we would use to explore it in our respective organisations and partnerships. We also designed a series of workshops we called Joint Learning Moments (JLM), in which we would share, analyse and record our learnings together. This paper is a product of our endeavours. In it, we share our journey and our findings with you, linking theory with what we learned in practice.

The document consists of three parts:

PART ONE: Overview of the TLP OA

In this section we introduce the TLP OA, briefly describing its context and rationale. We provide an overview of the programme, and of the six participating Dutch organisations. The section concludes with an attempt to make more explicit the beliefs and assumptions that guide our behaviour when engaging with partners in OA and OD.

PART TWO: Underlying questions

Part two of the document shares our reflections and learning on each of the six core questions which framed the TLP, with a strong focus on values and practice.

PART THREE: Learning practice sheets

Part three of the document consists of 16 separate practice sheets based on our experiences during the TLP OA. Each practice sheet elaborates on an OA practice question and details the answers we came to during the TLP. Each practice sheet ends with practical tips and is offered as food for thought to our peers engaged in OA.

By jointly formulating this inquiry document, we strengthened our mutual understanding of the methodological choices we make and the terminology we use during OA and organisational development (OD) processes. It provided us with insights into who we are, and who we want to be as development practitioners in our relationships with partners. We trust that in reading this document, you will be similarly challenged and that our findings will help you to reach satisfying answers to your own OA questions.

¹ War Trauma Foundation, Woord&Daad, Light for the World, Medical Committee Netherlands Vietnam & WorldGranny/Transition in East Asian ALLIANCE, Red een Kind (Help a Child)

PART ONE

Overview of the TLP OA

Why focus our learning on OA processes?

OA is at the heart of capacity development

Organisational Assessment (OA) is at the heart of our capacity development practices with Southern partner organisations and we regard it as an important precondition for organisational development (OD). A range of different OA methods and tools are available, each promoting a particular paradigm and approach, different starting points, and follow-up processes. OAs inevitably produce a wide range of results and outcomes, often quite different to those anticipated or desired by the organisation being assessed and/or by those doing the assessment. These differences relate to key aspects of the OA such as the:

- purpose;
- state, phase and quality of the relationship between the commissioning organisation and the organisation under assessment;
- level of voluntary participation;
- the competency and attitudes of the involved individuals;
- chosen type of assessment (self facilitated, externally facilitated by local facilitator, or externally facilitated by an international facilitator, possibly appointed by the donor);
- the type of tool to be selected, used and/or adapted;
- leadership of the organisation under assessment;
- level of transparency;
- timing.

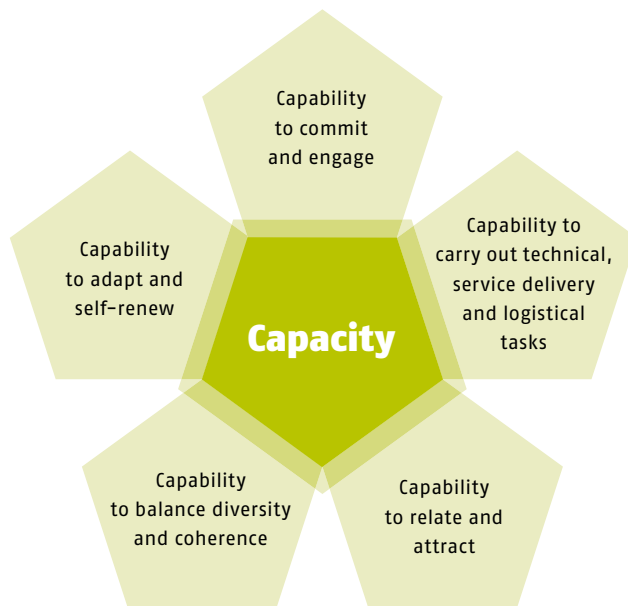
These key aspects are essential. They influence the success of both the assessment as well as the follow-up, capacity development process between the Southern partner organisation and the Northern support organisation.

Contextual changes & the 5 Core Capabilities Framework (5C)

Given the changes in the Dutch development cooperation context since 2011, OA must now be seen in the light of a 'new' model: the 5 Core Capabilities framework (5C framework)². The Dutch Government's support to development NGOs Operational Framework (MFS II) required NGOs to develop detailed monitoring protocols and a learning agenda, by the 1st of March 2011. These monitoring protocols had to focus on four specific result areas, of which one was the organisational capacity of their Southern partner organisations. For this result area, the Dutch Ministry requires Dutch NGOs to use the 5C framework, to monitor capacity development and institutional change³. In practice, this meant that many Dutch development NGOs began looking for ways to use existing data (and/or to generate new data) from partners to meet 5C framework requirements. The 5C framework therefore became an important area for learning and sharing in the context of this thematic learning programme.

² developed by European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM) 2009

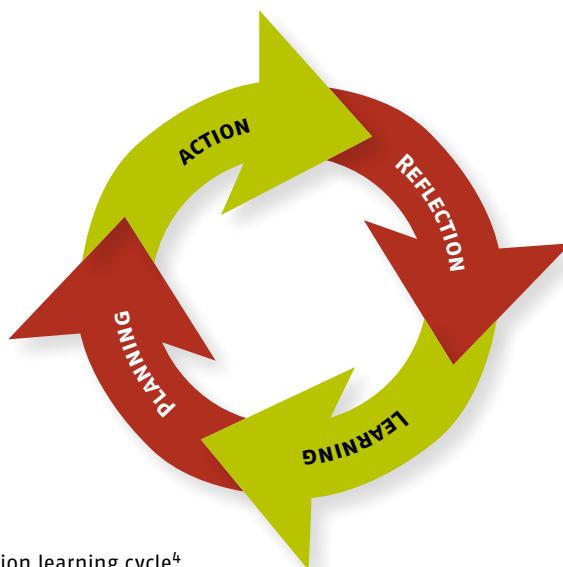
³ see annex 5 of the "MFS II subsidiebeschikking"



Our Thematic Learning Programme (TLP OA)

An action learning approach – learning from experience

Six Dutch NGOs and our Southern partner organisations took part in the TLP OA. We agreed on an action learning approach, central to which is the idea of learning from experience. Action learning is an iterative cycle of experience, reflection, making sense and application. In other words, an experience is reflected on, analysed and turned into new learning, which in turn becomes guidelines for action and new experience. Each of the participating organisations thus undertook to conduct and/or participate in an OA, as an action learning journey, bringing new attentiveness to its preparation, implementation and follow-up phases.



A typical action learning cycle⁴

⁴ www.cdra.org.za

Four levels of learning

We envisaged learning happening on three different platforms during the TLP: individual, group and open:

- Individual and intra-organisational reflection through implementation of OA, the development of an operational learning plan, as well as documentation of case studies and lessons learned.
- Group reflection at inter-organisational level through exchange of case experiences and peer exchange. These were referred to as Joint Learning Moments (JLM) and were attended by the six participating Dutch organisations.
- Learning events open to all PSO members and other Dutch development organisations, referred to as Open Events. These inter-organisational events focused on the development of organisational assessment (OA) guidelines and organisational development/institutional development (OD/ID) linkages in the development sector.

A fourth platform of learning was decided on during a JLM, and became the highlight of the TLP OA: A week long joint partner meeting was held, attended by the six participating Dutch organisations and those of our Southern partner organisations involved in the TLP OA.

Three external consultants were involved with the implementation of these platforms. Their tasks were to help organise and execute the main learning events, ensure that the process stayed on track, help create conducive learning environments, including feedback loops between events, document the learning from JLMs and provide coaching, inspiration and support to each participating Dutch organisation.

Central learning question

To help define our key concerns and interests, and to establish common ground within the group, we formulated a central learning question.

How can organisational assessment processes and instruments be developed and used in such a way that they facilitate on-going and endogenous organisational and institutional development (of both Northern and Southern organisations), and makes the processes transparent?

Core guiding questions

The central learning question provided a broad articulation of our focus, purpose and orientation. However we needed to identify the question's key components and turn each of these into sub questions that we could use more practically to guide our learning processes. Our core questions were:

- 1 What do we mean by OA and why do we support OA in our Southern partner organisations?
- 2 How do OA tools contribute to the assessment process?
- 3 What do we believe is important in terms of *facilitating* an OA process, so that it becomes meaningful and contributes to change?
- 4 What context supports the local ownership of OD and ID processes within an organisation?
- 5 What conditions seem vital for on-going learning along with and amidst ourselves, as partners across borders?
- 6 What do we pursue in terms of transparency and accountability (upward and downward) in OA processes?

Answers to these questions are discussed in part two of this document.

Time line: a brief overview of the TLP

October 2010: Identifying the possibility of a TLP on OA

Several PSO members approached PSO expressing the need for and an interest in a thematic learning programme focussed specifically on OA. Exploratory pre-meetings were held with interested participating Dutch organisations and an initial group was formed. Three external consultants were appointed, who, together with PSO staff, formed a core team to finalise design and manage the programme.

March 2011: Design

Working together in a one-day design workshop, we formulated the central and core learning questions, allocating each question to the appropriate phase of an OA process (selecting the OA tool, implementing the OA tool, and working towards OD) and developed the general TLP process. The consultants were tasked with turning our ideas into a well structured process including feedback loops between group members. Their design was finalised and captured in a joint proposal.

April 2011: 5C framework – 1st Open Event

This event was open, not only to the TLP OA group, but to all PSO member organisations and other Dutch development organisations. The event comprised three parts: presentation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs findings from their Capacity Development Evaluation based on 5C framework, an introductory experience of OA without tools, and space for participants to share current questions and own perspectives on OA.

We wanted to highlight the point that OA is a continuous process and that doing an OA is merely an intervention into this continuous process. We practised analysing organisations without using a tool, just by looking and listening to what was said and what was not said.

Several organisations shared their reflections of their own OA processes and expressed interest in the TLP. Their needs and interests were still strongly focused on tools. The primary debate was: 'Do you integrate the organisational capacity assessment (OCA) in the 5C framework, or the other way around?' 'Can you continue with the OCA and reorganise your data into a 5C framework template after the OCA?'

April-May 2011: Design of individual organisational learning plans (OLPs)

Participating Dutch organisations developed their own learning plans to be followed during the TLP, based on the joint proposal. The consultants visited all the organisations to help them develop their OLPs and prepare for the first OA activities.

Sept 2011: 1st Joint Learning Moment (JLM) – preparation phase: selecting the OA tool

Prior to the JLM, each participating Dutch organisation had to write a learning report on the process thus far. During the two day learning event, we shared any insights we had reached. A common question was: 'How can we involve our partners in an appropriate way? We chose to participate in this TLP OA, and now we are about to inflict it on them!' And so we talked about power. We also shared the various OA preparation practices. It was here the first paradigm shifts became visible, from tool to process. As we became more and more familiar with the 5C framework, we began seeing opportunities for adapting the model in different ways.

Sept 2011: Inspiration session on OAs – rules of engagement – 2nd Open Event

A development practitioner who had worked in the South for many years, shared some of her experiences of working in Cambodia at our second Open Event. In particular, she spoke about the preconditions for ensuring effective OA, highlighting the importance of zooming in on partner interests and agendas. 'It is important to ask, what's in it for them?' she said.

Sept 2011 – Feb 2012: Individual organisational reflection sessions

A reflection session was held with each participating Dutch organisation between September and the next JLM held in February. Given the hurly burly of everyday work, it was useful to spend a couple of hours reflecting on the on-going process and activities, on the values and assumptions underpinning our thinking and actions.

During this same period, we worked on formalising our OLPs and began writing the initial version of the inquiry document, which was later developed into part 2 of this document.

Oct–Dec 2011: Development of Operational Learning Plans by individual organisations

By December, we had formalised specific OA action points to be implemented in the South by participating Dutch organisations and Southern partner organisations. With the OLPs completed, everyone was busy in the field and action learning was in full swing.

Feb 2012: 2nd JLM – Implementing the OAs in practice; preliminary learnings

By the second joint learning moment, we were much happier with the 5C framework, our resistance to the model now behind us. We had all made an important switch in our thinking about the tools and the value of scoring. The 5C framework had become a useful method for dialogue, a framework to guide conversations and in-depth discussions about future ambitions.

Well prepared workshops, conducted with partners as part of the OA, had led to greater openness between us. And this openness led to greater insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the organisations. We all learned, however, that scoring in the OCA or OAs, was not helpful. Typically these sessions involved the organisations under assessment, pleading for the highest possible score.

The most important topics in this JLM were influence, participation, ownership, and accountability. These were frequently mentioned in peer learning sessions. We also discussed issues we had learned from facilitating sessions in our OAs, and shared questions such as: who facilitates and what impact does this have? How can you facilitate in a way that it is congruent with your ambitions? In a role play session, we experienced the difference between local and international facilitation, then asked; what is the better method, is there a better method?

Recognising that there were no Southern partner organisations present at this meeting, we decided to organise a joint learning event for Southern and Northern partners (called a joint partner meeting) and developed the design criteria for that meeting.

Feb 2012: 3rd Open event jointly arranged by PSO and Partos on use of 5C framework as baseline instrument of MFS II

The input for this session was a research report based on research among all 20 MFS II alliances produced by PSO and Partos. Diverse experiences of the 5C framework and design issues were shared, and do's and don'ts were identified. It was clear from the discussions that many organisations were experimenting with the 5C framework in a variety of

circumstances. There was still some resistance to the 5C framework in this big group, all of whom were PSO members, but also increasing openness as the possibilities and opportunities within the 5C framework became visible.

May and June 2012: Reversed OAs by Southern partner organisations

Two participating Dutch organisations, W&D and LftW, invited Southern partner organisations to perform 'reversed' OAs on them. The idea of the reversed OA was an extra element in the TLP OA. The term 'reversed' became a curious one; why reversed? When participating Dutch organisations assess Southern partner organisations, it is simply referred to as an OA. But when it is the other way around, we call it reversed, why?

Asking Southern organisations to assess their Northern partner organisations was a learning process in itself. How do you do this? Do you set terms of reference (ToR) with clear instructions on methodology and tools? Do you select the involved stakeholders yourself? Or do you just say: 'We want an OA done, what is your proposal?'

June 2012: 3rd Joint partner meeting and a public presentation of OA findings from a Southern 5C perspective

This week-long joint partner meeting, attended by more than 40 people from 15 countries, was the highlight of the TLP OA process. A great diversity of partners attended the meeting, from very large or very experienced Southern partner organisations to much smaller or less experienced ones. The week was designed around the TLP OA's six core learning questions. We shared learnings from our OA experiences in the field during a series of connected sessions, moving from small groups to the large group, and learned further new things in the North/South connection. The Southern voice was strong and face to face engagement was really effective in ensuring it was heard.

The general conclusion was that Southern partner organisations were quite happy with the 5C framework as an OA instrument, especially when it was used in an open, reflective and appreciative way. We were, however also aware of several other factors influencing the end results, key amongst which is the type of relationship between the participating Dutch organisation and partner organisation.



Picture taken during the TLP OA International partner conference June 2012

During the week long partner meeting, we used a variety of methods that were both effective for the tasks at hand, but also easy to learn and to adapt. In this way, the meeting offered further opportunity for participants to build their repertoire of development tools and interventions. One example was the World Café, always a big hit, yet still unfamiliar to many.

Oct 2012: 4th JLM workshop – Writeshop to document overall lessons learned and follow up from TLP

In this final JLM workshop, lessons learned by participating Dutch organisations were captured on practice sheets for sharing with other OA practitioners. These sheets form the third part of this document.

The learning processes were different for each participating organisation. We were given the space to design our own organisational learning plans (OLPs) and to generate insights into the application of OAs within our own setting. Further, given the great number of participating partner organisations from the South, there was much diversity in approaches and lessons learned.

Addressing common values and learning in OA practices

What do we understand about our values?

In this document we intended to make some implicit aspects of our work explicit. In particular, the values underlying our thinking and actions, which are mostly not spoken of, or simply taken for granted. We realise that this is quite a large area to cover and wish to make it as practical as possible. We dedicate this short section to promoting understanding on some of the key notions of values in our work, and offer practical examples to illustrate the most important points.

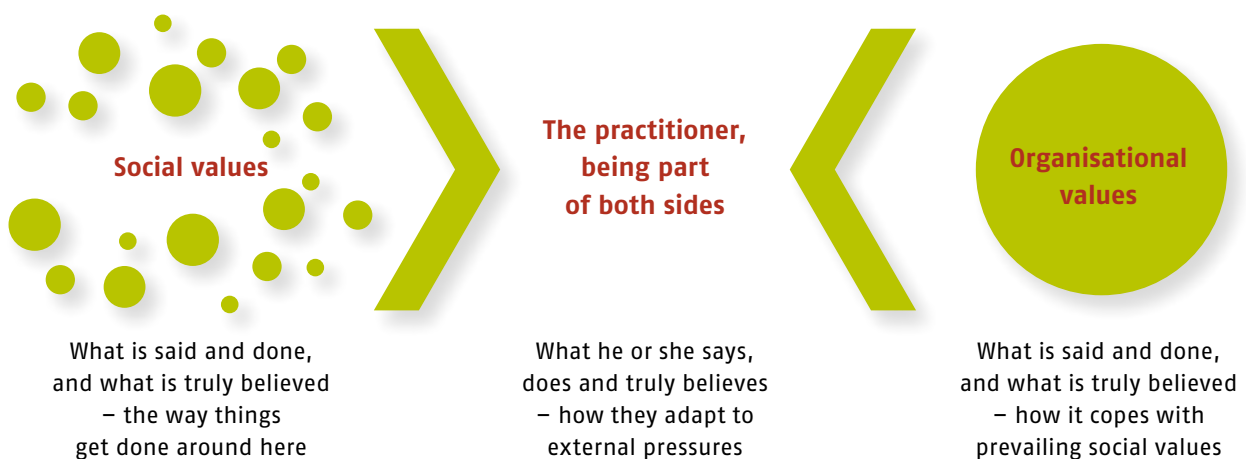
An individual's values are formed from a mixture of sources including religion, social norms, formative experiences and so on. Being aware of our values is important because they influence how we conduct our lives, they are the *'the deeply held beliefs that guide our decisions and actions'*.

As one of the participants of the TLP mentioned: "I believe that each and every person has a responsibility to work for the common good, in line with the place, position and role where people are. For me, this means that I always have a responsibility to work for the world to be a better place. This value leads me to expect from others that they take their responsibility and this sometimes leads to too high expectations of others..."

Values are usually so deeply ingrained in the way we view the world, that they are subconscious, both within individuals, and within organisational cultures. We are not aware of how they influence the way we act and make decisions on a daily basis. Thus there is often a difference between **stated** values, and **practised** values, i.e. the difference between what we say and what we actually do, and even deeper down, what we really believe about something – our **'real'** values.

EXAMPLE – many organisations say they value learning but punish mistakes rather than using them as opportunities for reflection and learning. The real value/belief underpinning many organisational cultures is that efficient delivery and demonstration of “hard” results are the most important consideration.

Anyone working in a culture other than their own will encounter different values within organisations and societies in general. An awareness of differences in values is particularly key in processes of organisational assessments. Practitioners might feel squeezed between powerful forces, creating the need to balance or reconcile their own beliefs with those of their own organisation, as well as their partner organisations’ beliefs and cultural values. Yet, both organisations are operating from totally different societies, both of which are changing all the time, so the influences on the organisations will also be changing. Making sense of how the different cultures are interacting at any given time is a challenge.



EXAMPLE – You, your organisation and your partner organisation strongly value total transparency and believe that corruption should not be tolerated; this is also a stated value in your institutional relationship. Yet in the world outside work, you find there is no choice but to play along in order to be able to get things done, e.g. to get utilities connected at your house. You realise that, in order to reach your development goals as organisations in a certain society, you might need to come to a new understanding of how to deal with corruption even though it creates tension between own beliefs, existing social values and the stated organisational values.

We identified **power, accountability, participation and ownership** as key issues in OA processes and realised that these are also value-laden issues. There are differences between Northern (mostly donor) and Southern (mostly recipient) organisations in what we say, believe and value in the OA process, and in the emerging realities to which we are inclined and/or expected to act. We therefore recognise that the essential starting point, for anyone discussing the idea of doing OAs in the context of such an institutional relationship, is to be aware of the values he or she carries into the process.

One of the learning reports from Red een Kind (ReK) stated: "We learned that **partnership** is a key word to work on in our process on OA. However, many partner organisations would see ReK (mainly) as a donor and this could hamper an open learning process for both ReK and the partners. We know and believe that partnership is important for ReK, but so far, ReK has not elaborated a policy or defined activities to ensure good partnership".

What do we mean when we talk about learning?

Our understanding of learning is strongly grounded in social norms and beliefs about the transmission of knowledge and wisdom from one generation or group to another. There are many different beliefs and opinions about learning, including different ideas on source, process, purpose and value of learning. Some approaches to learning create rigid thinking patterns that reject new ideas or do not acknowledge that 'experience' is a valuable source of learning. Even within cultures, individuals all have different types of 'literacy', which means that they learn best in different ways – some by doing, some by reading, some by watching, and so on. It is not, therefore, safe for anyone to assume that what they believe about learning is the same for others.



Throughout this learning journey with partners from other cultures, we became more and more convinced of the necessity of examining and understanding the learnings from a variety of contexts, when undertaking exercises such as OAs with partners. Without such understanding, it is possible that unrealistic expectations and confusions will arise during the OA learning process.

Questions we suggest we ask ourselves when working cross-culturally are:

- 1 What do I understand about how this partner learns? Why do I think this?
- 2 Can I identify a previous learning moment for this partner? What were its characteristics?
- 3 What types of learning do I expect to see emerging from the OA process with this partner?
- 4 What criteria can I use to identify what everyone has learned from participating in the OA?
- 5 Will the learning be the same or different for me and my organisation and the partner?
How will we understand each others' learning?
- 6 How can shared learning best be facilitated?
- 7 How could the learning be applied most usefully to future activities?

The participating Dutch organisations and their learning process

Woord en Daad (W&D)

W&D connects people around the world in their fight against poverty. They work with partner organisations in Africa, Asia, Central and South America, their support base in the Netherlands, social institutions, governments, enterprises and other sectors for sustainable change worldwide. W&D's approach consists of direct poverty alleviation, social capacity building, and advocacy.

Prior to the TLP, W&D had worked with various OA tools, particularly the OCA tool, which they had applied both to themselves and to most of their partner organisations. They were keen to move beyond OCA (which they saw as mostly a scoring tool for OA), explore the 5C framework, and were thinking of possibly even integrating the two. As W&D moved into cooperating with its partners in regional alliances, they anticipated that the 5C framework might be a useful tool for collectively assessing and addressing capacity development processes more systematically with partners.

A thorough study of the backgrounds to the 5C framework, and the paradigm underpinning the model, helped changed their thinking about it and stimulated ideas on how to work with it. W&D developed a more reflective and open way of working with its partners, and explored their new approach in several pilots all over the world. While the pilots were used primarily for reflection on organisational capacity and provided qualitative indicators, when reporting to the Dutch government W&D provided quantitative indicators using a 5C framework baseline. The OCA tools had been adjusted to analyse the 'hardware', while the 5C framework focussed on analysing the 'software' of organisations.

It was clear to W&D that reporting progress in capacity development needs to be related to the 5C framework, but at the end of the TLP OA process, even in discussion with the Dutch ministry, a more qualitative way of reporting was advocated.

Light for the World (LftW)

LftW NL is a member of a leading European confederation of national development NGOs committed to saving eyesight, improving the quality of life and advocating for the rights of persons with disabilities in the underprivileged regions of the world. They work through 175 programmes in 25 countries.

LftW are in a transformation process with roles and responsibilities shifting between themselves and partners, who are increasingly expected to work more independently of LftW. The organisation was therefore looking for new tools and approaches to help them conduct OAs with partners as a way to highlight future capacity needs and to help implement capacity changes.

LftW did not apply the 5C framework in their OAs, as their partners are not associated with any MFS II alliances, and are therefore not obliged to comply. Instead they developed their own way of doing OA, influenced somewhat by the 5C framework, but primarily based on Appreciative Inquiry (AI). Working together with the Athena Institute, they developed a structured way to harvest, not only the outcomes of their OA workshops, but also the feelings and emotions of the people participating in their workshops regarding the approach, method and workshop facilitation. This aspect of the harvest was particularly important given the transition that the organisation and partnership are going through.

War Trauma Foundation (WTF)

The War Trauma Foundation (WTF) is dedicated to the realisation of hope, peace of mind, and the full potential of communities impacted by individual and collective trauma in low and middle income countries. WTF works towards its vision together with local communities in development and exchange of knowledge, capacity development and innovation in psychosocial support. Its vision is achieved through technical training and supervision, financial support, development and promotion of local and regional networks, and compilation and dissemination of materials in several languages.

While WTF saw the opportunity to address both organisational and technical capacity development in the TLP OA, its Southern partner organisations had some reservations: 'OA is about the organisation and WTF support has thus far been about school based psychosocial programmes. Why were they now interested in the organisation as a whole?' Resolving the matter took time and effort. The partner workshop in the Netherlands was an important intervention. As partners became more familiar with the 5C framework, were exposed to organisations from other parts of the world and took part in sharing and learning with them, the rationale for participating became more obvious. The lecture about the Dutch way of benchmarking between semi-government organisations was the trigger for partner organisations to think about themselves and the role they could play in their region. A link was made to benchmarking as a continuous OA process. After the partner week, WTF and their partner organisations followed up on this idea, running a workshop on benchmarking and standard setting, enabling the partner organisations to identify their vision and start designing a joint strategy. This was an important outcome from the TLP OA process for WTF and its partners. On a more practical level, WTF developed a guidebook based on best practices for OA and school based psychosocial programmes.

Red een Kind (ReK) Help a Child

Red een Kind is an organisation that focusses on children in communities, working towards the realisation of the UN Convention on Children and the realisation of children's rights as defined by the UN. ReK programmes focus on community development as a means of creating and supporting opportunities for children to use and develop their

talents. The organisation has a portfolio of programmes in sub-Saharan Africa, including Ethiopia, South Sudan, Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, DR Congo, Zambia and Malawi, and in India.

ReK joined the TLP after the design session, and although they had to work hard to have everything in place in time for the first JLM, they had a good foundation, having recently evaluated their adapted OCA tool themselves.

ReK adopted a different approach in their OLP from other participating Dutch organisations. Their idea was to ask three of their partners to develop a ReK 5C framework that was suitable for partners to conduct self assessments of their own organisations themselves. A series of workshops was held. First, workshops were held at the different organisations to introduce the model and to start the adaptation and 'translation' process to a 5C framework suitable for child centred community based organisations. Second, a joint workshop was held with all partners to integrate the preparatory work from step one into the ReK model and to talk about roll out. The idea was that ReK partners, involved in the TLP OA, would introduce the self assessment tool to other partners in the region.

The Transition in the East Alliance (TEA)

TEA is a joint alliance programme of three Dutch civil society organisations, MCVN (lead), Global Initiative on Psychiatry (GIP) and WorldGranny. This alliance works to help improve the lives of people 'left behind' in their societies. The programme works in five countries and focuses particularly on the needs of ethnic minorities, disabled, elderly and people with mental health problems who do not benefit equally from the economic progress in their country.

TEA was the last participant to join the TLP OA. However, they had already started preparing a 5C framework application as part of MFS II. Moreover, strengthening NGOs and CSOs was already part of their own reflection and learning plans. The TLP was, therefore, an opportunity to continue the work they had already started, and to zoom in on the role of learning within the context of a 5C framework.

TEA chose not only (big) NGOs in the South, but also small CBOs to participate as partners in the TLP OA. Some of the CBOs were so small that they were more an informal collection of civilians with a task in their community, than an organisation per se. Local facilitators carried out the OAs with the help of a manual that had been developed by TEA. Participating in the TLP helped the alliance to add a learning dimension to the OAs. A meeting was held with local facilitators and they were all invited to reflect on the OA exercise with the organisations they had assessed, and to recommend changes in the approach.

TEA faced interesting questions, such as how to deal with a rather complicated 5C framework with illiterate ethnic communities in Laos and Vietnam, and had to become very creative, using drawings, metaphors and storytelling. They adopted the practice of starting their workshops with developing a time-line. This was the part of the OA process that was most appreciated by the partners, who suddenly realised that they had been able to deal with many challenges over time. This realisation was empowering and made them feel proud. All organisations liked the idea of taking time for deep reflection on their organisation.

TEA learned a lot from all the feedback they got from the field during the TLP OA. In response, they now want to change their OA manual to include a better explanation of the 5C framework, giving examples of approaches that worked well and approaches that did not work well, and turning the manual into a guideline that explains the overall OD process in TEA, of which OA is an integral part. In addition, TEA is looking to develop an approach to the training of trainers in OA and OD, as strongly requested by partners.

Concluding part one

The above text describes the set up and development of the TLP on OA and introduces the participating organisations. Part two of the document shares our reflections and learning on each of the six core questions which framed the TLP, and provides a strong focus on values and practice.

PART TWO

Our questions and answers on OA

At the beginning of our Thematic Learning Programme on Organisational Assessment (TLP OA) we formulated a broad, central learning question which helped define common concerns and interests. Our central learning question was:

How can organisational assessment processes and instruments be developed and used in such a way that they facilitate on-going and endogenous organisational and institutional development (of both Northern and Southern organisations), and make the processes transparent?

Next, we identified the question's key components and turned each of these into core working questions. We used these more applied questions to guide our learning processes. The six core questions were:

- 1 What do we mean by OA and why do we support OA in our Southern partner organisations?
- 2 How do OA tools contribute to the assessment process?
- 3 What do we believe is important in terms of facilitating an OA process, so that it becomes meaningful and contributes to change?
- 4 What context supports the local ownership towards OD and ID processes within an organisation?
- 5 What conditions seem vital for on-going learning along with and amidst ourselves, as partners across borders?
- 6 What do we pursue in terms of transparency and accountability (upward and downward) in OA processes?

Part two of the document shares our reflections and learning on each of these questions, offering a strong focus on values and practice.

1 What is organisational assessment and why do we do it?

What do we mean by organisational assessment (OA)?

Ideally, OA is a process of understanding how an organisation is functioning, unlocking the implicit and explicit information necessary to monitor organisational health, and designing change interventions. Ideally, the OA regularly provides up to date information and supports strategic choices to enhance overall performance. It is meant to be a capacity enhancement and learning exercise in itself; an exercise with structured and unstructured elements, surfacing both the formal and informal realities of the organisation. Ideally, the OA is an integral part of an OD process, and introduced as such from the start. Good practice shows that OAs are most effective, and most likely to contribute to change, when integral to on-going organisational learning and OD processes.

Not only internal stakeholders provide input into an OA. Since organisations do not function in a vacuum, good OA practice includes a context analysis to assess whether changes in the organisation's environment necessitate internal adjustments. External stakeholders' views are therefore essential. The environment primarily consists of other relevant organisations and stakeholders, as well as the political-economical situation in which the organisation operates.

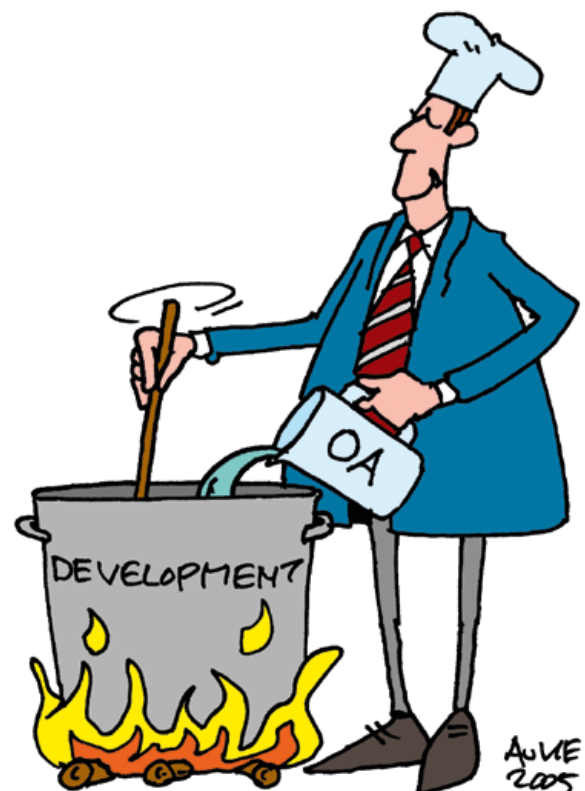
We believe the above view on OAs needs to guide future development practice, if they are to strengthen Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) around the world.



Picture taken during the TLP OA International partner conference June 2012:
Drawings: what is OA?

Why are organisation assessments of Civil Society Organisations being done?

The importance of civil society has grown significantly in the last few decades, resulting in a steadily increasing number of CSOs globally. We have seen an unprecedented rise in interdependency between Northern and Southern CSOs in many sectors, including the international development aid sector. Strong relations in-country, and between CSOs of different countries, can positively influence social, economic and democratic development at all levels. Enhancing the capacities of CSOs is therefore seen by both national and international aid systems, as a strong vehicle for development. This has added to the push to further professionalise CSOs.



Organisational assessments of CSOs are conducted for various (interconnected) reasons. Here are four primary reasons we found: First and foremost, to align the organisation with its own ambitions. Every organisation needs to understand its own functioning, which, together with its strategic thinking (vision and mission), should determine its development path. OAs can be used as audit mechanisms to monitor improvements in organisational performance, providing management with the necessary data. Findings can be compared with the results of monitoring and assessment practices that regularly take place at programme and project levels. Secondly, the OA, as an exercise, contributes to internal learning and motivation. OA has strong potential to raise self-awareness, leading to increased internal support for and ownership of the capacity development interventions among staff.

Ruth Callanta, from CCT, Philippines

"...when we started the OA, we thought that we were doing all right; but during the process we not only realised that we were not doing well, but we also realised that we can do much, much more... as a result, we have now come to engage over 60 business people to do business mentoring to micro entrepreneurs."

Akke Schuurmans, from MCV, the Netherlands

"...at the beginning of an OA, the organisation was very keen to show how advanced they were. As a result, the facilitator got the impression that the organisation was scoring itself too high. The facilitator then emphasised that the purpose of the OA was not for public relations, but for the sake of organisational development. That finally worked – and staff members started to reflect deeper and overcame their fears of "not looking nice".

Source: Report Georgia – TEA Alliance

Thirdly, OAs ensure the organisation has up-to-date information available on its functioning. This increases overall transparency and accountability towards supporting partners and other external stakeholders. CSOs benefit from providing proof of good overall organisational performance, which helps ensure their legitimacy.

Fourthly, and often the trigger for entering discussions on OA, CSOs seek to comply with the procedures of external funders, whether international or local. The external accountability systems usually require an organisational assessment. Compliance with the OA is a condition for funding. We acknowledge that implementing an OA as a funding condition is not the most appropriate way to achieve ownership for endogenously driven organisational changes. At best, we hope it serves to stimulate thinking on the other three reasons given above.

During the workshop in Sri Lanka, the OA facilitators, drawn from five countries, agreed that conducting an OA for the purpose of 'reporting to donors' was the lowest priority for doing it. While they had formerly ranked this as the most important reason, they had since come to see the intrinsic value of OA and now ranked 'creating a relationship of trust' as a far more important reason for doing it, arguing that accountability to donors would flow automatically if all the other purposes were fulfilled first.

Source: report on Sri Lanka Workshop – TEA Alliance



These four reasons should not lead to four separate OA processes. It is the CSO's task to integrate the OA into its development process, and to ensure that they benefit from it. If done according to the principles of good facilitation, including the choice of appropriate tools, an OA will stimulate an organisation to be deeply reflective on its own situation and performance, and thus introduces, or re-affirms, a learning orientation.

Joseph Walugembe, ADD/Uganda

"We don't do it because the Ministry of Foreign Affairs from some Northern NGO's country want us to do it. And we should not do it because the NNGOs want the Southern NGOs to do it for the sake of accessing their funding. We, as Southern NGOs, should only do it if we believe that it could be a self-energising and motivating approach for self renewal".

Every organisation in one way or another, formally or informally, assesses its performance. We believe that making this assessment more explicit will increase the likelihood that an organisation learns faster and is more focussed on improving its effectiveness. The OA can inform their view on their own role in society, their role in relation to the government, other NGOs and on their added value for beneficiaries. It will contribute to an increased effectiveness, sustainability and independence.

What is the benefit for Northern NGOs (NNGOs) in supporting OAs with Southern partner organisations?

Based on the idea that civil society increases social, economic and democratic development, NNGOs support the enhancement of its capacities. NNGOs invest in capacity development processes of Southern partner organisations

so that these organisations can enhance the quality of their own work, for the advancement of their beneficiaries. Support is provided in the form of financing and/or facilitation of their OA processes.

There are four further important reasons why NNGOs support OAs in the South. Firstly, given that the OA exercise is a valued capacity development intervention in itself, it fits the NNGO mission to support development processes.

If done well, the OA is a learning process for all involved, with potential to stimulate further change and create solid foundations for new learning opportunities that might lead to even broader societal change processes.

Secondly, NNGOs see a clear benefit from enhancing their relationship with Southern partner organisations. In ideal circumstances, trust and transparency towards each other is built through an OA process. OAs help NNGOs to better understand the organisational dilemmas and strengths of our partners, as well as the ever-changing context in which they exist and carry out their work. The OA process, if done in openness and honesty, can help both parties to take steps away from a traditional donor-recipient relationship towards one of a more equal relationship based on interdependency, shared values and common goals.

EXPERIENCE – "By participating in the OA process, we became really sensitive to the current core concerns of the local partner. We learned how to sense these concerns better, and make them explicit. We then tried to address them in the context of our partnership."

Source: Light for the World learning report



Thirdly, having a more profound understanding of Southern partner organisations will help us, not only to rethink the relationship with and future support strategy for each partner, but also our support strategies towards Southern partner organisations in general. Reflections with partners on their organisational performance and organisational development processes becomes an integrated part of a larger development process that NNGOs, one way or the other, have defined as our core organisational mission.



Andries Schuttinga, Red een Kind (ReK) Help a Child, the Netherlands

"We as NNGOs are here to support our Southern partner organisations to fulfil their role better in their societies and towards their target groups. When we take up a partnership, it's not for the process of doing a three year project together".

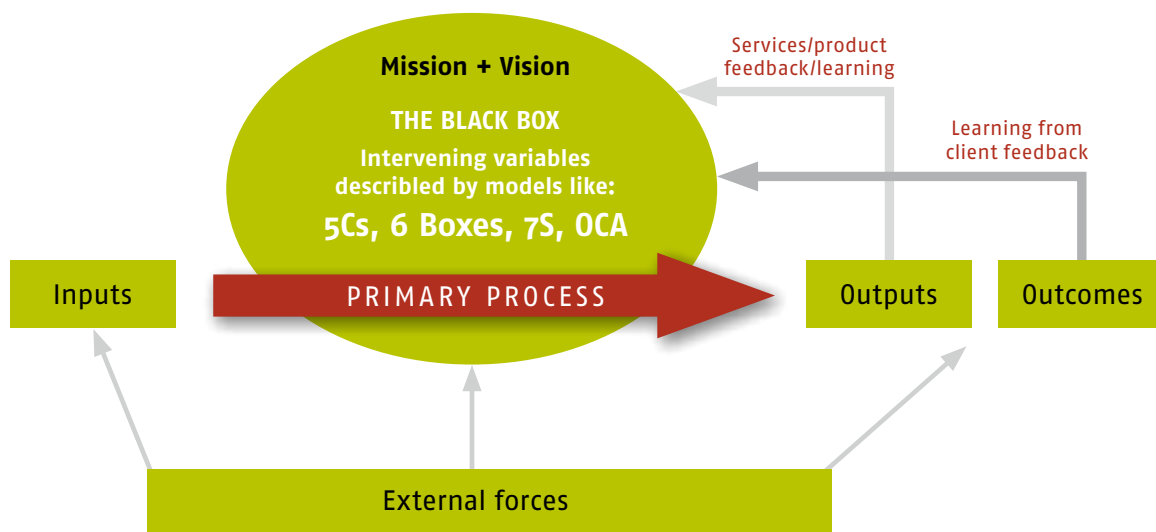
And lastly, NNGO support for the OA of Southern partner organisations needs to be accounted for within our own organisations, to our constituency and to our back-donors. This accountability is similar to Southern partner organisations' domestic accountability. Full transparency and evidence based results are needed to get the required support. For example, in the context of the Dutch MFS II⁵ system, OAs have been used as a baseline, and have helped Dutch NGOs be accountable to back-donors. Over the years, it will help to assess and expose significant changes in OD processes taking place within Southern partner organisations. Accountability is perhaps the most important reason for supporting OAs among NNGO management structures, as they are the ones responsible for reporting to the constituents. However when looking at the need to align NNGO support to local contexts, this reason will need to be merged with the other reasons.

5 Financial support scheme for Dutch Development NGOs 2011-2015.

Working on OAs across cultures, how is that possible?

Organisational assessments should be a regular feature of organisational life for both Northern and Southern partner organisations. But what common ground is there when NGOs and Southern partner organisations first work on OAs together? We have found that the systems approach is really useful in establishing a good basis from which to begin. In a systems approach, each organisation aims at achieving results, has one or more primary process for achieving these results, needs resources to make the primary processes operational, and is subject to external factors which influences these operations. The figure below illustrates this generic model:

A system view on organisations



This model provides the basis for joint learning on organisational issues and is easy for organisations from various backgrounds to relate to. There may be differences in emphasis – e.g. less emphasis on client feedback or less interest in mission/vision – but the general idea of input-output thinking remains intact.

2 How do OA tools contribute to the assessment process?

What purpose do we see in using an OA tool?

The socio-economic and political environments in which CSOs operate in developing countries are often unstable and the effects of globalisation make pro-poor developments even more complex. Any organisation in any context needs to be adaptive to its environment, but this adaptive capacity becomes even more relevant for Southern partner organisations as their immediate societies are faced with poverty, as well as political and economic instabilities.

The benefits of using an OA tool include inspiration, structure and focus for the process, and the provision of a common language for all those involved in the OA. There are different types of tools and different approaches to using them. Every tool has limitations, strengths and weaknesses. Some tools impose tight session plans, predefined formats and rigid frameworks, which limits their ability to accommodate the inevitable changes in the organisation's circumstances, and inhibits the organisation's chances of moving into a flexible reflection and learning process. This is a major constraint. Organisations are not static in their performance, nor in their chosen path towards organisational development. Continuous change in circumstances is inevitable. The more tools we know about and are competent in using, the easier it will be to choose the best for each OA.



An essential insight that the TLP OA group reached was that OA is, first and foremost, a development intervention. It is not the tool, but the intervention that sets the OA, and subsequently the OD process, in motion. We believe that the whole intervention strategy (which ideally sees OA & OD as one integrated process) should determine if and how a tool is used.

“Woord en Daad (W&D) used to work with an adapted OCA tool, implemented with all their partners (± 30). Partners' initial enthusiasm was tempered as they experienced some of the tool's downsides, e.g. mechanistic scoring and limited results focus. As a consequence they elaborated the 5C framework for their own use, and kept the necessary parts of the OCA as a separate exercise. At W&D, the OAs also function as benchmarks for MFS II. On the one hand, the tools are used for W&D's obligation to monitor MFS progress (using indicators), while on the other hand, the tools are guiding OD processes with no strings attached. W&D has discarded the more technocratic/mechanistic approach that was initially used with the OCA assessments and is starting to use the 5C framework in OAs. However, this required some internal discussions within W&D on which type of organisational capacities are non-negotiable for W&D (to be captured in potential 'administrative audits'), leaving other focus areas on capacity measurement and capacity enhancement open to the partner.

Source: W&D learning report phase 1, TLP OA

A tool must serve the OA purpose, intervention strategy and mutual goals of both the NNGO and Southern partner organisation involved. In other words, it must be functional. The following questions should be addressed openly between NNGOs and Southern partner organisations when selecting or introducing an OA tool:

- Which result is to be achieved with whom in order to achieve increased organisational performance and enhanced learning (change objective, strategic dilemmas, basic question)?
- How could this result be achieved (participation, momentum, process and contents)?
- What is the most suitable way and what are the best conditions for our joint work to arrive at the intended results (intervention planning)?



What do we value about standard OA tools and from the process of tailor-making them?

We have learned that a variety of OA tools and instruments are available⁶, both outside of and within the development sector. They all have their advantages and disadvantages, depending on context, desired effect and ambitions. As mentioned above, we believe that the question is not about good-better-best, but about which tool to choose as a functional element in the chosen intervention strategy.

Making the best choice requires thorough knowledge of the different tools, and an agreement with partner management on which organisational questions the assessment should address. For instance, the choice of the tool will depend on the main focus of the assessment. Below are some examples:

- Strategic focus → BCG Matrix, Porters 5 forces
- Organisational/network focus → INK, 7S, 6 boxes, 5 Capabilities, OCA
- Focus on primary process → just in time, benchmarking
- Focus on functional processes → ABC, marketing mix
- Focus on people/behaviour → tools regarding team roles, core quadrants



⁶ A large series of generic and specific tools were developed just for Civil Society Organisations, see: UNDP, A Users' Guide to Civil Society Assessments, 18 October 2010.

For a number of tools used in OA, see www.reflectlearn.org

We see organisations as adaptive human systems, part of a wider environment and in close relation to others. The 5C framework, developed by ECDPM in 2009⁷, has helped us to better understand organisations as adaptive human systems. We believe the 5C framework, possibly combined with other tools, is well suited for the development sector, provided that it is used as a tool for dialogue and reflection.

Missy Christie from CDA, Columbia

"5C framework looks into 5 core capabilities that an organisation should have, to say that it actually has capacity to carry out its mission. It's not a tool, it's an approach. Within the approach you can develop tools"

*For more information see video on the use of the 5C framework:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=16wpMJH8nXs&feature=youtube>*

From our recent learnings on OA interventions, we concluded that it is useful to consider a combination of existing tools. In partnership, we need space (time, money, open dialogues) to invest jointly in the development and mutual understanding of tailor-made instruments. This is a learning process in itself, which should be seen as an integral part of the OA process, keeping in mind the intervention strategy and mutually agreed goals.

"During preparatory discussions about ReK's participation in the TLP OA, we read some materials to learn more about organisational assessment. At some point during the process, and further motivated by the first TLP OA joint learning session (September 8, 2011), we decided to lay aside the OCA in order to have free discussions with our partners. We also realised that the ownership by partners would not be ensured if we simply proposed the Organisational Capacity Assessment tool (OCA). We started to think how we could move towards ownership of doing an OA and then realised that, if this OD is indeed important to ReK, the partners themselves should be the ones to design the OA tool, i.e. to re-interpret and design the 5C framework according to their circumstances and perspectives.

Source: ReK, learning report phase 1, TLP OA

What values and principles guide the selection of an OA tool?

The choice and use of a tool is influenced by the values of both the NNGO and the Southern partner organisations. The existing relationship between the two is a determining factor in designing and implementing the entire OA/OD process. We need to be aware of what the underlying values, realities, mutual understanding and principles of our relationships are, and discuss how to match these with both the OA tool and the proposed OA implementation process.

⁷ The 5 Capabilities Model was developed by ECDPM based on a series of cases, in an attempt to conceptualise and describe how capacity emerges. The concept of capacity is broken down into 5 intertwined capabilities, to be seen as an analytical framework for understanding the capacity of human systems.

Marguerithe Man, OD advisor from SIOO, the Netherlands, advocates diversifying practices

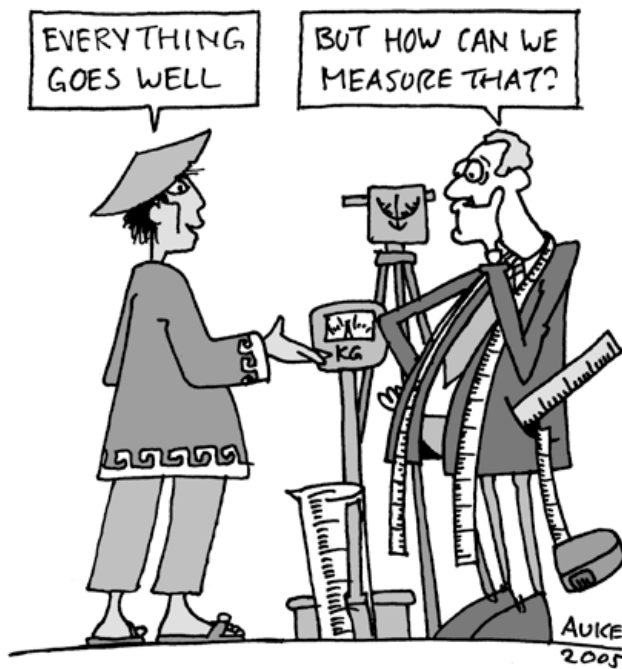
"...Once a tool is applied and adapted several times amongst partners and facilitators, there is a natural and practical tendency to make a tool and/or the process of OA implementation "standard" to own practices. Once something "feels" good, we are simply not inclined to look for other possibilities. However, occasional changing of the OA tool and/or approach, would encourage looking at the organisation and relations from new angles, which can bring new and valuable information to the table!"

The values that seem to lie behind the chosen tool and tool use need explicit articulation and understanding. Are the values in line with the type of relationship we currently have, or do we want to use the tools to pursue a new type of relationship? Is it about assessing or developing, about selecting our partners or supporting our partners? Articulating mutual aims and values behind the OA will certainly affect both parties' willingness to be open about our organisations' agendas. For instance, if the OA is only conducted to secure donor funding, it will have an entirely different value from when the need for an OA comes from the organisation itself. Furthermore, the understanding and practice of the concept of organisational learning may differ, e.g. preference for on-the-job vs. off-the-job learning. In part one, we discussed the cultural aspects of learning. It is vital to recognise the differences and be aware of when and how learning best takes place in a particular organisation and within a particular culture.

Within the TEA alliance, local facilitators were trained in the 5C framework and discussed the most suitable ways of applying it at the level of community based organisations and community self-help groups. How do you discuss concepts of 'coherence' or 'self-renewal' with people who mostly have a low education, and belong to groups that have not yet even started seeing themselves as an organisation? In Sri Lanka, a local facilitator used the metaphor of an elephant to give meaning to each of the 5Cs. In Vietnam, a puppet play was introduced as a means to discuss and address issues of organisational performance. These creative means supported better understanding of 'what makes an organisation strong' between participants in the workshops.

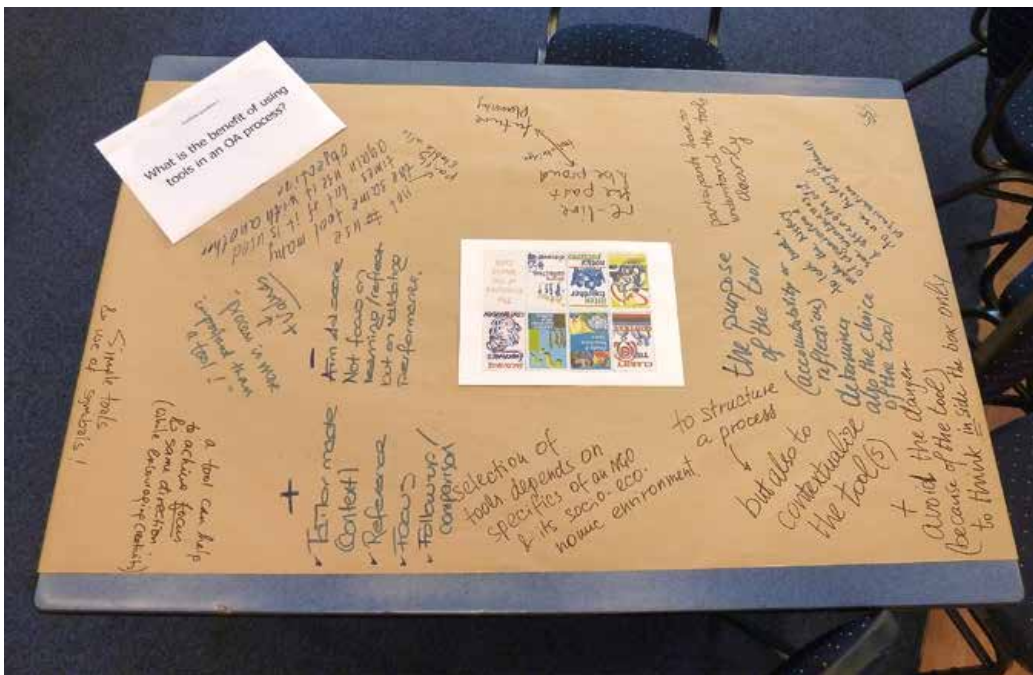
*A video of a puppet play on the 'capability to commit and act' is available at:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aEugabfbYuU@feature=youtube>*

Another value concerns the question of whether or not to make use of scoring. As partners working in the social development of complex societies, we seem to have in-built problems with scoring. Scoring is associated with 'judging' in the negative sense of the word. The connotations we attach to scoring often do not match the type of relationship we aim for with our Southern partner organisations. We believe that regular self-monitoring is crucially important for learning and the development of organisations. Based on this core value, we aim to negotiate the best approach between demands for the kind of hard data provided by scoring, and a more learning orientation. We use the word 'negotiate' as we all face donor requirements that need to be met, including hard and results-based data. We have learned that it is quite difficult to capture this type of information in more organic processes (see the case of Woorden Daad in box 1). The challenge lies in creating a minimal benchmark for later reviews of progress, which is transparent and all parties involved can agree to, based on our values and existing relationships.



This shift away from mechanistic tools and scoring is creating a move towards dialogue and a strong process orientation. This requires high-level facilitation and negotiation skills and a deep appreciation of context.

In conclusion, the dialogue between Northern and Southern partner organisations about rationale and focus of the OA, should lead the selection of tools. These tools will be the instruments that assist in getting the right information and analysis into the open. The next question we asked ourselves was, 'how do we facilitate this process?'



Picture taken during the TLP OA International partner conference June 2012: World café discussion on tools.

3 What do we believe is important in terms of facilitating a participatory OA process?

Complexity of terms: facilitation and participation

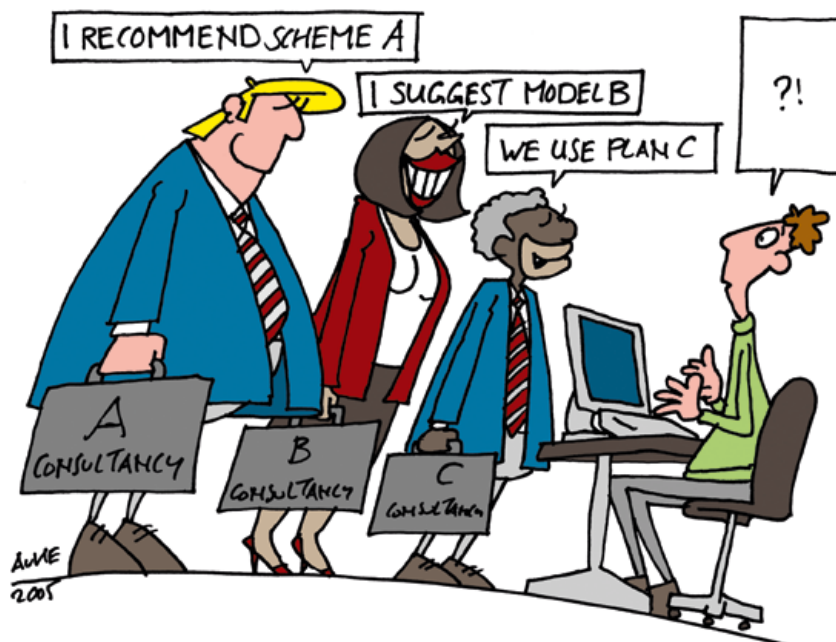
The terms 'facilitation' and 'participation' continue to be extensively discussed in all sorts of practice and academic fora. And it is no wonder, they are complex concepts to understand theoretically and even more so to master practically.

In our TLP OA we decided to focus on values and 'how' issues. More specifically, we reflected on what we value in facilitation and participation, and took a close look at how to facilitate participatory OA processes. Before sharing our insights and recommendations below, we offer two observations:

Facilitation requires the ability to create 'space'. Space for in-depth discussions was necessary for the overall process. Facilitation is the 'oil' in communication.

We identified three types of participatory arrangements: participation (i) within the organisation, (ii) between recipient and funding agency, and (iii) between the organisation and its external stakeholders such as clients and other influential actors. All three are important to take into account when working on OA and subsequent OD interventions.

What are our values and views on facilitation and facilitator requirements?



The design and execution of the overall process is core to any OA exercise. Tool and instrument selection are secondary, and should support the design and purpose of OA. We acknowledge the importance of 'general' competencies that an OA facilitator should have, such as high level facilitation skills along with a thorough understanding of organisational management and organisational development processes. But we would also like to emphasise the importance of a facilitator's ability to be culturally sensitive, and respectful of organisational values.

But what makes OA facilitation good? What aspects of OA facilitation really make a difference and/or should we always be aware of? Six lessons from experience:

- As a learning process, it is vital that the OA is built on an understanding of how people learn within a certain context and/or culture. Western learning habits and methods are certainly not universal. Local facilitation expertise and contextual knowledge are crucial.
 - OA facilitation practices range from self-assessments to bringing in international/regional OA experts to using local facilitators, to a combination of these three options. Sometimes, the choice is to engage the NNGO in (co-) facilitating the OA. Even though this is not always ideal, it can be done in situations where, for example, relationship building is part of the agreed intervention strategy between the two partners.
 - Neutral facilitation is a fallacy. All facilitators have an agenda, however small they may be. External facilitators, whether local or international, have an assignment which shapes their agenda. They also have a preferred way of working, some of it conscious, some unconscious. Internal facilitators will have more of an understanding of the organisation being assessed, but less facilitator neutrality.
 - During the design phase, the facilitator needs to choose the best mix of activities, workshop, series of smaller meetings, individual or small group interviews, short presentations, or any combination of these, to best suit the organisation being assessed.
 - Be clear on when to involve external OA/OD facilitation expertise. When little OD expertise is available within the organisation, external support should be involved as early as possible, preferably before formulating the main OA questions.
 - During facilitation of OA activities, flexibility is key. The facilitator's willingness and skill in moving away from pre-designed plans when necessary or if requested by stakeholders, will lead to increased participation, and ownership of the whole process. Even when the facilitator doubts the proposed changes will lead to better data, demonstrating flexibility in design and facilitation may become crucial for the OD process as a whole.
- Below, an example from Woord en Daad:

"It was a real difficulty to get the discussion going when we were doing an OA with our Asian Regional Alliance. Participants asked several times if the discussions should fall within the framework and guidelines given by (or perceived to be given by) W&D.

As a facilitator, I stressed that this reflection discussion should be an open discussion, not limited by (perceived) ideas and external demands, but focused on the interest of the participating organisations (including W&D through the regional coordinator). I pointed out that it did not have any decision making power. Having this preliminary discussion brought the very important topic, legitimacy of the alliance, onto the table. In the reflection that followed, the group felt that the regional coordinator (being a representative of W&D) was not the most suitable person to facilitate this discussion, and suggested that somebody with more distance should take over."

Source: W&D learning report on the OA of their Asian Regional Alliance

What are our values and views with regard to participation?

Participation within the organisation

All organisations developed a way of communicating internally, both formally (meeting systems and formal reporting structures), and informally. These informal arrangements often exert a large influence over who is and who is not involved in the organisational assessment and in OD issues.

The dynamics and outcomes of the OA process depend on the people who self-select or are chosen to be involved. To achieve assessment validity and completeness, we recommend that a wide variety of staff participate in the OA, whether in workshop mode or otherwise. In practice, a limited selection of participants is often made, usually due to practical reasons. This is risky, and may mean that data objectivity is limited. More important than data objectivity, however, is that organisational learning takes place, as organisational learning is an important precondition for organisational change.

Short story of CCCT Philippines where they started using the 5C framework only amongst management staff at the CCCT coordinating office (?), and then realised that – as they were growing into operating as a network – the reflections on their capabilities should be done at all levels. What was originally started as an OA exercise became an integrated reflection and learning tool at network level...

If it is not possible to involve a wide range of staff in the OA, we recommend picking up on this issue during the follow up processes. We are aiming for growth in the organisation's learning attitude, so that new views, values and ideas can emerge. We believe an OA is only truly successful when it triggers new energy, motivation and strategies among the organisation's management and staff, so that they can take the next steps in achieving their anticipated social change.

"Light for the World (LftW) believes it is important to get the support of the whole organisation and their partner organisations for the organisational assessment. This commitment specifies the hierarchical levels in the organisation that the facilitator should focus on; not only higher management, but addressing the whole organisation and their surroundings ... through making the roles and responsibilities (on mainstreaming disability in the organisation) explicit for individual staff members, their confidence to start working in these areas was raised ... The organisational assessment seemed to have motivated the participants to use their power for their organisation to be willing to make the needed strategic decisions towards the topic of mainstreaming disability. The future will tell if they really managed to put this wish into practice, and what support can enhance this."

Source: LftW learning report, Jan 2012

An interesting approach to conducting OAs, that actively encourages staff participation, is the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach. AI is an organisational development method which focuses on increasing what an organisation does well, rather than on eliminating what it does badly. It supports investigating the positive and engages all levels of an organisation. It seeks to renew, develop and build on positive characteristics, and connecting to them in ways that heighten energy, sharpen vision, and inspire action for change.



Akke Schuurmans, from MCV, the Netherlands

"... Many organisations said that they initially viewed the OA as a type of inspection. Inspections are common in Tajikistan, and if government structures are not pleased with what they find, the consequences can be devastating for the organisation. Throughout the OA process, however, our partner organisations quickly realised that the OA was truly for their own benefit. Partners were relieved to find that the assessment stimulated learning and reflection for the benefit of their target groups, and was not just about compiling a dossier on their functioning for bureaucratic and evaluation purposes"

Source: Comparative analytical report Tajikistan – TEA Alliance

LftW explains how it has become more effective in promoting a greater sense of partner ownership of the OA processes:

"The facilitator's encouragement to fulfil their dreams made participants in the organisational assessments, organised by Light for the World, think about individual commitment and responsibilities. Furthermore, linking the organisational assessment with the history of the organisation seemed to help staff members feel connected to the issue. Their contributions in envisioning a future for their organisation gave them a sense of ownership in the organisational development process, which is evidenced in the clear ideas for OD follow-up activities."

Source: LftW learning report on ownership

Whatever design, set-up, and approach are chosen for an OA process, they should support the creation of a learning environment that suits the realities of the organisation concerned. We value internal participatory processes because they increase the effectiveness and sustainability of organisational change. Increased levels of participation, negotiation and cooperation among staff and management have the following three advantages:

- Possible inconsistencies between organisational and individual interests can be dealt with; it usually also encourages effective informal communication.
- There will be an increase of staff power to counterbalance leadership's tendency to take too much control, e.g. there will be more internal accountability.
- Awareness-raising of organisational issues at all levels will lead to increased cohesion and a greater willingness to change.

Participation between Northern and Southern partner organisations

The relationship between Northern and Southern partner organisations has both funding and partnership aspects. Unfortunately the funding role is usually experienced as an obstacle to the partnership role. This tension is inherent. It is there, and we need to deal with it. When entering an OA process, this tension needs to be recognised and should be carefully managed, especially in cases where the OA was introduced as a pre-condition for funding. As CSOs, we acknowledge the need and desire to be held accountable. Yet, we also believe that too much focus on accountability will decrease the effectiveness and benefits of the OA as a learning exercise.

"Finding the balance between influence and support turned out to be an evolving process. WTF suggested carrying out OAs in the context of a school based programme (for psycho social care), in which several partners from various countries participated. At the beginning, different organisations looked at which benefits and investments could be expected when engaging in OAs. During the process, and especially after joint planning meetings and workshops, a balance seemed to emerge. Investments made in terms of discussing assignments and doing the assessments, showed to be beneficial and also contributed to a sense of unity, both within the TLP OA and in other forms of cooperation between us. Meeting each other and meeting people from other organisations turned out to be very beneficial."

Source: War Trauma Foundation, TLP learning report

Our experience shows that using a participatory approach is a learning process as well. Organisational leaders from both local and international NGOs may be reluctant to discuss internal affairs with outsiders. Overcoming initial reluctance among leaders can be done by discussing examples from elsewhere, trying out minor, less threatening discussions, or holding presentations on selected organisational topics, etc. Participation is a means, not an end in itself.

Participation with external stakeholders

Clients and other local constituents (e.g. community leaders, local government, cooperation partners) are important contributors when assessing organisational capacities. They usually do not have direct experience of what happens within the organisation, but they do have opinions about its outputs and outcomes. They also encounter the organisation's staff and visit the organisation's building/offices. Some organisations already have client surveys or regular context analyses, while others acquire informal feedback via the grapevine. Incorporating these actors as participants in the OA/OD dialogue yields valuable information and entry points for improvements.

Note: A special type of participation with external partners is local networks and alliances. Assessing networking capabilities is part of the OA (e.g. this is explicitly mentioned in the 5C framework), assessing the capacity of the network itself requires an additional focus⁸.

From our experiences we recommend:

- Emphasise and invest in relationship building. Know each other's way of working, strategies, leadership style, funding arrangements, donors, activities, ambitions. This will likely increase mutual trust between you. OA and subsequent OD activities cannot be separated from the overall collaboration between both partners.
- Work with local staff (external or own staff) to minimise cultural and language barriers and maximise local solutions.
- Be open and transparent about back-donor requirements, tool selection and policies on confidentiality and privacy.
- Stimulate the leaders to take charge on OA contents and process (group/individual sessions, timing, phasing, etc).

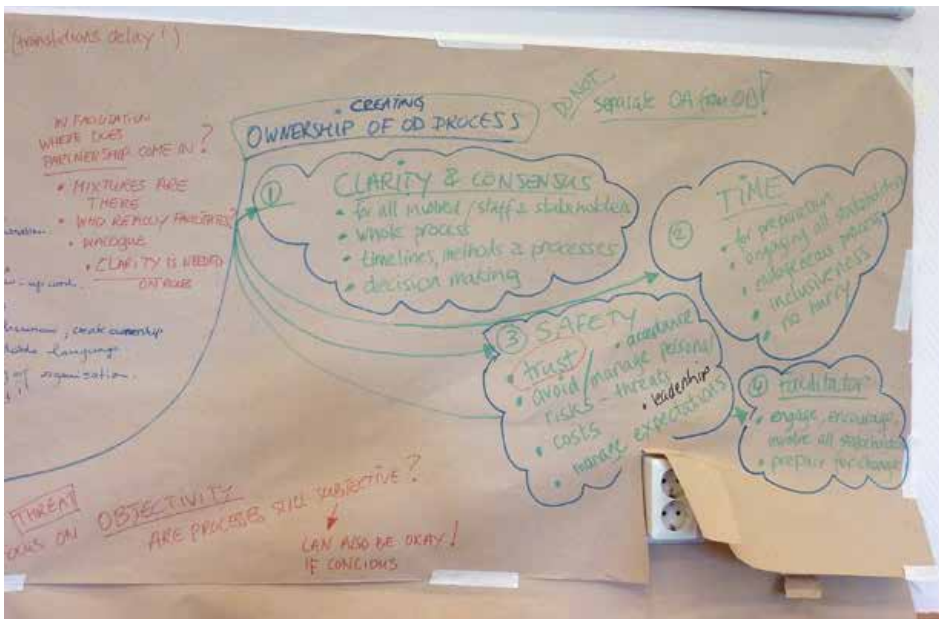
4 What context supports ownership for OD and ID processes within an organisation?

Who owns the OA?

In the previous core question we came across the issue of existing tensions between the Northern funder and the Southern partner when assessing the Southern partners' organisations. With this in mind, we asked what a conducive context for OAs would be, given the inevitable tension between an assessor who is paying, and the assessed who is receiving. We have seen how this tension can be reduced through relationship building, and through open discussions between the two partners. We have also observed that this tension may already be on the decline. Under our first core question, we indicated that Northern (international) and Southern (national) NGOs have become much more dependent on each other. Some of the other noticeable changes in the development cooperation landscape currently are:

- Previously recipient governments (e.g. India, Brazil, South Africa) increasingly fund their own (sub) national NGOs; sometimes through outsourcing of government tasks, sometimes as partners in development.
- Multi-lateral and private international donors increasingly fund Southern NGOs directly.
- Back-donors in traditional donor countries increasingly demand outcome information that can only be provided by Southern partner organisations.

⁸ Reference is made to the work of Ricardo Wilson-Grau. Besides an interesting read on network assessments, is the article: "Next Generation Network Evaluation", June 2010, by Innovations for scaling impact (scale) and Keystone Accountability.



Picture taken during the TLP OA International partner conference June 2012: mindmap ownership.

These developments imply a changing context regarding the 'ownership' issue. More and more NNGOs and Southern partner organisations own programmes jointly, and need each other to achieve their respective missions. And organisations that need each other should have the openness to look into each others' kitchens!

Two of the participating NNGOs (Light for the World and Woord en Daad) invited southern partner organisations to assess their organisation in the Netherlands, as a part of this TLP OA. Pleasantly surprised by the invite, Southern representatives came to conduct the assessment, and held sessions with the leaders, staff and external stakeholders of their Northern partner organisation. Both the Northern and Southern organisations learned a lot about how to conduct OAs, the design of an OA process, about issues of partnership and about dealing with the donor-recipient tensions. Amongst other benefits, the experience of doing these OAs led to a better understanding by Southern partner organisations of the emerging internal and external reality in which the NNGO operate. They learned more about development cooperation in Dutch society, and about issues of accountability to back donors and constituents.

More information on the experiences of these OAs of Light for the World and Woord en Daad has been published as Praxis Note by Intrac, see www.intrac.org.

What about change readiness? And who exactly needs to be ready?

Under our first core question, we described the rationale for OAs as providing a process and tools to track progress, assist learning, and support change interventions. What has not been emphasised enough, is the issue of change readiness. Being ready for change is a very important pre-condition for creating ownership. However, not all managers, either Northern or Southern, are prepared to openly discuss their internal affairs. Forcing an OA upon them will have little effect, and lip service is likely to prevail. There can be many reasons for not being open to an OA. It might not be the right timing because the organisation has only just changed its strategic course, because of circulation of key staff

and/or recent internal systems change. Either way, in our joint discussions we have learned that assessing the reasons for possible reluctance and negotiating solutions beforehand, should be part of the very early stages of an OA process. In the end, these questions must be asked: Does an OA improve our cooperation? Is this the right time? Why do we do it and for whom? If an OA is not feasible, it is better to be open about it than sweeping the issues under the carpet.

We have also experienced internal organisational dilemmas when managers are clear about their change objectives ('we know what needs to be done'), but a large number of their staff do not show change readiness. This issue usually comes up during the OA (or after, when the OD plans are made) and can be explained by a number of reasons such as: disagreement between management and staff, internal inter-group conflicts, fear, lack of change management and/or communication skills by managers wanting to push for change, etc. It's wrong to expect that external OA facilitators and/or supporters will be able to solve these issues, but we do believe that an OA can be instrumental in bringing the reasons behind the resistance into the open. Only after recognition of these issues, can underlying differences of interest be further addressed, through, for example, a culturally acceptable follow up exercise. The facilitator should play a low key role in elaborating the change processes with questions such as: Where are the internal and external levers of change? How can change be made attractive? Which resources are needed? What would the initial steps be? etc. The lead for making the change lies with the organisation and its leaders.



Political readiness

We are aware that organisations function in an institutional and/or sector context. Organisational changes resulting from an OA will always need to fit into that context. If, for instance, an OA leads to a need for increased networking with other organisations, or towards the need for increased democracy and equality for the organisation's clients, then the change process is no longer just an internal matter. The process of OD enters into the area of institutional development (ID), where the interactions among organisations take place in a more political arena. In most developing countries, addressing this arena is easier said than done, and may even lead to the decision not to pursue this

particular change in ID. ID objectives are difficult to achieve and need cooperation with higher level political players, especially in more fragile economies. Change readiness at this level requires the organisation to have up-to-date information about what is happening outside its own organisational borders, an understanding of when to make a move, and the capacity to maintain long term, external relations.

Implications for OA relations between Northern and Southern partner organisations

While becoming more open and transparent on one hand, relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs have become more contractual on the other. Donors fund a programme that aims to achieve a certain outcome, the implementing NGOs commit themselves to this outcome. Mutual trust is key in cooperation among NNGOs and Southern partner organisations, though yet again, this ideal is hampered by tensions inherent to donor-recipient relationships.

Joseph Walugembe, from ADD, Uganda

"...the realities of Southern organisations are different from the Northern organisations. All of us need to understand each others' realities, this includes each others' constraints, fears and motivations. Eventually it is finding equal partnership in trust. Trust, and what we see as being our shared values. These are key aspects that underpin a good relationship, conducive to engage in OAs together".

We have experienced a strong shift towards demonstrating results. Whether NNGOs like it or not, accountability to our (back-)donors, and strict organisational conditions (mainly on finance and procurement) influences our relationship with Southern partner organisations and interferes with the trust we think has been established. To overcome this issue, we have seen NNGOs (such as in the case of Woord en Daad) choosing to keep 'audit' type of assessments of their Southern partner organisations separate from assessments that focus on learning and organisational improvements.



Another implication of the changing context between NNGOs and Southern partner organisations is that the implementing NGOs will benefit from working in alliances, some at national level, some at international level. Alliance building promotes joint advocacy, fund raising policy development and/or capacity development. For the effectiveness of these alliances, alliance assessments will become important as well as peer-reviews and assessments amongst the participating organisations. Knowing and understanding each other becomes part of the deal. These developments are slowly emerging and require time and learning from experience to take shape. We all need to work on an internal culture that accepts OA as a normal organisational activity, just like annual or strategic planning.

During the international conference “Learning from OA practices: sharing insights for enhancing our organisational capacities” (June 11–14th, 2012), which was hosted by the TLP OA, participants were inspired by the Dutch Benchmark Group’s presentation. This group is an alliance of Dutch (mainly semi-public) organisations, who have decided to engage in peer-audits every year. Results of the audits are benchmarked and widely published. Participating organisations benefit both from the quality audits and the transparency and public exposure afterwards. Participation is completely voluntary, based on a clear contractual commitment. The Benchmark Group guarantees quality and engages in capacity development of auditing staff. The Benchmark Group is a financially independent organisation.

WFT partner organisations Denal (Chechnya) and Dostizhenia (North Ossetia) became very enthusiastic about this idea and started investigating the possibilities of setting up a similar group amongst civil society organisations in the Caucasus. A workshop on benchmarking and standard setting facilitated the start of a process of identifying a strategy on benchmarking and certification for NGOs in the North Caucasus. This turned out to be a very interesting and unexpected outcome of the TLP OA for both the partner organisations as well as WFT. The partner meeting had been very inspirational for this process.

5 What conditions are vital for on-going learning along with and amidst ourselves, as partners across borders?

The concept of learning in OA and OD processes

In part one of this document we discussed the concept of learning. Since we understand OA and OD as extended organisational learning processes, we tend to approach the concept of learning in an action-oriented way, i.e. with the assumption that organisations will change and improve through learning from the experiences of their constituent parts.

Yet the concepts inherent in this assumption are culturally based and may be understood or interpreted differently in other cultures. When interactions take place between Northern and Southern NGOs, and among Southern NGOs from different cultures, we always need to be aware of these differences and how they relate to learning and know how to deal with them. Only when the differences have surfaced, is it possible to decide what, if any, adjustments have to be made to the task at hand.



During one of the TLP OA joint reflection sessions, in which only NNGOs participated, a participant from TEA alliance mentioned their internal discussions on the concepts used in the 5C framework, and in particular, how to interpret and translate the word 'coherence': "It was truly a struggle for South East Asian staff as well as partners..., the concept was simply perceived as too abstract and multi-dimensional, and would only lead to misunderstandings...". This contribution by TEA alliance led to a discussion in the group about our joint understanding of the very concept, coming to the conclusion that even between Northern NGOs different meanings were given to the concept. Does it matter? We asked ourselves. No, probably not. But what really mattered, was taking some time to talk about it, understanding the different perceptions that existed amongst ourselves as individuals, as well as between our organisations. As long as we were aware of these differences, they would less likely blur our joint learning process.

Source: TEA alliance learning report, Jan 2012

Implications of culture on learning

When people from different cultures interact on OA and OD processes, there will certainly be pitfalls ahead. Some can be avoided, others cannot, but all should be treated as learning opportunities.

During the TLP OA, we became even more aware of inter-cultural differences, and we worked towards a mutual understanding of how the OA and OD process might best be managed. We would like to highlight the following key concepts that so often create cross-cultural misunderstanding.

Learning

Virtually all the literature on learning, particularly on organisational learning, has been produced in the North. The Western understanding of learning is based on premises such as learning being a continuous process, irrespective of the environment. Not all will agree with this statement. Some see learning as something that happens at school, university or in a training course and beyond that it is a matter of 'professionalisation'. In many cultures learning is the transmission of social knowledge and wisdom from elder to younger generations, conducted in strictly defined ways. Some see learning as an activity that takes place irrespective of its environment; others perceive it as a highly situational activity. When starting an OA, miscommunication may arise if there is no clarity about how the different people involved understand the concept. If we approach OAs as learning opportunities, the interpretation of the learning concept has to be clear from the start.

Organisation

Similarly, it is important to understand how the concept of organisation is perceived. What someone understands about and values in organisations will be influenced by their culture, country, education, experience and family life. Is an organisation seen as a machine, a family, a living system, or perhaps something else? Does it have a character, a life, or is it an inanimate object? Issues of ownership are also very important. Do staff believe that the organisation belongs to them, to the Director, or maybe to an external stakeholder group?

These ideas have an impact on how internal processes are set up and managed. For example, how conflicts are managed, how procurement takes place, what criteria are used for human resource management (e.g. recruitment based on merit or connections?), and what the mechanisms are for formal and informal reward systems.

We have come to realise that recognising these different ideas and perceptions is essential to understanding how best to support mutual learning in OA processes.

In a recent study on the differences between Anglo-Saxon and European interpretations of OA, a differentiation was made between the two ways of looking at organisations using the 7S Framework (Peters and Waterman, 1982). The Anglo-Saxon focus on organisations puts more value on immediate financial results (shareholder value), strict planning and standardisation of procedures: *a rule based organisation*. The European focus – and also our focus – values more the quality and market position (stakeholder value), general planning and increased staff involvement in strategy: *a principle based organisation*. These two interpretations will lead to a different OA focus.

Study by Brouwer and Peters, Nieuw Europees Organiseren (New European Organising, Dutch Original), 2011

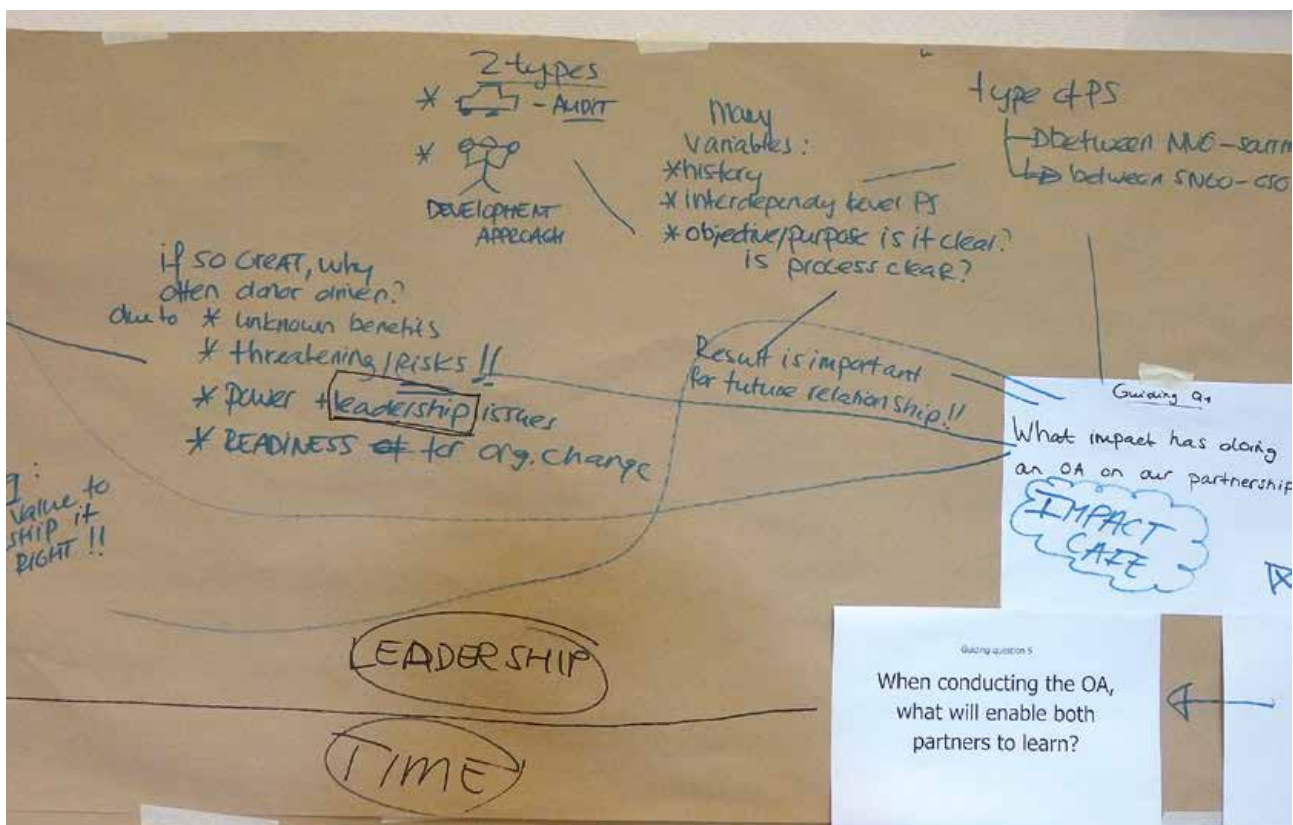
Change

The word change occurs frequently in OA and OD processes. Effective use of learning about the past or present should lead to plans for change in the future. This can create many different types of reaction, some of which are culturally based, some of which are intellectual, while others are emotional. It is important to draw out cultural perspectives when discussing or negotiating change. For example, in some Asian cultures change is to be avoided because it implies that something is wrong, which in turn causes a loss of face for the leaders responsible for the present situation. Other issues, such as who can mandate change, the pace at which it can happen, and how to deal with resistance, are equally important as those of practicality and feasibility.

The implications of power for learning

We've already discussed the implications of culture for learning, but issues of power and leadership are related and also very important. Apart from the power relations between NGOs and Southern partner organisations (discussed in core question 4) we have seen that the OA and OD processes are influenced by internal power holders as well. If the leadership is not open to honest feedback in an OA process, or is unwilling to embrace learning, then it is likely that they will, either overtly or covertly, block any of the benefits that might arise. The Southern partner organisation should also be made aware of how the NNGO uses power structures, because mutual understanding of each other's opinions and assumptions, across cultures, is crucial. For example, sensitivities may arise if Southern leaders experience their Northern partners as too intrusive in their leadership style. Both will have to ask themselves: 'What and how much will I accept from the other?' 'When and where will I draw the line?'

Informal structures also need to be taken into account. Those working within an organisation will be aware of, not only the formal hierarchy, but also the informal leadership dynamics at play, even though these issues might not be openly discussed. For example peer pressure can be as influential in blocking change as leadership attitudes can. Any external person working with an organisation needs to be alert to the nature and extent of informal structures, and to find ways to explore their implications for learning and change.



Picture taken during the TLP OA International partner conference June 2012: Mindmap leadership.

Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) as an opportunity to support learning

Agreement is needed between NNGOs and Southern partner organisations on how to identify and report on OD progress as well as on project and/or programme M&E.

We all realise that M&E is important and necessary, both within relations between NNGOs and Southern partner organisations, as well as for their own constituencies. As professional organisations, we want to be held accountable for our actions (see more about accountability in question 6). However, the reality is that the emphasis is usually on reporting, whereas a report should be understood as just one of the outputs of M&E. Unfortunately, the preoccupation with reports often leads to M&E being perceived as a chore, something that needs to be done to keep everybody in the aid chain content, and organisations consequently miss out on the riches M&E has to offer.

We believe it is key to make the M&E agreements between NNGOs and Southern partner organisations learning oriented. Enhancing organisational development is not about producing a report. It is far more important to have a good process that leads to a report than just the report itself. The process should reflect on the cycle of activities, their outputs (and outcomes if possible), look at progress, challenges, decisions made, and so on. An organisation that succeeds in linking learning into its existing M&E system is likely to also address its own development, systems and behaviour, rather than just capturing project and programme data. The systems view, as described in core question 1, supports this thinking.

6 What do we pursue in terms of transparency and accountability in OA processes?

Allowing others to see what happens within our organisations can be a sensitive matter and needs to be handled with care. The following questions are important to consider when working with other organisations in an OA process: Who is in charge in the relationship between Southern partner organisations and Northern NGOs? To what extent do partners need to be open and transparent with each other? Is there a 'code of conduct' which sets out what we communicate to each other and what we communicate to our internal staff regarding organisational performance? And what about communication with external stakeholders?

Transparency

We believe that being 100% transparent with each other, whether within or between organisations, or even between spouses, is fiction. Partners are entitled to their own discretion and their privacy. Apart from this general principle of personal integrity, we believe that transparency also has a cultural dimension. In some countries, for example, it is simply not acceptable to look 'behind the façade'. A well known attitude in capacity development processes is to only focus on what the organisation produces, in other words on 'capacity for what?'. What happens within the organisation is then of less concern to the client or donor. However, in relationships where NNGOs aim to enhance and support the development of Southern partner organisations, what happens in the organisation does matter. Internal processes, whether primary or supporting, are part and parcel of overall organisational functioning.

Even though the level of transparency may differ from case to case, it is important to take note of what is happening within each others' organisations. To what extent this happens should, of course, match the scope of the relationship. However, if we only look at outputs, and not at primary processes and supporting mechanisms, we will lose the possibility of assisting each other to improve internal efficiency, effectiveness and focus. We see this as a missed opportunity, given that the information exchange would be valuable for both Southern partner organisations and NNGOs, and would enhance their relationships. In particular, we advocate for more openness from NNGOs towards their Southern partner organisations, as this could lead to greater mutual understanding and strategic feedback on how to better organise NNGO assistance to Southern partner organisations. OAs are done to learn and consequently improve support to each other.

"We always get the executive summary", said one participant from Ethiopia, during the TLP OA international conference, (June 2012)."

The level of transparency is a matter of negotiation. Not all internal organisational issues have to be part of the public domain. Some financial and human resources issues may, for example, be left out of the OA. They can be discussed informally, but excluded from formal documentation. Clear agreement on issues of communication, both internal (inward accountability), as well as communications to key stakeholders and other partners (outward accountability) are vital when agreeing on doing an OA exercise. The guiding principle is to co-determine the minimal level of transparency necessary and acceptable for both partners in order to continue the cooperation. The facilitator should play an important role in helping to negotiate a satisfactory agreement which hopefully lays a solid foundation for future improvements.

In the TLP we heard an interesting story about negotiations between a Cambodian capacity development organisation (VBNK) and ICCO, which happened in 2004. VBNK was asked to conduct a series of assessments of ICCO's Cambodian partners. It was ICCO's intention to support follow-up activities, and to further strengthen capacities of their Cambodian partners based on the outcomes of the OAs. After discussions among VBNK and ICCO on best design, it was agreed a holistic approach would be adopted where OA and OD processes of all targeted partners would be addressed in one integrated project. This was easier said than done. Going into the detailed design of the project raised various concerns which were brought to the table by all three parties, linked to issues of trust, accountability and desired levels of transparency. They all agreed that these needed addressing first. Negotiations followed, which eventually led to an interesting set of 'rules of engagement' between the three parties, namely:

- partner participation would be voluntary, with a clear message from ICCO that there would be no detrimental judgement or impact for any partner not wishing to participate.
- Detailed information from the assessments, findings and priority issues, would only be shared with the partner (and not with ICCO).
- VBNK would prepare a consolidated, anonymous summary of the assessments for ICCO.
- VBNK's ongoing reporting to ICCO would be at project level only.
- VBNK would only talk to ICCO about details in the event of any breakdown of the work process with a partner.

*For more information on this experience see full report at
<http://www.vbnk.org/uploads/VBNKdocs/Partnering%20for%20Change%202008%20Eng.pdf>*

An open and transparent partnership takes time and positive experiences to develop. As mentioned under core question 3, an OA can be instrumental to relationship building. At the same time, conducting an OA when relationships are not yet sufficiently transparent is not likely to yield valuable information, nor induce learning and organisational development. Objective, scope and depth of the OA are crucial topics in the initial dialogue between partners. To invest in a process in which activities that enhance gradual learning from each others' organisations are planned, may be the wisest course of action and most likely to build the relationship between partners. Carrying out peer-OA reviews, as described in the green box on p 40, core question 4 is an example of such a process.

Accountability

Whether operating from the North or the South, all NGOs are accountable to those who provide the inputs (donors), and to those who benefit from the outputs (public, beneficiaries, stakeholders or intermediary organisation). Donors need to know if their money is well spent, and if the beneficiaries and public are interested in the services offered and/or received. Ideally these interests coincide. However, too much attention on outputs and activities purely to justify to the donor what the organisation has done with their money, may jeopardise the true effectiveness and quality of its services to beneficiaries. Subsequently, the contents and importance between upward and downward accountability might become unbalanced. The figure below shows 4 key dimensions of accountability:



In our opinion, the OA and OD processes link these four dimensions of accountability. Working towards improved capacities enhances the organisation's performance and services towards its beneficiaries. When all the main stakeholders agree on the performance that is desired, the OA/OD process will ensure that all interests will be taken into account. A complicating factor may be that in strong hierarchical and less democratic societies, both inward and downward accountability are less common. During OA processes, this may become evident in a low level or complete lack of involvement by non-managerial staff and final beneficiaries.

"Particularly, when discussing the C: 'to adapt and self renew' we looked at the preconditions for learning (leading to adaptation/renewal). We spoke about issues of hierarchy and power versus openness, room for experiment and failure, room for (constructive) criticism of the superiors' decisions and policy. Discussing these topics with partners turned out to be both tricky and enlightening, and led to hilarious moments in the exchange of views."

Source: ReK learning report TLP OA

Fulfilling the donor's report demands is the recipient organisation's burden. For example, the MFS II subsidy framework has led to many discussions on how to align timeliness and reliability of OA base-line results with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' requirements. The baseline results were required to be quick, complete and accumulated to country and alliance levels. However, the lack of sufficient time and experiences with the 5C framework did not help make sense of the results at these aggregated levels.

After the first joint learning meeting of the TLP OA (September 2011), Jenny Pearson, international reference person to the TLP, wrote: "What caught my attention? The impact of the government's decision about using the 5C framework. This has prompted a wide range of responses within Dutch development organisations and from the sector as a whole. It seems that every conversation, whatever its starting point, inevitably arrives at the 5C framework as everyone struggles to work out how to introduce it to all their partners, and to use it in their assessment processes".

Partner organisations and contexts are too different from each other to provide proper aggregated information. And demands from other donors may increase the danger of parallel systems. The recipient Northern Alliances will need to negotiate with the donor on how best to proceed with the OA/OD process, taking into account both the donor's and their partners' interests.

The M&E requirements within the MFS government programme demanded that in the first quarter of 2011, baseline studies (OAs) would be carried out of all participating Southern partner organisations. This condition, as set by the back-donor, raised various concerns within the TEA alliance. Firstly, it was discussed that the effects of doing the OA amongst their large variety of partners in South East Asia, would be very limited if no immediate follow-up could be given to related capacity building activities. They realised that TEA alliance would simply not have the capacity to support all these partner OD processes, in the same period of time. Besides, TEA alliance anticipated that conducting the baselines with the use of a 'new' tool, being the 5C framework, would bring many lessons and would need on-going reflection amongst the TEA alliance partners, local facilitators and the various local partners. In order to build on and improve the OA approach, it was key to provide spaces for learning and reflection on the TEA OA approach and tool. Based on these arguments, TEA alliance negotiated with the government to carry out the baseline OAs alongside a designed learning approach, which allowed for a solid step-by-step development and implementation of OAs amongst partners over a longer period of time.

Source: Learning report TEA Alliance

Similarly, the same dynamics will play a role when a (group of) Southern partner organisations have a donor relation with a Northern NGO. These dynamics go further than merely agreeing and signing a contract; especially in these international relations, mutual trust is as important as the signature.

Concluding part two

In this second part, we have shared our answers and insights into our central learning question.

How can organisational assessment processes and instruments be developed and used in such a way that they facilitate on-going and endogenous organisational and institutional development (of both Northern and Southern organisations), and make the processes transparent?

We have found that OA is really a process of understanding how an organisation is functioning and how to design change interventions. OA is a capacity enhancement and learning exercise in itself, in which both internal and external stakeholders' views are crucial.

We have recognised four main reasons for carrying out OA with CSOs, and these are not easily integrated even though it seems preferable to do so. The reasons behind an OA exercise influence the findings and the usefulness of the results.

We looked at many aspects of our involvement in OAs as NNGOs, and found that if done well, the OA is a learning process for all involved. It is a process that has the potential to create better understanding, to stimulate more equal and long lasting partnership relations, and create solid foundations for new learning opportunities that might lead to even broader societal change processes.

We have learned a lot experimenting with selecting, adapting and using different OA tools. We understand that as organisations are not static, OA tools must be functional, serving the OA purpose, intervention strategy, context and mutual goals of both the NNGO and Southern partner organisation involved. We learned that it is not the tool itself, but the intervention that sets the OA, and subsequently the OD process, in motion. We found the 5C framework to be an approach for dialogue and reflection, which has helped us to better understand ourselves and our partner organisations and conclude that it is well suited for the development sector. We believe that the choice of a tool needs to be understood and communicated between all stakeholders, and be suitable for the jointly envisioned process. And we have learned a lot on the specific aspects of quantitative scoring.

Effective facilitation requires specific knowledge of management and organisation, but also on the OA processes: being flexible, culturally sensitive, respectful of organisational values and able to create an enabling environment for dialogue. Moreover, we put great emphasis on being very clear to all stakeholders on when and how to involve OA/OD facilitation expertise.

We now know that involving a wide spectrum of staff and external stakeholders in an OA is important so that organisational learning really takes place. We found the Appreciative Inquiry (AI) approach a motivating approach to conducting OAs, as it focuses on increasing what an organisation does well rather than on its weaker aspects. This led us to think more about the use of OA findings and about change readiness. We found that sometimes it is better to keep 'audit' types of assessments separate from assessments that focus on learning and organisational improvements.

We have become more aware of inter-cultural differences concerning learning and mutual understanding of how the OA and OD process might best be managed and monitored. And we realise that recognition of and communication on the different ideas and perceptions of these essential concepts is crucial.

This is also very true for the issue of transparency. Based on our experiences, we advocate for as much openness as possible. Conducting an OA when relationships are not yet sufficiently transparent is not likely to yield valuable

information, nor induce learning or organisational development. We have learned that there is a need to link the various dimensions of accountability beyond our own requirements to our back-donors.

Our conclusion is that when taking the above aspects into real consideration and dialogue, OAs have enormous potential to promote learning and facilitate on-going, endogenous organisational and institutional development for both Northern and Southern partner organisations.

PART THREE

Practice sheets

Introduction to the practice sheets

Before presenting the 16 most important lessons we learned during the 20 month long TLP OA, part three sketches the context in which the TLP took place and traces the development of the questions which framed our process.

Context

There were three important developments (planned and unplanned), which came together in the TLP OA:

- 1 This TLP was initiated by PSO member organisations which had been involved in OAs with Southern partner organisations for many years. The existing OA tools had seemed helpful to us during that time. However we had grown dissatisfied, realising we were caught up in a game, a ritual dance with our Southern partner organisations. Completing the OA formats seemed to be an end in itself and not a means to further strengthen organisational capacities, which was, after all, our key intention. Our dominant mind set, as NNGOs, was that OA automatically leads to OD. We all asked ourselves the question: If we assume that OAs should lead to OD, but do not see that in our practice, what do we need to learn about carrying out OAs to ensure the OA findings do indeed lead to OD?
- 2 At the same time, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign affairs required all MFSII organisations to carry out baseline studies with their Southern partner organisations. These baselines are to be repeated after four years, to ascertain whether the financial resources were well spent. Furthermore, the MFS II organisations were required to report on the baseline study findings quantitatively, and aggregate the findings at higher aggregation levels.
- 3 The Ministry also introduced the 5C framework, which included abstract indicators to be used in the baseline reports. The NNGOs had to familiarise themselves with this model, hence we included the 5C framework in the TLP OA. We asked ourselves questions such as: How does the model work, what's the background and how can we use it in our learning process on OA? And more importantly, do we have to integrate the OCA tool in the 5C framework or the other way around?

Shifting questions

Our learning questions changed during the course of the TLP. In the beginning we asked:

- How can we explore strengths and weaknesses with our partners in order to support the capacity needed to implement school based programmes?
- Is it possible for us to develop a standard tool to assess Southern partner organisations which are implementing school based programmes?

Some questions touched much more on the complexity of the OA/OD process, for example:

- Taking into account the complex environment in which Southern partner organisations are working, how can we ensure that the OA tools are adopted and adjusted by us and the Southern partner organisation?

Some questions focused on the OA process from a different angle, for example, from a network perspective:

- How can these OA methods and instruments be implemented by organisations and alliances in such a way that it gives energy and inspires further organisational development and institutional strengthening of both Southern partner organisations and their networks?

Our questions began to change right from the start of the TLP, and throughout the subsequent TLP meetings and workshops in which they were discussed. The many 'how' questions changed as the process of getting to know the 5C framework deepened. Finally, this led to a learning process that can be summarised as follows:

From a focus on 'how' questions and a search for the one and only model or instrument, the participants of the TLP discovered that the essence of their question was: 'Why would we actually want to carry out OAs with our partners, if not obliged to by the Ministry?' And the answer to that question was: 'To make the world a little more beautiful and better, driven by ideas about equity and equality and a sincere belief in the OA-OD cycle, and the willingness of all staff in the organisations to keep that cycle turning'.

Our collective insight was that for an NNGO to show up at their Southern partner organisation with a scoring list, is not acceptable. Instead, we should be an interested stakeholder and partner, willing to enter into conversation with an appreciative, reflective and investigative attitude. We should be willing to discuss the ambitions of the Southern partner organisation, with the 5C framework in mind. This way, we could also learn what our role should be in supporting or facilitating the OD process. So we started facilitating participatory workshops and experimented with different approaches. A lot was learned during the pilots, and we all got more and more excited and appreciative of the possibilities within the 5C framework. After some time, we realised that the hard data and figures needed in donor-recipient relations, were still lacking. Furthermore, an important new learning question emerged: How can we continue with all the good stuff coming out of the pilots and at the same time collect the required quantitative data?

The lessons present here in part three, surfaced within this background. We have divided our learning into four categories, even though the lessons and processes were closely interlinked and did not occur in any chronological order. These categories are: the preparatory phase of OA; tool selection and the effects of scoring; implementation; and follow up.

Two lessons on the **preparatory phase of OA**, talking about questions that you may ask yourself right from the start

- Ownership; the process is mine
- Balancing participation and clarity

Five lessons on aspects related to OA tool selection and the **effects of quantitative scores**

- Tool selection
- Scoring: the scores went down this year
- Measuring the 5C framework
- The struggle for scores
- Overcoming ambivalence

Six lessons on issues that arise during **implementation** of OA

- Positive aspects of power
- The donor and partner role of the NNGO
- Who is in the lead? On leadership
- To trust or not to trust
- Learning in cross cultural settings
- Facilitation

Three lessons on **follow up** after the OA.

- How are we doing? From OA to OD
- Is no news good news? On the on-going process
- Change readiness

Lesson 1 How are we doing?

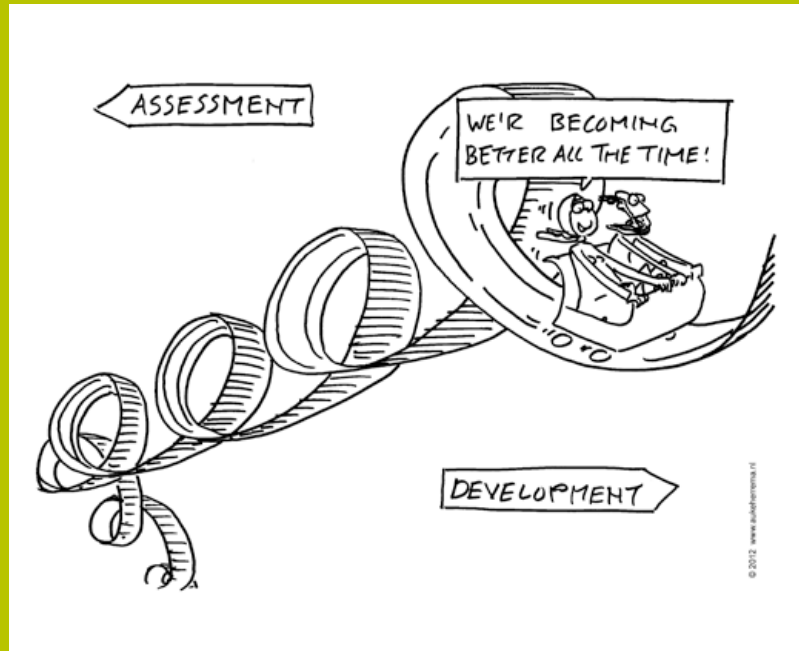
The role of OA in OD

THE PRACTICE

The regular practice of organisational assessment (OA) is that northern NGOs work with southern NGOs in performing the OA, after which a development plan is made. These assessments are often conditional for subsequent funding. However, this practice does not coincide with the day-to-day realities of organisational change. OA does not necessarily precede organisation development (OD).

NGOs, whether Southern and Northern based, are in a constant process of organisational change. Some NGOs move faster than others. In this case, an OA serves as a regular progress check. However, when the objective of the OA is a funding check, the OA can easily be performed separately. The drawback will be less ownership and some reluctance to being open, which can hardly be avoided. A different course of action is needed when the objective is organisational improvement when conditions like OD acceptance, an open culture and leadership support come into play.

In the reality of organisational life, informal assessments happen all the time, e.g. in smaller interest groups or in the confines of a certain organisational level, the organisation's canteen or smoking pit are important places to acquire



THE QUESTION

How do we make OA an integral part of organisational improvements? An OA phase separated from the normal day-to-day improvement activities carries the risk of making this phase too 'heavy'. Possibly we should pay less attention to this element in the OD process and just make sure that we regularly check improvements and reflect on where we stand. Improving organisational performance is an iterative process of acting and learning.

For this iterative process to work, we need an organisational culture that accepts, or even rewards, a reflective and assessing attitude, both within and outside the organisation's boundaries. It may be feasible to have an internal dialogue about the organisation, it gets threatening when we start asking other stakeholders for their opinions about the organisation, like clients and partners.

THE LESSONS

Create OAs as a regular check in the OD process. The check should not be seen as something special and you should not place too much emphasis on it. If OD is approached as a normal process of action learning, the assessment will become a recurrent step in a larger cycle of events. Sometimes this step will take more time (e.g. a workshop), sometimes less (just a meeting after monitoring information comes in).

assessment information. However, working towards a joint and common assessment is harder. The joint assessments between northern and southern NGOs usually do not go beyond programme assessments, without looking at the underlying organisational mechanisms. We put a lot of effort into how to do a good job, but too little into how we organise ourselves to improve this job and too little into deciding to do a completely different job.

We need to reflect on the way we organise ourselves, on how we are doing, in order to draw some conclusions and create ideas on how to continue. The challenge is not only to find the time to do this. The challenge is also to create an environment in which we openly question the formal and informal processes and structures that govern our organisation.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Is no news good news?
- Role of the NNGO
- Change readiness

All organisations are in a state of flux which will result in them becoming better or worse performers. What is more, most members in the organisation, whether consciously or not, have opinions about 'how we are doing'. This is an entry point for organisational change. Using an 'appreciative' approach starts from where the organisation is now and what it has achieved to date. The obligatory 'assessment checklists' divert the attention to a gap approach that is likely to frustrate both management and staff.

Working on OD processes requires a firm commitment from the top. Although it is not really necessary for the top to initiate the OD process themselves, the top does need to be involved when the process becomes inter-organisational – like when Northern and Southern NGOs collaborate. However, it does not make much sense to have an OD process started if the organisation's management is not willing to reflect.

OD that takes account of the wider environment – clients, markets, economy, partner networks, etc. – are more effective. During the assessment phase of this process, a multi-stakeholder dialogue (joint or separate) has been shown to be helpful when making decisions on how to continue developing the organisation.

PRACTICAL TIPS

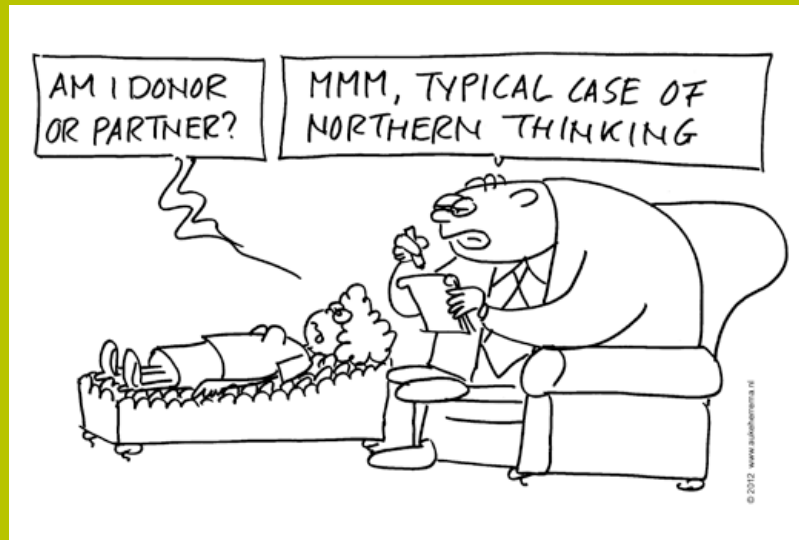
- If the OA is used as a funding condition, be clear about that and do not use that as an entry point for organisational change.
- If OA is used with an OD objective, delete OA from your vocabulary and work on the basis of an OD approach that combines action, reflection and learning.
- In most cultures managers are key to making the OD cycle run, make sure they are on board.
- When Northern and Southern organisations both subject themselves to internal assessments and exchange results, collaboration between the two will improve

Lesson 2 The donor and partner role of the Northern NGO

THE PRACTICE

Many Northern NGOs (NNGO) facilitate the OA processes with their partners

Eva works for a small NGO and, although it is based in the Netherlands, she still spends a lot of time in the field, visiting Southern partner organisations in her capacity of thematic specialist. The partners, which are also rather small NGOs, appreciate these visits and the support given by Eva. The funding from Eva's NGO is also very important for them. Based on her experience and knowledge she has concluded that there are promising opportunities for cooperation among the partners. In connection with the coming subsidy programme Eva's NGO needs to perform a series of OAs as baseline studies for their support programme. She decides to use the 5 Capabilities framework because this model will clearly identify the need for increased cooperation, i.e. 'the capability to relate and attract resources'. She carries out the baseline study herself, here for she designs and facilitates a workshop with her partners. It starts very well but, somewhere during the process, the composition of the group of participants changes and some key staff from the partner organisation fail to return on the second day. The enthusiasm, the openness and creativity are gone. Eva does not understand what is happening and the reasons given



THE QUESTION

Is the role that you choose as NNGO really suited to you and does it match who you are and what you want to be in the relationship with your Southern partner? Does the Southern partner organisation have any influence on this?

Eva has two roles to play. She is a donor and a partner. Emphasising either one of them when interacting with partners will have a particular effect. Some of these effects are expected, while others are not. Both expected and unexpected effects may positively or negatively influence your relationship, especially when this role is different from the one your partners expect from you. So you need to be careful! Especially in the context of the sometimes ambiguous North-South relations, situations between donors and partners can become a little tense. For instance, when compliance with a donor request has funding implications, it may also have implications for mutual relationships. Consequently, role transparency is advised. Different skills and expertise are required for each role. To design a workshop or to facilitate an OA process requires a particular expertise. There is a wide variation in the expertise and skills required to interview staff members using a pre-coded OCA questionnaire or to facilitate a reflective, investigative dialogue on essential organisational questions. In the example described above, Eva was sincere in her belief that cooperation in the South is important for her partners and this belief was strengthened by the concept of the 5C framework. Her reasoning was that if her partners apply the 5C framework, they will discover the importance of cooperation, and it will all be a piece of cake!

to her are not very clear. They conclude the workshop and she returns home disappointed. Consultations with her colleagues from the NNGO do not help her to understand the situation so she decides to call one of the partner organisation's staff members, someone she is very close to. The call takes time and a lot of energy, but finally they manage to understand each other. According to her partner, the turning point in the process was Eva's powerful plea for cooperation with other NGOs. They all experienced this as an obligation they had to comply with. Although they think it might be a good idea, and small-scale initiatives have already started, her intervention was seen and interpreted as her pushing a hidden agenda. The team was wondering why Eva had stressed this point so much and why they had not talked about it during her regular visits. Eva fears that rebuilding the relationship with this partner may take some time.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- How are we doing?
- Is no news good news?
- Change readiness

However she was unaware that, during the workshop, her donor role was more prevalent than her partner role that promotes an open discussion among colleagues about the pros, cons, possibilities, changes, and difficulties of cooperation. Neither did she believe it necessary to explain her preference for South-South cooperation in advance. In her enthusiasm, and maybe unintentionally, she changed the emphasis from the one facilitating a dialogue to one that made her come across as a 'representative from the donor with a strong own opinion'.

THE LESSON

Clarity and openness about the various roles you play improves the cooperation process.

The North-South relationship is complicated. Many aspects need technical and relational attention. A representative from an NNGO is both a donor and a partner to your Southern partner organisation. Either way, you may see the partner organisation as a partner. However, this might not be their perception, as you are the one who came to them to carry out an OA exercise.

In addition, you have been involved with your partner for a long period, you know them personally as well as their organisation, and you have formed your own opinions about them. This prior knowledge and these perceptions may complicate the OA process, and be seen as an obstacle by the Southern partner. The relationship may influence the dialogue, positively in the sense that you know and acknowledge each others situation, and negatively because you may want to avoid conflicting discussions. Moreover, the organisation has come to know you in a particular role or function. If you suddenly change into a different role or function this will cause confusion and is not understood nor easily agreed with.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be aware that you have a choice to make, and that every choice will have an impact. Assess these effects and consider the options well.
- Be clear and transparent about your roles and position in the OA process. Be clear about possible dilemmas between these roles.
- Regularly check how your partner perceives you. This might change over time, especially when you have to switch roles during a workshop.
- Never go home without addressing any problems that arise. You may not be able to solve these problems, but you can show your concern. Besides having a role and a function, you are also someone who is interested in maintaining good relationships.

Lesson 3 Is no news good news? On the on-going process

THE PRACTICE

After we had conducted the organisational assessment with our partners in Asia we drafted the reports, sent them to our partners and they gave their consent to finalize the reports. Thereafter, we waited for the organisations to provide proper follow-up based on the recommendations. At least, that is what we expected them to do because why would we have carried out the assessments other than to enable the organisation to continue progressing? However, despite them seeming so interested when we conducted the assessment, we heard nothing from them for months! How could we address this silence and start the discussion about progress being made? How could we ensure an on-going process of monitoring and planning based on the organisational assessment?



THE QUESTION

How can we ensure that follow-up is provided to the OA?

The tension is that it actually seems to be 'not done' to take the initiative as a Northern NGO and go too far in emphasising the follow-up to the OA. It is also true that, if no initiative is taken, the effect of the OA may flounder and never result in OD.

THE LESSONS

Before addressing the question it is important to find out how the assessment was implemented. Who took the initiative for the assessment, and were the expectations clear? Were the participants in the OA involved in joint sense-making, relating the analysis of information to the vision and objectives of the organisation? Were there also actions planned for further follow-up? This may help clarify whether the organisation is just too busy with other priorities and failed to communicate about the progress, or whether the organisation may have experienced some internal resistance towards the introduction and objective of the assessment.

At the end of the day the assessed organisation should be fully convinced that the points that were raised in the assessment are relevant to them and need follow-up. This may take time and the Northern NGO may propose providing assistance during that process. It is no more than natural to show interest and ask what follow-up has been provided. There may good reasons for not doing this immediately. Change is mostly not a mechanical process, although the OA/OD tools and approach

sometimes seem to support that illusion. Change happens all the time, whether planned or unplanned. The management agenda of Southern NGOs is often filled with topics that are urgent, but that does not mean that they feel that other topics are unimportant.

One successful approach is to integrate the discussion on the progress of the organisational development into regular communication between the Northern and Southern NGOs. This can be done by Skype calls, emails, phone calls, or a field visit. In the event that a couple of Southern partners have completed the OA process, another very effective method is to gather them together for a face-to-face meeting, or peer exposure visits. If face-to-face meetings are not possible, another option is webinars.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- How are we doing, the role of OA in OD
- Role of the NNGO
- Change readiness

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Personal and face-to-face contact during the assessment process is helpful to acquire a proper insight into how relevant the assessment is or has been for the Southern partner.
- An OA should not only entail the collection of information and its analysis, but also include joint sense-making and action planning.
- If you have made agreements during the assessment itself, it is definitely helpful and legitimate to seek contact.
- Use a business-like attitude when it comes to communication about the follow-up on the assessment. The fact that the Southern partner does not communicate about progress, may not indicate that they do not find it important.
- There are numerous ways to communicate that do not take too much time, for example using Skype, phone or email.
- When Southern partners have gone through a similar assessment process, it is stimulating for them to learn from each other and follow each other's progress. This balances the power divide between the Northern and Southern partners. Besides that, it generates insights because they will have had similar experiences and may encourage them to take new initiatives they may not previously have considered.

Lesson 4 Positive aspects of power in organisational assessments

THE PRACTICE

In our work as development practitioners, the word POWER often has a negative undertone. We fear power, we do not openly discuss power, we stay clear of such sensitive issues and, above all, we try to ensure that we do not force and exercise power on our Southern partners. We aim to achieve equal relationships based on trust and mutual understanding in the processes we set up and implement with our Southern partners.

However, reality is more complex. Power has many dimensions and can take on many different forms. Power imbalances are present at all levels, between individuals and organisations, between different levels within organisations, between males and females. Cultural differences, communication and leadership are closely associated with power and are important aspects to consider. Power dimensions are not always clear and visible and are hardly ever spoken about openly. Leaders (directors or management team members) have power over their staff and their organisations. When leaders do something that is not appreciated by others it is labelled as power over. When they use their 'power to', this is labelled as leadership. Similarly, as a Northern NGO, you are in charge of financial resources and are thought to have the required technical expertise.



THE QUESTION

In our organisational assessment practices we have experienced how power can also be used as a positive flow of energy, despite its negative connotations. We should not be blind to these forces of power but instead use them to our benefit. An OA process works best when it really helps the organisation to improve itself. In this process, formal and informal leaders can use their powers to inspire and legitimate activities, ensure the relevance and importance of activities within the organisation, make time and resources available, create opportunities to make things happen and, above all, take their people and peers along in the process. One example of such leaders exercising their power to ensure for effective OA processes is when NNGOs take the initiative in the context of an OA and use their power to convince the SNGO to participate in the OA.

THE LESSON

When things need to be done, the same priority and urgency is not always displayed by those who have to do these things and that can cause resistance and delays. Power and influence can force and create an enabling environment.

An example

A network organisation in the Philippines started working on the OA processes by calling all its higher management staff together. Soon it became clear that the OA process required implementation at all levels, namely top level management, middle management and on the shop floor. At each level the OAs were facilitated by people's peers, or informal leaders. This resulted in real discussions on values, drivers and meanings

of the network organisations and it also started on-going learning processes. What really worked in this network was that all the leaders were involved in the process and they had a real willingness and commitment to take time and free up resources. They put their trust in the people and in the process.

Another example

An inspirational director from Colombia strongly advocated the use of the 5C framework to ensure that the OA process is participative and reflective and stimulates learning. She managed to inspire her own organisation and the 8 other organisations that are part of their regional alliance.

Yet another example

A Northern NGO engaged in OA processes with a number of Southern Partners. Early in the process they realized that OA processes would require follow-up. They committed resources to this follow up right from the start. They were very clear on this commitment to their Southern partners. These financial resources would be made available based on identified needs and OA results.

These examples show how inspirational leaders use their power to empower others, their people and organisations. Instead of exercising power over, they gave power to and in this manner ensured that people were taken on board.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Leadership
- Trust
- Role of the NNGO

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Allow local leaders to spearhead the processes.
- Empower those that are involved.
- Use your power positively to get things done and to get them done in time.
- Do not be afraid of power.
- Be aware that you have power, even if you are pursuing equality and partnership.

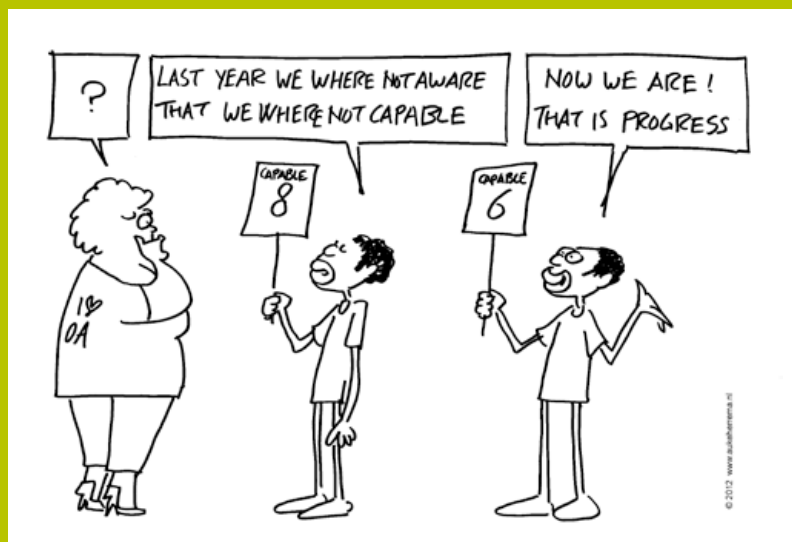
Lesson 5

Scores went down since last year!

Score to show progress of Organisational Development in terms of the 5Cs

THE PRACTICE

Robbie Williams' song 'Morning Sun' starts with the sentence, 'How do you rate the morning sun?' Most of us would agree it is tricky to do this. Einstein said 'Not everything that matters can be counted and not everything that can be counted, matters'. It is clear that, as soon as we talk about feelings and emotions we feel uneasy, and rightly so, because figures can never do any justice to our multi-faceted social and emotional reality. On the other hand, scoring provides a sense of grip and a scale which can help us to see progress and regression. Donors and managers also love it as it gives them a quick view of how things stand and how things have developed over time. So the question is what exactly is the problem about scoring the 5 capabilities of the 5C model?



THE QUESTIONS

Which problems do we encounter when we try to acquire an insight into progress by comparing scores over time?

THE LESSONS

The 5C model is an organic model that is violated by separating five organic parts (the capabilities) and by looking at them in isolation. The capabilities then need to be separated into parts again (the pointers) which can then be scored. This is really like diagnosing an elephant by first assessing its body parts (trunk, ears, heart, etc.) in isolation and then scoring the functioning of the different cells these body parts exist of. The problem with analysing 'the parts of the parts' in this way, is that the people involved in the assessment easily lose the overview of the whole.

When, in spite of the above problem, scoring is still carried out in order to get a grip on how the current situation is judged and whether or not progress is being made. As people in an organisation acquire more insights into what the capabilities really entail as a result of capacity development efforts, they experience an interesting period of growth which consists of four phases. These phases are: 1) We are not aware of what we are not capable of; 2) We are aware of what we are not capable of; 3) We are not aware that we are capable 4) We are aware that we are capable;. As peoples' 'awareness and capabilities' develop, they may very well assign themselves lower scores as they become more aware of their shortcomings. While we all agree it is good thing when the self-knowledge of people and organisations grows, the scores people and

organisations give themselves as regards their capabilities decrease and this seems to be evidence of regression whereas there really has been progress.

We could argue that we can still assign scores to show progress, as long as we explain why scores go up and down and as long as we do not associate lower scores necessarily with bad progress. However, this is extremely difficult and creates real confusion. It is like telling people that a green ball should be called red in certain circumstances, and that just does not work.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Tool selection
- Overcoming ambivalence
- Indicators to measure the 5C
- Struggle for scores

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Do not split up capabilities and pointers and then score the pointers as this is a working method that does not do justice to the organic nature of the 5C framework.
- Be aware that, if you compare scores over time, the score changes only reflect changes in people's perception and do not say anything about 'real progress'.
- Make the qualitative analysis of progress the method for assessing positive and/or negative changes in organisational development.
- If you do decide to score anyway, tell participants in advance that lower scores are not necessarily evidence of regression and that higher scores are not necessarily evidence of progress. Explain that people's scores will go down as their self-knowledge grows and also explain that more self-knowledge is a sign of progress.

Lesson 6

Overcoming tool seeking behaviour

THE PRACTICE

Martin is called in by his manager. "We've got to do some organizational assessments with our partner organizations and we need to use the five core capabilities. Can you design an instrument and make sure this happens?" This is the kind of job Martin really likes. He has a large network of peers, has been involved in earlier organizational scans, knows the partners' realities and loves creating formats that are clear and understandable. After acquiring some examples he deliberates with a number of key partner organizations and, based on their inputs, chooses an instrument and develops the necessary formats. Management accepts the proposal and the process continues. The response from the partners is less enthusiastic than Martin had hoped for. There were complaints that the process and the instrument were too restrictive and the whole process had been a tick box exercise for compliance rather than a learning experience.



THE QUESTION



How can suitable and appropriate tools and instruments be chosen for organizational assessment?

Martin instinctively decided to choose an instrument and a format and the result was that the organizations felt they were being restricted and forced into small boxes. Martin probably did not assess whether the chosen instrument actually matched the approach that he was asked to use, namely the core capabilities approach.

Martin could have left the choice of instruments and formats to each partner organization and just provide guidance on the methodology to be used, the actors to be involved, the processes to be used and the options for instruments and tools. This would have increased the degrees of freedom for those involved in the organizational assessments. A further option for Martin would have been to ensure a common understanding of the approach and the ideas behind the approach. He could have provided guidance to his partner organizations on different methodologies and instruments and formats, thereby helping his partners to make relevant choices for their specific situations.

One option Martin did not have, but other Martins might have, is to leave the approach open and discuss the paradigm or philosophy to be used, or the wider purpose for which organizational assessments are performed. A result-based management paradigm could have led Martin to opt for audit-like approaches and a reflective practice paradigm might have led him to opt for reflexive approaches.

THE LESSONS

The freedom to make appropriate choices at operational level is more important than the factors and the process of selection. For his next assignment Martin would benefit more from actually being allowed to select the approach to organizational assessment and the subsequent methodologies, instruments and formats, than from a perfectly equitable selection process that produces degrees of freedom only at the level of the font size to be used to fill the chosen formats.

Then Martin would, in turn, be able to help his partners more effectively by discussing the main objective of the exercise and by providing guidance on how to make appropriate choices as regards approaches, methodologies, instruments and formats for organizational assessments. During the guidance process it is very important for Martin and his partners to establish whether the selected instruments indeed fit in with the approach and whether the selected approach indeed fits in with the paradigm under which it operates. It is also important to realize that choices can be made at each level different.

It could be that Martin's biggest struggle will be his struggle to overcome his own preference for clear-cut tools and formats. In other words: to overcome his own tool-seeking behaviour.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Scores went down
- Overcoming ambivalence
- Indicators to measure the 5C
- Struggle for scores

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Keep the freedom for selection at the operational level as high as possible in the hierarchy from paradigm, approach, methodology, instrument and format.
- Match the choice for methodologies and instruments to the needs and situations in which the organizational assessment is performed. However, make sure as well that they match the approach and paradigm under which they operate.
- Realize that, if you choose a methodology or an instrument, the approach and paradigm come with it and they have implications for the outcomes of the exercise.
- Resist the temptation to rush into using instruments, tools and formats, even if you are allergic to ambiguity.

Lesson 7 To trust or not to trust? North-south relationships in OA/OD

THE PRACTICE

In NGO partnerships it is important to be open and pay attention to trust .

Anne works for a Dutch NGO and wants to help improve the situation of vulnerable people. She enthusiastically started the thematic learning programme on organisational assessment (OA). Soon she found that the partner organisations she was working with had all kinds of questions and doubts about the objectives of the OA programme. Over time Anne found that the reluctance was due to lack of trust in the motives of the Dutch NGO. She devoted time to sharing motives and views of the persons and organisations involved with the process as well as to acknowledging the value and views of her partner organisations. Such processes turned out to take time which Anne did not really have because of her high workload and the vast number of issues that needed to be addressed. Nevertheless, Anne learned about the importance of active attention to trust that needs to underpin a partnership and a helpful, open and encouraging attitude, both at the start of the programme and throughout the OA – OD process. Based on our experiences we, as NNGOs, recognise the crucial importance of building and maintaining trust prior to, and during, OA/OD processes. This trust relates to different levels, for example between northern and



THE QUESTION

Which ingredients are necessary to create and maintain trust?

Crucial ingredients for the building and maintaining of trust are sharing, acknowledgement and time.

Sharing motives and values contributes to understanding and ownership and, with that, to trust.

The organisation that initiates the OA/OD influences the different motives. Organisations and people will feel more involved in the joint process if they share their motives for performing an OA/OD. Equally, an important aspect of trust is acknowledgement. When organisations or people feel that their own views and experience are appreciated and that their own processes are valuable, they feel confident and involved and will also be more inclined to trust the other participants involved. Finally, trust can only be built over time. Trust comes with experiences of working and sharing together and appreciating each other and this requires space and time.

THE LESSON

Trust is a precondition for a successful OA

There has to be a realisation that actively building and maintaining trust is an important ingredient to make an OA-OD process successful. Trust is a precondition for being able to reflect on one's own organisation and the organisations of others, but it also evolves during the process. It needs to be actively addressed in order to be able to maintain, or

southern NGOs, and between people and trust within organisations. When working jointly on an OA/OD process, it is essential to reach a common understanding of what it is that all the organisations involved would like to address and achieve. In such instances trust already plays a role and will remain important during the whole OA-OD process, in which learning together plays a crucial role. Trust is always an important issue when working together, but is even more crucial in the context of OA/OD. OAs have been misused to justify the activities of NGOs and donors. Another crucial point of trust-related OA is that you have to have an open attitude to learn. It is important to find out and understand how southern partners view and experience OAs. Trust does not come naturally. Being open about motives is therefore crucial and can help organisations appreciate the usefulness of an OA and with that have sufficient trust to start the process. One challenge relating to partnership and trust is that of conflicting interests. It is important to be open about this in terms of building and enhancing trust. In relation to this it is important that conflicting interests are dealt with adequately and openly. Besides that it is important to be clear about, and fulfil, expectations.

continue strengthening, this trust. Sharing values and information can contribute to openness and, with that, to trust. By acknowledging the added value of all the organisations involved, people and organisations can appreciate each other and feel more confident. This enhances trust in each other and in the OA – OD process. Every ingredient is important for the dish to be a success. This requires the active involvement, sharing and appreciation of all organisations involved, not only at the beginning, but during the whole process. As a result, it is important to take enough time. In this way, the additional trust will contribute to more openness and more reflection and enhance the capacity of organisations and, with that, improve the programmes that partnering organisations would like to implement successfully.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Positive aspects of power
- Ownership
- Participation
- Facilitation

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Trust is a prerequisite to a successful OA.
- The elements of sharing, acknowledging and time are important when trying to build trust.
- Linking OA to OD from the beginning may change the perception of the process and foster trust.
- It is important to be open about conflicting interests so that, if need be, these can be dealt with adequately and expectations met.
- Trust does not come naturally. It is therefore crucial to be open about motives to help the organisation appreciate the fact that an OA is useful. In this way, there will be a sufficient level of trust to initiate the process.
- Create a good dish together with an appreciation of all the ingredients and, in this way, enhance energy and trust.

Lesson 8

Learning in cross cultural relationships

THE PRACTICE

The NNGO has a learning agenda based on its own concepts of learning

Simon works for a Dutch NGO involved in NGO capacity building. Learning therefore plays a central role in the practice and vision of Simon's organisation. When visiting one of his partner organisations in the south, Simon enthusiastically introduced the idea of carrying out organisational assessment and the concept that this would enhance learning as an organisation. The partner organisation reacted hesitantly. "Why should we focus on learning? We have so many other priorities to work on. Besides that, we know very well what we are doing!" Simon realised that it was important to come to terms first with what it is that the northern and southern organisations would like to work on and why, and possibly find another term to use to describe the process than 'learning'.

NNGOs recognise the importance of learning in order to maintain a process of continuous improvement in their practice. This covers both what they do, how they do it and their reflections on the what and how. Good practice has shown that learning is essential for effective OD and must be included in OD processes. This provided a basis for implementing



THE QUESTION

How can we find out how our partners understand learning so that we can develop a shared understanding of learning?

For any real learning to emerge, either from a review of activities or from specific learning processes, it is essential to understand how learning is understood and practised in the Southern NGO. For example, many organisations in the south have a fixation with training as the source of knowledge and skills for capacity development and it can be tricky to get people to let go of their assumption that training and learning are the same thing. This may be because, in their society, only formal education is recognised as a source of learning.

Any NNGO that wants to engage in a learning partnership first has to ask a wide range of questions in order to understand learning in the local culture. These would include: What is the purpose of learning? Who needs it in this culture? Who in an organisation should be involved? Who or what is valued as a source of learning? How do people learn best? What do they do with what they have learned? Only then can the NNGO go on to ask 'What do we need to learn together?' and 'What will be the most effective way for us to do this?'

THE LESSON

Do not assume that everyone has the same concept of learning, or that everyone learns in the same way.

the learning agenda, in many ways, in partnerships with Southern NGOs.

Different cultures can have very different concepts of learning and value it in different ways. For instance, for some it is only the wisdom handed down from elders that is valued, or from teachers in a formal educational setting. In many societies the notion of an individual or group learning from their own experiences is completely alien. It is not an idea that has any credibility, so there are no practices to support it. Yet it is this idea of learning from experience that is at the heart of good practice in organisational activities like OA and OD.

It is not possible to develop a feasible and shared understanding of learning with a partner until there is real clarity about how everyone involved learns. That means the NNGO representatives have to be able to present a clear set of ideas about their own learning concepts and practices, as well as asking the right questions to establish what the southern partner believes. A process of negotiation is then needed because there needs to be an understanding of perceptions and of the way of working in a learning process. The organisations need to attach the same importance to learning and interpret it in the same way. It is equally important to look at the usefulness of the perception of learning. Another term may perhaps be more suitable, such as professionalisation. Working through such issues will take time and require sensitivity on the part of the NNGO. Without taking that time they risk setting up something that the partner sees as just one more thing they have to do to please the donor, and they will be reluctant about becoming involved in a good spirit of openness and inquiry.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Positive aspects of power
- Role of the NNGO
- Leadership
- Facilitation

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be aware of your own values and assumptions related to learning.
- Take time to explore how people learn in the culture in question, including who or what is valued as a legitimate source of learning, and the different ways of learning.
- Take time to negotiate the purpose and benefits of working on a shared learning agenda.
- Make sure that the southern partner really owns the objectives.
- Be open to types of learning that differ from your own.
- Explore what you want to achieve together and why, both as individual organisations and jointly. Create an understanding of how organisations perceive learning and whether it would be more appropriate to find another term which is a better description .
- If necessary, adjust your vocabulary and attitude.
- Learning is not an objective. It is a way to achieve other aims.

Lesson 9

Balancing participation and clarity

THE PRACTICE

Wouter is a representative from a Dutch NGO and made the following proposal to his Southern partner, "Listen, Oliver, I have a great idea! We have some funding which we can use for capacity development. The only requirement is that we carry out an organisational assessment as a baseline. This will not just be any assessment. The idea will be for you to reflect on your current organisational practices. Please will you join us in this OA process?"

When OA was introduced by Dutch NGOs to Southern partners in 2011, it was clearly an initiative of the Northern partner. The Dutch government encouraged Dutch NGOs to become more involved in capacity development and to use OA as a starting point. It was at that point in time that Wouter, phoned contacts in Uganda, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Georgia and Colombia to present the above proposal. The following is Oliver's story from that point onwards. After some initial hesitation, Oliver started the OA process full of energy. Several Skype calls with his Dutch partner made him feel confident that he was up to the task and he felt inspired by the Dutch NGO which was going to provide a guideline on how he should implement the OA. The idea was for him to report back on the results. As time passed by, the Dutch NGO encouraged Oliver more and more to feel ownership of the OA process and introduce his own



THE QUESTIONS

Participation implies that there is a process initiator and other people who participate in it. Ideally, participatory processes develop in such a way that both parties feel ownership of the process, either throughout the process as a whole, or at some point during the process. However, in the beginning there is often one party that sets the rules, while the others follow. The dilemma in participatory processes is that setting a certain framework might limit the participant's willingness to take the initiative and be creative. The question that rises is: How should you set the rules in such a way that there is space for own initiative and creativity? Should you be clear and precise about boundaries? Should you even set guidelines, or is it better to remain flexible? Although participation requires the participant to assume an active role, at the same time the participant often does not start out as the process owner. How can Oliver become the process owner and participate fully, without crossing the boundaries?

THE LESSONS

Sometimes there seems to be space to move the goalposts and to manoeuvre one way or the other. The OA process is like football. When the ball is kicked over the side-line, but remains in the air, a player is legally allowed to kick it before it touches the ground. We had the same experience with OA. Rules are set, but they are not cast in stone. It seems almost impossible for the Southern partner to understand the extent of these boundaries because the Dutch partner continues to be vague about them and because they have not, in fact, set the rules themselves. This

perspectives. After some time Oliver started to feel uncomfortable because he had followed the guidelines introduced by the Dutch organisation, but it was not exactly what he was looking for. After some discussion, Oliver was given some freedom to adjust the guideline to his local context, and that worked a lot better with his partners. He was delighted. When handing over the results to the Dutch NGO, Oliver received a lot of questions on why he had used a SWOT analysis instead of the 5C framework to assess the organisational capacity of his partners. Oliver felt torn between his freedom to set his own rules and the requirements set by the Dutch partner. He felt disempowered to continue participating enthusiastically in the OA process.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Positive aspects of power
- Role of the NNGO
- Ownership

means that the context in which the Dutch NGOs and Southern NGOs operate determines the level of participation.

Stimulating initiative on the part of SNGOs does help to increase participation. If it is difficult to set the boundaries, it will help to focus on what is possible instead of what is not possible. Defining the framework in which the SNGOs can manipulate according to their own wishes does increase participation.

If partners do not have any questions, you probably have been very clear in your rules. However, be aware that you might also have been overly precise and might have stifled their creativity. This is what happened in a few cases where manuals and guidelines were introduced.

PRACTICAL TIPS

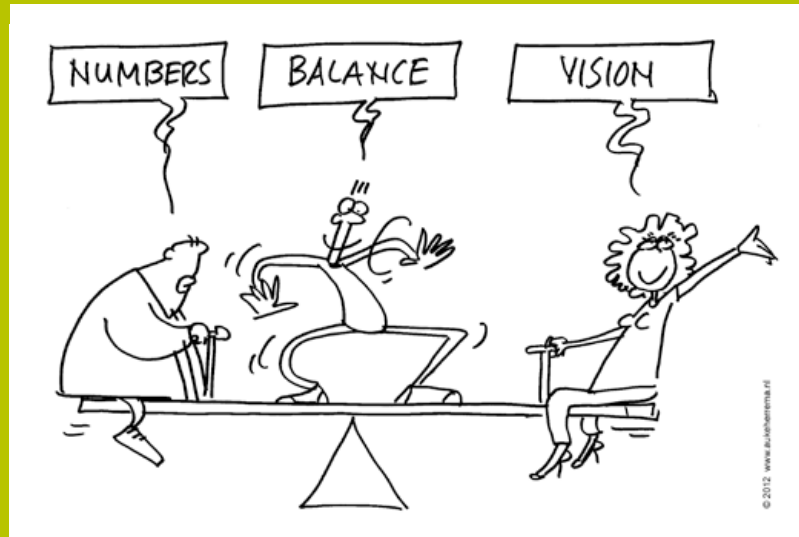
- To increase participation you have to define the playing field for the Southern partner. The NNGO can write a tender in which the goal of the assignment and the requirements (from funding agency and NNGO) are clearly formulated.
- Our advice is only to be really clear about the non-negotiables because the more rules you write down, the less creativity you will encourage.
- Furthermore the tender should be open and flexible and should include a request for the partner to propose how to approach this assignment. Your partner will probably use the original wording to impress you and 'get the tender'. What is more, partners will try to be creative by adding their own ideas and exploit the close relationship they have with you. Your Southern partner will then be responsible for the process, while fulfilling the necessary requirements.
- Participation is increased because ownership is stimulated and trust in your partner is enhanced due to you acknowledging their expertise and creating space for them to contribute.

Lesson 10 Overcoming Ambivalence

Different type of OA

THE PRACTICE

Marjo is a young professional in development cooperation. She recently finished her Master's in Management of Development and she is glad she was able to find work at a medium sized NGO. Her first field visits were exciting experiences but also raised questions. She wanted to engage in open discussions with partner organizations about the direction of their programmes, but felt resistance in the responses she received. She was frequently asked, "But what do you want? What are your requirements and criteria." Upon her return home she felt a bit frustrated. When she shared a particular experience with the financial manager at her organization, he reacted quickly saying, "This organization is not performing at all. We recently carried out an audit which revealed some crucial weaknesses. If they don't improve they will become a liability for our EU contract." Marjo answered by saying, "They seem to be doing terrifically good work, and are truly reaching the poorest of the poor. Can't we help them to improve?" An older colleague commented, "These types of audits are really killing the passion and willingness to take initiative in this organization. It would be much better to take time, help arrange an organizational reflection and stimulate organization improvements from within. Marjo felt confused



THE QUESTIONS

When Marjo reflected on her confusion and discussed her dilemma with colleagues of other Northern NGOs, she recognized this ambivalence in many professionals who work for Northern NGOs and governments. A dilemma is felt between performing an organizational analysis for upward accountability to donors and an endogenous development process. In upward accountability the tangible and measurable things seem to be most important, with more audit-like tools are preferred. In endogenous development processes the emphasis is on the intangible and non-measurable and open reflection tools are more appropriate. Is it a matter of choice or are both valid approaches? Is one approach more important than the other or does it depend on situations and contractual conditions? It is clear that a range of organizational analysis tools exist, of which the audit and the open reflection method are at the extremes of a spectrum. That leads to the question of how the different tools or approaches should be used.

When is an audit-like tool appropriate and what conditions should accompany it? How can more open reflection methods best be applied? In Marjo's case it is clear that different staff members in her organization have different views which seem to contradict each other. The staff do not appear to have reached a joint understanding of how to use the different tools. If communication within the Northern NGO is insufficient, what impact will this have on the Southern partners?

THE LESSONS

Marjo's search for answers caused her to conclude that, when working together, Northern and Southern organizations both have their own

because both reactions seemed valid, but could the two co-exist, and what would the partners think about this?

responsibilities and accountabilities. These can be part of contractual agreements. Their organizations can be analysed at different levels and with different objectives. The analysis may focus on the 'hardware' – systems, procedures – and on the 'software' – vision, drive, relationships. Different tools or approaches are appropriate at different levels. However, using different tools also means having the skills to apply them and the knowledge of their limitations.

Therefore, when analysing an organization, a mix of tools is usually beneficial. However, different people might be needed to use them. It is beneficial for the whole process of organizational development if these different people appreciate the value of other tools and approaches. At times this may be challenging because of the different personalities of an auditor and a facilitator of an open reflection process and because of differing perceptions of a particular organization. Mutual understanding and communication are essential.

As there are always sensitive sides to any assessment, it is very important to know why certain analyses are performed, for what reason, and who will use the outcome. Organizational assessments need to be accompanied by appropriate communication. Although this is already true for your own organization, it is even more so when you want to perform an organizational analysis of another organization, or are invited to do so. After all, an organizational analysis, whether in the form of an audit or an open reflection, is meant to detect and discuss certain failures and weaknesses and lead to improvements. This will be realized only when the people involved are convinced of the need for an OA and are ready to change and improve. This applies both to your own organization and even more to your partner organizations. The more the analysis focuses on the organization's 'software', the more important it becomes that those involved understand and agree with its use.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Good progress
- Tool selection
- Indicators to measure the 5C
- The struggle for scores

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Clearly distinguish the different organizational levels and corresponding needs for analysis in the organization.
- Different tools and different skills are needed for analysing organizational 'hardware' and 'software'.
- Organizational analyses should be embedded in processes with clear conditions and expectations, irrespective of whether this applies to contractual arrangements between different organizations or to longer term (internal) organizational developments.
- Only when people are convinced of the benefit of organizational analyses, will they contribute to useful organizational improvements.

Lesson 11

SMART indicators to measure 5C

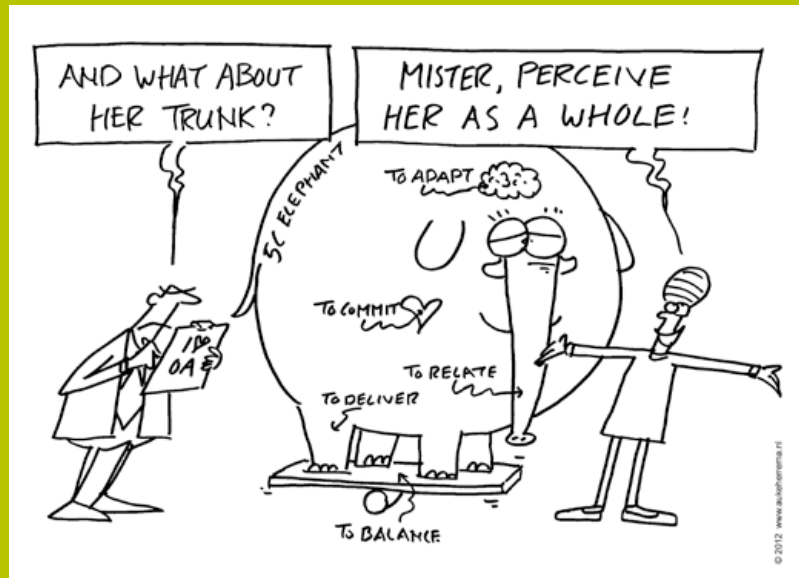
Do not kill the elephant!

THE PRACTICE

Marianne is asked by her manager to use the 5 Capabilities (5C) framework to gain a greater insight into the capacity development of their partner organisations. The organisation Marianne works for has set resources aside to strengthen at least 5 CBOs and NGOs in three countries this year.

Marianne phones her friend Peter who she still knows from college and who now works with the development organisation 'Share'. He tells her that, within the framework of his organisation's practice, the 5C frame has been developed into a tool for 'objective performance measurement'. Peter dislikes the model and the vague 'woolly' descriptions that accompany it.

Marianne is not sure whether she agrees with the issue Peter raises and decides to talk to her friend Jana who comes up with a completely different story about how she experiences the 5C framework in her organisation 'Safe Water for All'. Jana tells her that the 5C frame helps her and her partners to view the organisation as an organic entity in which different parts are strongly interlinked. The approach helps them to keep an eye on the interlinking of the different capabilities that any successful



THE QUESTIONS

What is the strength of the 5C framework and how can an international capacity development facilitator like Marianne use the framework in a way that stimulates and enthuses partners and local facilitators to improve the capacity of local NGOs and CBOs?

THE LESSON

The 5C framework can help to map out where an organisation stands, where it wants to go in the future and it can help to track progress in organisational development. This is only possible if the facilitators accept that the framework needs to be adapted to the reality of the users.

If participants are able to think of metaphors and analogies for the 5Cs, this is evidence that they have taken ownership of the model. Marianne was really excited after she had spent a year experimenting with the model and realised that organisations in Sri Lanka compared the frame to an elephant (which is a highly valued animal in Sri Lanka). Maharabat, from the Sri Lankan partner organisation, told her: "When the elephant (analogy of an organisation) feels good, the different parts of its body (analogy with the 5 capabilities) apparently function and interrelate very well. The elephant needs its trunk to relate to people and to find food, just like organisations need the capability to relate and find resources'. Maharabat kept on explaining how the parts of the elephant could be compared to the capabilities an organisation needs to possess to perform well. When Marianne asked what benefits the assessment of his own organisation with help of this model had generated, he said it had given

organisation must possess. For example, the model shows how leadership influences all those five capabilities. The approach helps when exploring which interventions would have the greatest impact as regards improving the different parts and therefore the performance of the organisation as a whole.

Marianne wonders how she could use the model in a way that does justice to the philosophy that lies behind it.

LINK TO FILM

about the three metaphors

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Good progress
- Tool selection
- Over coming ambivalence
- The struggle for scores

him more insight into their functioning. "I realised, that as long as we do not improve the quality of the leadership in the organisation, the elephant will keep feeling sick and all its body parts will suffer. The five capabilities the organisation needs to possess will not flourish as long as the leadership style in this organisation does not change'.

PRACTICAL TIPS

- If you ever consider using the 5C framework in your practice, you should realize that this model was not designed for 'objective measurement' of organisations' performance of. Instead it was developed to make NGOs and facilitators realise what makes successful organisations tick and what capabilities they possess that make them so successful. It also helps them appreciate how the organisation that is being assessed can acquire and/or improve those capabilities.
- Allow organisations to play with the reference framework and encourage them to think of analogies and metaphors. Make sure they develop the general framework as a frame of reference that they own and cherish.
- If organisations make a timeline in which they openly talk about the history of their organisation, a facilitator can ask them at a later stage to explain the developments in terms of how the 5C developed. In this way the facilitator can help the participants to link organisational realities to the 5Cs.
- Do not use the 5C as a kind of checklist to tick off which things are going well and which not. Use it as a tool to hold conversations about an organisation's functioning and to reach consensus among members as to where the strengths and challenges lie.

Lesson 12

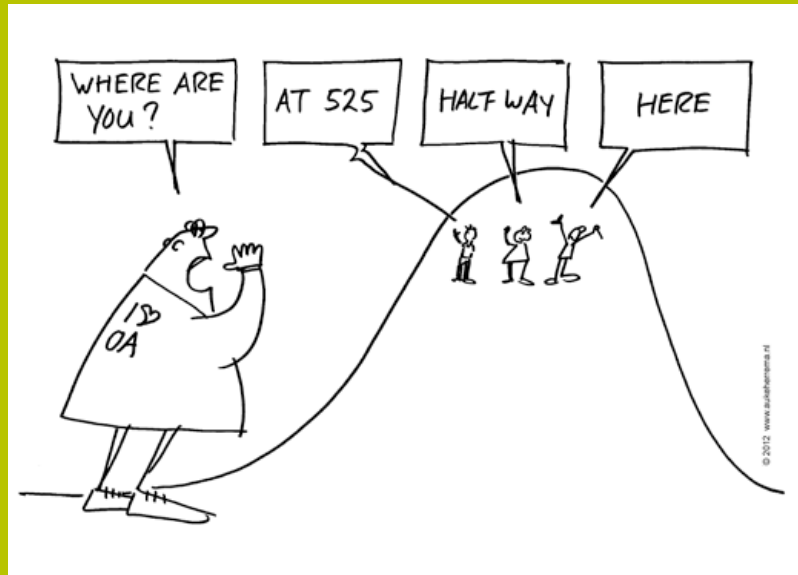
The struggle for scores

THE PRACTICE

Soraya facilitates organizational assessments. For each aspect of capacity she uses a rating scale ranging from weak, basic, moderate to strong. She quantifies this scale with the figures one, two, three and four. She calculates averages and concludes that the average capacity of all organizations is 2.9 with a standard deviation of 0.7. She tried to run some regression analyses but concluded that the reliability was insufficient.

Thomas is also carrying out organizational assessments and he decides not to use any form of scoring. He facilitates the discussion of various aspects of capacity but finds it difficult to round off each discussion in a satisfactory way. When asked about the overall level of capacity of his partner organizations he has plenty of stories to share.

Debbie also decided not to use quantitative scores but, at the end of each discussion, she asked the participants to negotiate some kind of summary. One of her partner organisations used the stages of plant growth as a metaphor. When asked to give a summary she explained the stages of progress that partners believe they have reached.



THE QUESTIONS

Each type of scoring, as well as the absence of scoring, has its advantages and disadvantages. What would be the best way to decide about this? A strong argument against any form of scoring is the influence it has on the mood and behaviour of participants. An open and vulnerable mood can change instantly into a defensive mood. Soraya called it the Triple F Syndrome: fighting for fours.

An argument for using some sort of scoring is to avoid open-ended or never-ending debates that are very cosy but do not provide much insight into the organization's level of capacity. Each participant could leave the discussion with his or her own views without much convergence. One good middle road could be to work with summary statements, expressed in words, but with some sort of progression. The use of growth or movement metaphors could help, such as plants, rivers, waves or ecosystems.

Another question is how insights into organizational capacities from different organizations can be combined, compared or contrasted to paint an overall picture? Making statements about capacities of more than one organisation is much easier with quantitative scores. Averages, higher and lower comparisons and benchmarks can easily be calculated. Qualitative analysis is another option, but more time consuming. Which is better in which circumstances?

THE LESSONS

To score or not to score? Different situations require different choices. If the limitations of quantitative scores are fully realized it can still be a valid option. In most situations, however, a scoring in words might be preferable because it carries less risk of unwarranted use. Sometimes scoring can be left out altogether, as long as the discussions do not become endless and woolly.

The role and function of the information matters a lot. If information from different organizations needs to be combined, some form of scoring is very beneficial. The most important lesson for someone in this position, like Soraya, Thomas and Debbie, is that sense-making is always needed to interpret quantitative figures, give them meaning and place them in their historical and geographical contexts. In many situations it is very questionable whether figures have any meaning beyond the level at which they were collected. Comparison between contexts or between time periods can only be done when each context and situation is taken into account.

Quantitative scores can be used sometimes, but one should realize that they represent qualitative realities and are often ordinal rather than continuous scales. Figures have a higher risk of being taken out of their contexts. When summarizing statements, qualitative analysis is often a much better option than quantitative analysis. However, these analyses can include references to numbers of partners who make certain statements or who made progress.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Tool Selection
- Overcoming ambivalence
- Good progress
- Indicators for the 5Cs

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Make a conscious choice whether or not to use some form of scoring.
- Avoid the defensive mood that scoring can induce.
- Never use any scores without some form of sense-making.
- If using quantitative scores, be aware of the limitations for mathematical and statistical operations.
- Never produce or present any comparisons or compilations of results on organizational capacities without proper interpretation and attention for each context.

Lesson 13

Good facilitation

Facilitation as unlocking potential: jointly designing a road map. One thing is clear: there should be a road, and a destination. The group decides how to reach the destination.

THE PRACTICE

“When we, a Northern NGO, first discussed the methodology to conduct organisational assessments with partner organisations, the main focus was on which tool we would select from the abundance of tools and frameworks in existence. A decade ago there was a lot of talk about the OCAT tool. These days the 5C-framework is on everyone's lips. However, while we were planning the organisational assessments all kinds of new questions arose regarding how the tool should be used, and how the assessment process should be facilitated.”

“I remember well the meeting we had in our office when somebody asked us how we as Northern NGO would approach our Southern partners and introduce to them the idea of the organisational assessment. It felt awkward to say that it was a back donor requirement. We reflected on this within our organisation and decided that, if we wanted to facilitate the organisational assessments, this would have to take place in mutual agreement with our Southern partners with the focus on really helping the organisations involved to progress. We continued our discussion and came across the



THE QUESTIONS

How should organisational assessments be facilitated? What does it mean for the facilitator, and which assessment process is suitable?

THE LESSONS

A lot of ‘facilitators’ may want to opt for an instrumental approach which puts the assessment tool in the spotlight, with the facilitator being in charge of the assessment, instead of choosing a more flexible and open assessment process. However, facilitation requires a deliberate change in attitude: from controlling to letting go. Why should the facilitator be in control in the first place? The desire to improve the organisation's capacity should be the concern of the Southern partner, so what is at stake for the facilitator? Does the facilitator want others to see him or her as the expert? If so, facilitation is not the right thing to do because it requires a different attitude. Letting go means letting go of the reins. Doing this will make people feel more comfortable about stepping in and claiming ownership of both the organisational assessment process and the results.

Besides the importance of the right attitude and role of the facilitator, another lesson we have drawn concerns what is conducive to making a facilitation process a success. The following points are essential to make or break a facilitation process at the start and relate to unlocking human potential. Firstly, the assessment should address the personal interests of people because that naturally creates engagement and nurtures commitment to the outcome. Secondly the concerns of the people who participate in the organisational assessment need to be taken seriously and addressed. Thirdly, while assessments focus all too often on the gaps

Appreciative Inquiry approach. We used this approach to organise the organisational assessments and documented the experiences and lessons learned both from us and our partners."

and flaws, it really empowers people if the assessment starts with an appreciation of the organisation's past successes and people's contributions to realising these successes. Finally, it is vital to use a variety of techniques. As people learn in different ways, have different perspectives and assimilate and process information in very diverse ways, they need to be stimulated in diverse ways as well. People will not always feel free to open up of their own accord. They need to be stimulated to come forward. Acknowledging diversity is also a way of recognising and respecting who you are. Examples of the techniques that can be used in an eclectic way are timelines, rich picture and stories. Ranking may also be a useful technique.

These points are key ingredients to enable the assessment process to be elevated to a collective level at which reflection can take place within a safe environment and where, at the end of the process, action points are agreed for concrete implementation.

Without the facilitator having the right attitude and without proper facilitation, an organisational assessment is trimmed down to some oblivious toolboxes that can be easily located on the internet.

Facilitation is about attitude and skills and is essential in driving development processes.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Leadership
- Trust
- Learning
- Positive aspects of power

PRACTICAL TIPS

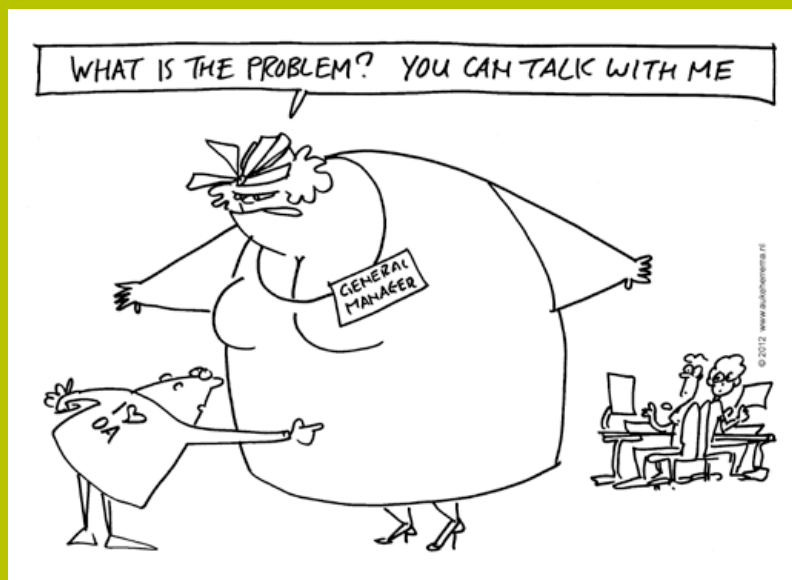
- Are you the right person to facilitate an organisational assessment? Can you listen, can you create a safe environment, are you accepted by the Southern partner?
- Any facilitation process needs at least three phases: diverging (stimulating the expression of varied perspectives), emerging (linking ideas, reflection) and converging (getting to a common understanding, agreed action points). These phases need to be part of the organisational assessment process.
- As a facilitator you should prepare yourself properly before the organisational assessment starts. Familiarize yourself with the expected end result of the process and design the process consciously. Decide which participatory working methods and techniques you want to use, how to engage everyone so that they can share their ideas, how to ensure a synthesis of discussions and a convergence to a common understanding and action plan.
- Keep the focus on the concerns and interests of the people participating in the organisational assessment and do not turn the assessment into an information extraction exercise. During the organisational assessment check whether the discussion topics are still relevant and usable. If not, move to a topic related to the organisation that they find more captivating.
- Use fun facilitation techniques. There are plenty to choose from. They will ensure an atmosphere that unlocks potential, is memorable and intensifies bonds between the participants and help foster joint commitment.
- An indicator of successful facilitation is that participant energy levels remain high until the end of the assessment process.

Lesson 14

Who is in the lead?

THE PRACTICE

The Southern Director usually takes the lead when dealing with external stakeholders such as funding partners, and that is right and proper because it is the Director's role to deal with external relationships. John has been the Operational Director of an NNGO for 2 years. He is on a visit to a partner organisation and is informed by the Director about the latest developments the organisation has undergone and its work and the changed context in which the organisation operates. John wonders whether he will have an opportunity to meet other staff members so that he can listen to their opinions about the organisation, the work and the context in which they operate. He knows from experience that this Director does not always like him to do so. However, this is his third visit and he feels it is necessary to intervene. He has observed the organisation's weaknesses and knows that its programme delivery could be addressed by capacity development interventions, ideally based on a participatory OA. However, the road to change is still blocked by the Director.



THE QUESTIONS

How can we work effectively with Directors who exercise total power and block external interventions? What is the best way to approach difficult leadership issues in a manner which shows cultural sensitivity?

The Director is a very powerful, and somewhat daunting, personality and the idea of confronting him on this issue gives John the creeps. He feels that action is needed to bring about change, but feels at a disadvantage and uncertain about how to proceed without acting in ways that are culturally insensitive. The question is how can he achieve a new balance of power in the relationship with the Director in order to try to bring about positive change? John intends to have a meeting with a number of colleagues and discuss how to approach the Director in question.

THE LESSONS

- 1 When on a busy mission visit John tends to regard the time for social niceties as time wasted. However, it could be worth it in terms of building relationships and trust. In many cultures everything depends on the quality of the relationship.
- 2 It is wise to focus on clear issues for which you have good quality information. You should not forget to be properly aware of your assumptions and underlying values.
- 3 John found out that, if there are issues to deal with, it is crucial to have very clear and accurate information so you can keep your conversation focused. This is probably best done in the context of

issues which are directly related to your partnership. John discovers that it is also helpful to try and learn everything he can about local customs and practices so that his comments are framed in terms that make sense locally.

- 4 In this partnership it is wise that John has explained the 'bottom line' to his NNGO before he left. This is the line between 'still acceptable' and 'not acceptable (at all)' as far as behaviour and attitudes are concerned that go against the values and principles of his NNGO.
- 5 It is possible that meetings with the Director may end up causing John to make the non-negotiables clear to the Director. This is small consolation, however. If it gets to this point, then the time for worrying about cultural sensitivity has probably past. I need to say very clearly what is and is not acceptable and why.
- 6 If it gets to this point, John intends to acknowledge that this may be the result of cultural values, but that the moment has now come for John and the Director to make choices.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

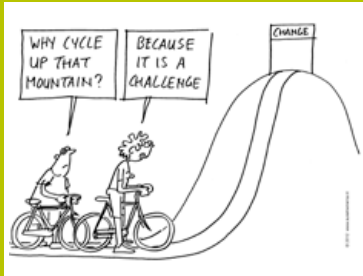
- Positive aspects of power
- Role of the NNGO
- Participation

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be aware of your assumptions and underlying values;
- Find out as much as you can about local culture so that you are properly informed;
- Focus on clear issues for which you have the facts;
- Be clear about your non-negotiables;
- Do not let cultural sensitivity block you from conveying a clear message when the non-negotiables have been disregarded;
- Be prepared to follow through with a hard decision about the partnership.

Lesson 15

Are you ready for change?



THE PRACTICE

Ronald, the visiting facilitator from the North, has come to a partner organisation in the South to join a team in a learning process about the organisation and its potential for further development. While he is there he is going to present OA as an intervention for organisational change. He knows that he cannot initiate a process of reflecting on the organisation if the team is not prepared to leave its relative comfort zone and face the necessary changes in the organisational structure or programme strategy.

The 3 day session is a success. All participants contribute to the discussions, people stay enthusiastic until the end and energy levels in the room remain consistently high. Moreover, Ronald experiences the same energy levels during identical sessions with two other partner organisations in other countries.

Even though pilot partners had shown an interest in organisational development before, Ronald still wonders after the three sessions

THE QUESTIONS

- 1 What exactly motivates teams to stand up and leave their comfort zone and be prepared to go through a series of changes that inevitably entail a series of uncertainties?
- 2 In general, how can (the degree of) 'change readiness' be positively influenced, e.g. by Ronald?
- 3 How does 'change readiness' manifest itself? What does it sound and/or look like?

THE LESSONS

Re. 1 Drivers for 'change readiness'

First of all, a distinction can be made between internal and external drivers that lead to readiness.

External drivers lead to a sense of urgency in organisations to get ready for change. Usually management determines that intervention for change is urgent and emphasises the need to be prepared.

Example: The whole context change when a tsunami hits the area in which the organisation is working. Changes in type of aid and modified needs and priorities need to be accommodated by all staff in the organisation and management needs to set different priorities and take action. It needs to enforce change readiness so that change can actually be achieved.

'Change urgency' is an important factor which leads to increased readiness for change.

However, the process of translating urgency into readiness can take quite different forms. In this respect the search for mutual understanding and trust building plays an important role. In real life Ronald has found two extremes on a continuum with management imposing changes in priorities at one end and exchanges with staff and persuasion at the other.

Internal drivers of readiness for change usually stem from inner motivation of individual staff members. This translates into commitment by staff at all levels in the organisation with the aim being to realise 'good work' in the sense of relevance (to vulnerable groups) and sustainability. One example of this is that, if reality experienced by field staff interferes with people's inner drive, tension can be built from the bottom up in the organisation. At the end of the day, this tension will either find an outlet in a negative clash or will permeate the entire organisation and stimulate change readiness.

Re. 2 Positive influence on 'change readiness'

When asked, Ronald tended to come up with two strategies which could have a positive influence on readiness for change.

what is actually driving this level of staff energy? Was the enthusiasm genuine and based on the people's inner motivation to continue improving the functioning of their organisation, or was it driven by other interests?

During the sessions held with three different partners in Africa, energy levels appeared to increase when staff were asked to consider the most exciting and successful moments in their careers at the organisation and to reflect together on the factors behind these exciting moments. This naturally causes participants to reflect on differences between those moments and current reality.

When invited to reflect on your own organisation this, in itself, opens people's minds and may lead them to draw own conclusion that changes are necessary. Ronald used some sort of organisational assessment (OA) as a more formalised framework for reflection by participants on the own organisation. Energy is not involved when finalising an OA as a goal in itself. Energy is about improving (the functioning of) the organisation.

Re. 3. Expression of 'change readiness'

The important thing here is simply to discuss 'readiness for change', preferably during reflection sessions and to discuss it with representatives from all levels in the organisation. Ronald introduced 'readiness' during the course of a discussion on an aspect of the organisation. At that moment he sensed some divergence in the views held by programme field staff and management staff on the urgency for change. The latter were keen to adopt more active fund raising strategies, with the aim being to achieve a greater diversification of funding partners. By contrast, field staff preferred to prioritise the intensification of links and networking at community level. Although the discussion was quite innocent and normal, it offered an opportunity to discuss the theme of 'readiness for change'.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- How are we doing?
- Is no news good news?
- Ownership
- Participation

PRACTICAL TIPS

- 1 Discuss positions on, and attitudes towards, 'change readiness' with representatives from all levels in the organisation, preferably during sessions held to discuss and reflect on the organisation's functioning. It is advisable to build mutual understanding and trust in order to facilitate open discussions.
- 2 Preferably, one should discuss the subject of change readiness 'in the open', in plenary sessions with all representatives from all levels. Alternatively, the matter can be discussed in sessions with each department. However, in such cases an extra feedback round will be necessary.
- 3 Try to find out what drives 'change readiness'. Is it inspired by external or internal factors? The source for change tells you something about the nature and dimensions of the change and the potential consequences for the organisation concerned.

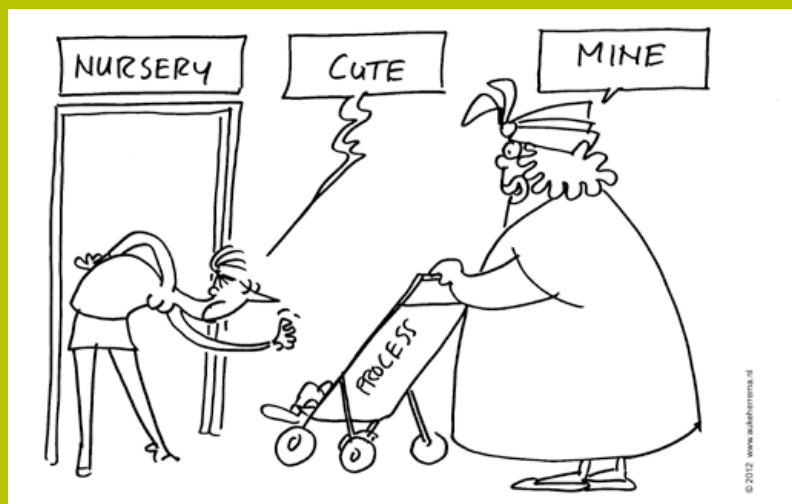
Lesson 16

The process is mine! On ownership

THE PRACTICE

Amanda was asked by her employer, a Northern NGO (NNGO), to carry out several Organisational Assessments with Southern NGOs (SNGO). She selected a tool and visited the Southern NGOs to perform the assessments with them. She tried to involve as many people as possible in the process and used the tool to help the SNGOs to reflect on their own functioning and draw up an action plan together with Amanda. The SNGOs needed time to get used to the idea but were enthusiastic about the process. Amanda compiled a report which was shared with the management of the NNGO. The action plan had hardly been finalised and the SNGOs were already waiting for Amanda to take action.

After reflecting together with the Southern organisations, Amanda decided to try another approach. This time the Southern organisations were offered the chance to carry out an OA and were asked to decide on the process and tools to be used. The main leaders within the SNGOs took the responsibility of involving staff from different departments. The outcomes of the exercise were quite different from the first one, as people felt it was their own process and therefore decided to talk about the real situation within their organisation. They decided to take time to implement the agreed action plan.



THE QUESTIONS

The question is how can NNGOs stimulate ownership of OD processes with SNGOs, where SNGOs take the preconditions of the NNGOs and back donors seriously? What other ways are there to stimulate ownership than giving complete freedom to the SNGOs?

NNGOs have specific different interests in the OD processes of their Southern partners. First of all, the NNGOs want SNGOs to become stronger so that they are more able to carry out their programmes. It is therefore important to evaluate not only programmes but also the organisation as a whole. Besides this, NNGOs are accountable to their back donors and report on the OD processes of the Southern partners. Some NNGOs see OD support as part of their moral obligation towards SNGOs. Others state that they support OD to ensure that SNGOs become less dependent on them and can continue their programmes without their support as soon as possible.

As NNGOs have an interest in stimulating OD at their Southern partners, they need to communicate and negotiate about their interest and the interest of the SNGO. If this is not done thoroughly, NNGOs may place too much emphasis on their own interests. This may create the impression on the part of the SNGO that it has to adopt OD processes because it is in the interest of the NNGO. The question remains of how NNGOs look after the above-mentioned interests, while leaving the ownership to the SNGOs.

THE LESSON

For an OD process to produce good results, ownership is primarily with the organisation at which OD is going to take place. A NNGO might feel a

Amanda was happy, but still a bit confused. She was left pondering whether this the only way to create ownership, or whether external involvement can also stimulate ownership and openness.

high level of responsibility for this OD as well. The NNGOs have to be clear about their different interests and can stimulate the OD processes within the SNGOs they support. If SNGOs accept these interests as valid and useful, NNGOs could then offer tools to carry out the OD process, provide information, possibly facilitate the process and provide the financial means necessary to undertake the process.

In a relationship between an NNGO and SNGO, in which both regard each other as equals, it is important to be open about each other's interests. SNGOs can learn to understand the interests of back donors and include these in their OD process while continuing to be the owners of the process.

SNGOs will exhibit ownership of the OD process in different ways. Firstly, leaders of SNGOs will show commitment by ensuring that staff from different layers and departments in the organisation are involved during the whole OD process. Secondly, when talking with these members of staff, the SNGOs explain how they have been involved in the OD process, how they have contributed and which changes they have observed. The SNGO will probably adopt initiatives and take decisions which were not all planned in advance. Another sign of ownership is that the SNGO is open to sharing results (both positive and negative) with different stakeholders, including the NNGO as well as other SNGOs they are connected to.

LINKS TO OTHER LESSONS

- Leadership
- Participation
- Facilitation

PRACTICAL TIPS

- Be clear about the interests of both parties (NNGOs and SNGOs) but stress our common interest in OD!
- Discuss the roles of the NNGOs and SNGOs and decide together in an open dialogue how the interests of both parties can best be served.
- The NNGO should provide clarity about its commitment and how it plans to support the SNGO once the OD process is started, while still stressing that the process itself is owned by the SNGO.
- The NNGO can provide the SNGO with inputs and lessons learned from its own experience. This can help the SNGO to decide which process is best for it.
- The NNGO can play an important role in helping the SNGO to find a good facilitator that preferably knows the organisation, but is an outsider and can handle sensitive issues.
- The NNGO can offer tools for different stages of OD, while the SNGO can choose which tools best fit its process.



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