



KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT TOOLKIT



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Swiss Agency for Development
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Short versions in the form of a Vademecum are available in English, German, French, and Spanish.

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- ❑ We know that well proven methods and knowledge are available
- ❑ We do have a lot of freedom in organising our work
- ❑ Only rarely (if ever) do we ask our colleagues about their experience
- ❑ We allow ourselves little time for reading and for sharing our experience
- ❑ We take little time to describe our own work realistically, and to look at it critically

→ As publisher of the present toolkit, the Knowledge and Learning Processes Division of SDC supports the sharing of knowledge and skills

- ❑ With many other organisations, we are connected and maintain a constructive and trusting relationship
- ❑ Reviews, evaluations and studies help us to understand our activities and their effects
- ❑ However, we ourselves do not always become aware of what in fact we have learnt
- ❑ Still we know that sharing requires a real interest in the experience of other people

→ We want to sum up the results and the experience of our activities, and to present them in a form that is easy to understand

→ We want our products to be available to our partner organisations

Our organisation is a learning organisation

Our organisation is interconnected

**Introductory remarks to the toolkit
«Sharing Knowledge and Learning»**

SDC Bern, July 2009
Jörg Frieden, Manuel Flury

Our organisation is closely related to practice

Our organisation strives for effectiveness

- ❑ A variety of methods exists, and they are easy to apply
- ❑ We constantly use new methods
- ❑ Sometimes we become tired of using new methods and keep away from innovations

→ Collaborators of SDC use tried and true methods themselves and reflect on them

→ By applying the methods, we experience the added value they produce for our practical work

- ❑ Obtaining the desired effect is the best argument for getting the support necessary for our activities
- ❑ By making use of knowledge proven in practice, we will be effective
- ❑ However, in practice our lessons learnt and our successful experience are not sufficiently taken into account when planning future activities

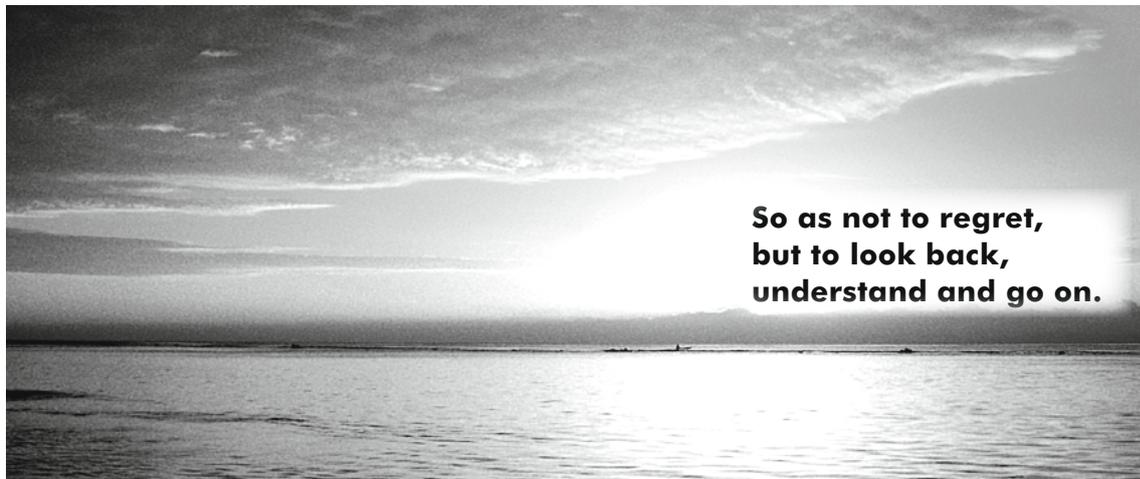
→ This toolkit makes available the methods proven in practice, and thus supports efficient and effective sharing of knowledge

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After Action Review



What are after action reviews?

An after action review (AAR) is a discussion of a project or an activity that enables the individuals involved to learn for themselves what happens, why it happened, what went well, what needs improvement and what lessons can be learned from the experience. The spirit of an AAR is one of openness and learning – it is not about problem fixing or allocating blame. Lessons learned are not only tacitly shared on the spot by the individuals involved, but can be explicitly documented and shared with a wider audience.

After action reviews were originally developed and are extensively used by the US Army.

What are the benefits?

What makes after action reviews so powerful is that they can be applied across a wide spectrum of activities, from two individuals conducting a five minute AAR at the end of a short meeting to a day-long AAR held by a project team at the end of a large project. Activities suitable for AARs simply need to have a beginning and an end, an identifiable purpose and some basis on which performance can be assessed. Other than that, there are few limits.

Some examples of when to use an AAR are: when you have introduced a new set of procedures or ways of working; after a busy winter season in which capacity was stretched; following the introduction of a new computer system; after a major training activity; after a shift handover; following a piece of research or a clinical trial; after performing surgery; etc.

AARs are excellent for making tacit knowledge explicit during the life of a project or activity and thus allowing you to capture it. Learning can be captured before a team disbands, or before people forget what happened and move on to something else. Despite the name ('after action'), they do not have to be performed at the end of a project or activity. Rather, they can be performed after each identifiable event within a project or major activity, thus becoming a live learning process in which lessons learned can be immediately applied. In fact this is where AARs can add the greatest value.

AARs provide insights into exactly what contributes to the strengths and weaknesses of a project or activity, including the performance of each individual involved, of the project leader, the team as a whole, and the various processes involved.

AARs are also a useful tool for developing your employees, which they do by providing constructive, directly actionable feedback in a non-threatening way because they are not linked to employee assessment. Similarly, they give people an opportunity to share their views and ideas and to be heard.

How do I go about it?

AARs can be grouped into three types: formal, informal and personal. Although the fundamental approach involved in each is essentially the same, there is some variation in how they are conducted.

Formal AARs tend to be conducted at the end of a major project or event (learning after doing). They require some preparation and planning, but are not difficult as they take the form of a simple meeting. This meeting may take place over a couple of hours or a couple of days, depending on the scale of the project. Steps and tips for successful formal AARs include:

- 1. Call the meeting as soon as possible and invite the right people**

AARs should be conducted as soon as possible after the event. The reasons are simple: memories are fresh, participants are available and where appropriate, learning can be applied immediately. As well as the project manager and the key members of the project, it may be useful to invite the project client or sponsor and also members of any project teams who are about to embark on a similar project. However, be aware that the presence of external people may inhibit some team members.

- 2. Create the right climate**

The ideal climate for an AAR is one of trust, openness and commitment to learning. AARs are learning events, not critiques, and so should not be treated as performance evaluation. There are no hierarchies in AARs – everyone is regarded as an equal participant and junior members of the team should feel free to comment on the actions of senior members. Make it clear that the purpose of the meeting is to help future projects run more smoothly by identifying the learning points from this project.

- 3. Appoint a facilitator**

Ideally an AAR should be facilitated. (Certainly a formal AAR should be facilitated but informal AARs and personal AARs need not be so). The main purposes of the facilitator are to help the team to learn by drawing out answers, insights and previously unspoken issues; to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to contribute; and to help create the right climate and ensure that blame is not brought in. The facilitator should be someone who was not closely involved in the project, so that s/he can remain objective.

- 4. Revisit the objectives and deliverables of the project**

Ask ‘what did we set out to do?’ and ‘what did we actually achieve?’. You might like to revisit the original project plan at this stage. You might also decide to construct a flow chart of what happened, identifying tasks, deliverables, and decision points. This can help you to see which parts of the project were particularly effective or ineffective.

- 5. Ask ‘what went well?’. Find out why, and share learning advice for the future**

It is always a good idea to start with the positive points. Here you are looking to build on best practice as well as learning from mistakes. For each point that is made about what went well, keep asking a ‘why?’ question. This will allow you to get to the root of the reason. Then press participants for specific, repeatable advice that others could apply in similar situations.



During my time as a coordinator of the SDC programme in Bolivia, the core team (section head, coordinator, desk officer) used an AAR of about two hours for a review of the Country Assistance Strategy that was worked out with all key staff some days ago.

The AAR produced a list of features to repeat and some proposals what to change in a forthcoming process.

The working process of the annual programme of the E&I division including the two hours presentation of the annual programme to interested (internal and external) parties was reviewed with a 30 minutes AAR in a section meeting some 10 days later.

This AAR has been a good experience and helps to foster ownership by all concerned.

Peter Tschumi, Head E&I Division

After the Dare to Share Fair 2004, the organisers reviewed what happened and what the outcome was. We did this by using the checklist "how to organise an international conference" and collected experiences, new ideas and proposals for future conferences of that type. In doing this we exchanged our impressions about what happened, what went well, what could have gone better and shared the lessons to be learnt for the future.

At the end and with the help of the "checklist", a case of the Dare to Share Fair was well described for future organisers.

My lesson: Do not just list "lessons" but choose a format that could serve others in a similar situation best.

Manuel Flury, Head Knowledge Management Service

6. Ask 'what could have gone better?'. Find out what the problems were, and share learning advice for the future

Notice that you are not simply asking 'what went wrong?' but rather 'what could have gone better?'. This way you can learn not only from mistakes, but also from any aspects of the project that got in the way of delivering even more. Hence the focus is not on failure, but on improvement. Even if no mistakes are made as such there is almost always scope for improvement. Again, for each point that is made, keep asking a 'why?' question to get to the root of the reason. Then again, press participants for specific, repeatable advice that others could apply in similar situations: 'what would we do differently next time?'

7. Ensure that everyone feels fully heard before leaving the meeting

It is important that participants do not leave the meeting feeling that they have not been heard or that things have been left unsaid. A useful technique here is to ask them for a numerical rating of the project: 'looking back, how satisfied are you with the project: marks out of ten?'. People who have said the project was fine will often still score it an eight, which enables you to then ask 'what would have made it a ten for you?'

8. Recording the AAR

It is important to have a clear and interesting account of the AAR and its learning points, both as a reminder to those involved and in order to effectively share that learning with others. You should aim to include things like: lessons and guidelines for the future; some background information about the project to help put these guidelines into a meaningful context; the names of the people involved for future reference; and any key documents such as project plans or reports. Bear in mind who will be using your account and ask yourself if you were to be the next project leader, 'would this account and the lessons in it be of benefit to you?'

9. Sharing the learning

As well as distributing your account of the AAR to the project team, you need to consider who else could benefit from it. For example, you may be aware of another team that is about to embark on a similar project. You also need to make your learning more widely available so that people working on similar projects in the future might also benefit; your document therefore needs to be stored somewhere it can be easily found and accessed by those it could help. This may be in a library, or in some kind of knowledge database or on an intranet.

Informal AARs tend to be conducted after a much smaller event such as a meeting or a presentation (learning after doing), or following a specific event during a wider project or activity (learning while doing). They require much less preparation and planning and can often be done on the spur of the moment, as the format is simple and quick – a ‘pencil and paper’ or flipchart exercise. In an open and honest meeting, usually no longer than half an hour, each participant in the event answers four simple questions:

- What was supposed to happen?
- What actually happened?
- Why were there differences?
- What did we learn?

Personal AARs are a simple matter of personal reflection. For example, take a few minutes to reflect on something you did yesterday such as a patient consultation, dealing with a complaint or making a specific telephone call. Ask yourself the four AAR questions above. What does that tell you about what you could do differently tomorrow?

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

- It is worth repeating that AARs are learning events, not critiques. It is therefore vital that they are not treated as performance evaluation. The quality of an AAR depends on the willingness of participants to be open; this is unlikely to happen if they fear they are going to be assessed or blamed.
- Studies on the learning process show that the less time that elapses between discussing a lesson and applying it at work, the more effective the application. This would suggest that AARs are most valuable when used to ‘learn while doing’.

Source

National Library for Health NLH (Author: Shaunagh Robertson / Caroline De Brún)
<http://www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/ViewResource.aspx?resID=70306>

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http://www.signetconsulting.com/methods_stories/proven_methods/after_action_reviews.php

After Action Reviews: 3 Step Process

http://www.myfirecommunity.net/documents/AAR_3Step_Example.doc

How to Conduct an After Action Review (PowerPoint Presentation)

http://www.waterisac.org/epa/trainers/AA_Reviews.ppt#257

AAR Case Studies

http://www.fireleadership.gov/toolbox/after_action_review/

Step-by-step guide to writing ARRs

<http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/leader/leadaar.html>

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers guide to After Action Reviews

<http://www.mvr.usace.army.mil/PublicAffairsOffice/2003AnnualReport/DistrictHighlights/AfterActionReviews.htm>

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Balanced Scorecard



What is the Balanced Scorecard?

The **Balanced Scorecard (BSC)** is a tool to execute and monitor the organisational strategy by using a combination of financial and non financial measures. It is designed to translate vision and strategy into objectives and measures across four balanced perspectives: financial, customers, internal business process and learning and growth. It gives a framework ensuring that the strategy is translated into a coherent set of performance measures.

Original methodology

The earliest Balanced Scorecards comprised simple tables broken into four sections – typically these “perspectives” were labeled “Financial”, “Customer”, “Internal Business Processes”, and “Learning & Growth”. Designing the Balanced Scorecard required selecting five or six good measures for each perspective.

Many authors have since suggested alternative headings for these perspectives, and also suggested using either additional or fewer perspectives. These suggestions were notably triggered by a recognition that different but equivalent headings would yield alternative sets of measures. The major design challenge faced with this type of Balanced Scorecard is justifying the choice of measures made. “Of all the measures you could have chosen, why did you choose these?” This common question is hard to ask using this type of design process. If users are not confident that the measures within the Balanced Scorecard are well chosen, they will have less confidence in the information it provides. Although less common, these early-style Balanced Scorecards are still designed and used today.

In short, early-style Balanced Scorecards are hard to design in a way to build confidence that they are well designed. Because of this, many are abandoned soon after completion.

Improved methodology

In the mid 1990s, an improved design method emerged. In the new method, measures are selected based on a set of “strategic objectives” plotted on a “strategic linkage model” or “strategy map”. With this modified approach, the strategic objectives are typically distributed across a similar set of “perspectives”, as is found in the earlier designs, but the design question becomes slightly less abstract.

Managers have to identify five or six goals within each of the perspectives, and then demonstrate some inter-linking between these goals by plotting causal links on the diagram. Having reached some consensus about the objectives and how they inter-relate, the Balanced Scorecard is devised by choosing suitable measures for each objective. This type of approach provides greater contextual justification for the measures chosen, and is generally easier for managers to work through.

The four perspectives

The grouping of performance measures in general categories (perspectives) is seen to aid in the gathering and selection of the appropriate performance measures for the enterprise. Four general perspectives have been proposed by the Balanced Scorecard:

The **financial perspective** examines if the company's implementation and execution of its strategy are contributing to the bottom-line improvement of the company. It represents the long-term strategic objectives of the organization and thus it incorporates the tangible outcomes of the strategy in traditional financial terms. The three possible stages as described by Kaplan and Norton (1996) are rapid growth, sustain and harvest. Financial objectives and measures for the growth stage will stem from the development and growth of the organization which will lead to increased sales volumes, acquisition of new customers, growth in revenues etc. The sustain stage on the other hand will be characterized by measures that evaluate the effectiveness of the organization to manage its operations and costs, by calculating the return on investment, the return on capital employed, etc. Finally, the harvest stage will be based on cash flow analysis with measures such as payback periods and revenue volume. Some of the most common financial measures that are incorporated in the financial perspective are revenue growth, costs, profit margins, cash flow, net operating income etc.

The **customer perspective** defines the value proposition that the organization will apply in order to satisfy customers and thus generate more sales to the most desired (i.e. the most profitable) customer groups. The measures that are selected for the customer perspective should measure both the value that is delivered to the customer (value position) which may involve time, quality, performance and service and cost and the outcomes that come as a result of this value proposition (e.g., customer satisfaction, market share). The value proposition can be centered on one of the three: operational excellence, customer intimacy or product leadership, while maintaining threshold levels at the other two.

Firstly, I utilise it as an internal controlling instrument for the support of the management of the F-department. We use the balanced score card with 8 key indicators for the two domains "financial resources" and "human" resources as an instrument for the strategic management. Secondly, I used the BSC in our joint work with our partner organisation "Women's World Banking", a network for micro financing targeting at women. In a joint effort, we improved their BSC into a monitoring system that on the one side supports their own strategic management, and on the other side provides the information required by the donors.

BSC is a tool for strategic management and for knowledge management at once. It helps to extract and condense relevant information in order to make well based strategic decisions. The usefulness of BSC is more evident at the management level than at the level of single projects. The special value added of the BSC lies in its broad assessment criteria; the approach is less abstract and more open compared to the LogFrame approach, and thus allows including aspects that are relevant for all involved partners. BSC is mainly used in the private sector, whereas its applications in the field of public administration and development cooperation are still quite limited.

Guido Beltrani, Programme Officer, Evaluation and Controlling F-Division



The **internal process perspective** is concerned with the processes that create and deliver the customer value proposition. It focuses on all the activities and key processes required in order for the company to excel at providing the value expected by the customers both productively and efficiently. These can include both short-term and long-term objectives as well as incorporating innovative process development in order to stimulate improvement. In order to identify the measures that correspond to the internal process perspective, Kaplan and Norton propose using certain clusters that group similar value creating processes in an organization. The clusters for the internal process perspective are operations management (by improving asset utilization, supply chain management, etc.), customer management (by expanding and deepening relations), innovation (by new products and services) and regulatory & social (by establishing good relations with the external stakeholders).

The **learning and growth perspective** is the foundation of any strategy and focuses on the intangible assets of an organization, mainly on the internal skills and capabilities that are required to support the value-creating internal processes. The learning and growth perspective is concerned with the jobs (human capital), the systems (information capital), and the climate (organization capital) of the enterprise. These three factors relate to what Kaplan and Norton claim is the infrastructure that is needed in order to enable ambitious objectives in the other three perspectives to be achieved. This of course will be in the long term, since an improvement in the learning and growth perspective will require certain expenditures that may decrease short-term financial results, whilst contributing to long-term success.

How to go about it?

Implementing Balanced Scorecards typically includes the following steps:

1. Formulate mission, vision and strategic goal of the organization.
2. Develop the balanced scorecard matrix:
 - a) Break down the strategic goal into objectives and activities within the given dimensions
 - b) Select strategic initiatives/activities (goal, action, indicator).
3. Club initiatives into strategic projects.
4. Implement strategic projects (clear assignment of responsibilities!).
5. Communicate the planned activities and results by means of a reporting scorecard.

The Balanced Scorecard Matrix

| Vision and Strategy | | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------|---------|-------------|
| | Objectives | Measures | Targets | Initiatives |
| Financial Perspective | | | | |
| Customer Perspective | | | | |
| Internal Process Perspective | | | | |
| Learning and Growth Perspective | | | | |

SDC, generally spoken, has no systematic BSC-controlling modalities; using BSC is optional. I experienced two major moments to set up a BSC approach. One has been the controlling of the cooperation strategy of the COOFs. Several COOFs use a standardized reporting format corresponding to a formal BSC. There has been room for variation to do justice to the regional context. Thus, BSC approach within SDC looks multicoloured; there are different experiences with BSC. The piloting effect for SDC as a whole is not obvious. Budget considerations remain being the main factor for management decisions within SDC; other factors are far less important. The second moment, BSC has been applied within SDC is the monitoring of the SDC strategy 2010 (MOSTRA). The annual MOSTRA report, composed by E&C division, refers to BSC approach, containing objectives and respective indicators. Management decisions at directorate level refer to MOSTRA recommendations. The today's management review is a further development of the MOSTRA, going beyond the BSC approach.

SDC has experimented with the BSC approach, but never systematically applied at any level. There is no normative regulation within the organisation. Quality standards are not defined very prominently; quality control is driven based on individual responsibility. SDC is working within various contexts. "Contextuality" has become almost a value at SDC. How to balance and lead between these two poles of contextuality (with broad variation) and guiding quality norms (with defined standards) is still one of the major management issues.

Gerhard Siegfried, Head of Evaluation and Controlling Division

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

According to each perspective of the Balanced Scorecard, a number of KPIs can be used such as:

Financial: Cash flow, Return on Investment (ROI), Financial Result, Return on capital employed, Return on equity

Customer: Delivery Performance to Customer – by Date, Delivery Performance to Customer – by Quality, Customer satisfaction rate, Customer Loyalty, Customer retention

Internal Business Processes: Number of Activities, Opportunity Success Rate, Accident Ratios, Overall Equipment Effectiveness

Learning & Growth: Investment Rate, Illness Rate, Internal Promotions %, Employee Turnover, Gender/Racial Ratios

Further lists of general and industry-specific KPIs can be found in the case studies and methodological articles and books presented in the references section.

Source

The Balanced Scorecard Institute <http://www.balancedscorecard.org/>

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Brainstorming



What is a Brainstorming?

Brainstorming makes it possible to quickly and, with a minimum effort, extend one's horizon to available experiences, ideas and opinions. For application in groups and in workshops, this method consists of collecting uncommented ideas or suggestions and is thus especially used at the beginning of (brief as well as comprehensive) experience capitalizations in order to gain an overview of the theme to be treated.

Brainstorming sessions are used for solving a process problem, inventing new products or product innovation, solving inter-group communication problems, improving customer service, budgeting exercises, project scheduling, etc.

What are meaningful steps in brainstorming sessions?

1. Introduce a question, problem, or theme both orally and in writing on chart paper. Set time limits.
2. Invite participants to respond with as many ideas or suggestions as possible, ideally in concise single words or short sentences.
3. Refuse any comment on participants' contributions. All ideas are equally valid.
4. Record each response on cards or chart paper.
5. Group ideas to reduce redundancy; allow for related ideas to be brought together. Ask "What is missing?".
6. Prioritize and analyze the results. Decide on further steps. Make participants feel the value added in a bigger context.

Key Factors to successful Brainstorming

There are numerous approaches to brainstorming, but whichever approach you use, there are several key factors which make the difference between a successful brainstorming session and a mediocre brainstorming session.

State your challenge correctly. In order to get the right ideas, you need to ensure that you are giving the brainstorm session participants the right challenge. Otherwise, you could end up with a lot of ideas which do not actually solve your problem. It is important to indicate very clearly the challenge in such a way as to indicate the kind of ideas you want, while not making the challenge so restricting that participants cannot get creative.

The most common problem is that the challenge is vaguely phrased. A manager who is looking for ideas on how to improve product X in order to make it more attractive to younger customers all too often phrases the challenge like this: "New product ideas" or "product improvements". Such vague challenges encourage vague ideas, many of which do not respond to the managers' needs.

No squelching! Squelching is when you criticise an idea or a person contributing the idea. Squelching can be obvious, such as "That's the dumbest idea I have ever heard!" or subtle, such as "you'd never get the budget to do that". No matter what the form, squelching does two terrible things to a brainstorming session. Firstly, it makes the person who contributed the idea feel bad. As a result, she is unlikely to contribute any more ideas to the session. Even if her idea was not a good one, it is likely she would have had other, better ideas to contribute. Secondly, squelching tells other participants that unusual ideas are not welcome at this brainstorming session. Since most creative ideas are also unusual ideas, a single squelching effectively prevents participants from offering creative ideas. So, if you remember nothing else about brainstorming, remember: no squelching!

Mixed participants. When brainstorming works well, it is because the session taps into the combined creativity of all the participants. Clearly, then, the more varied the participants, the wider the range of creative thinking and the more creative the ideas generated. It is a common mistake for managers to think: we need marketing ideas, so let's get the marketing department together to brainstorm ideas. These people work together all the time, have similar backgrounds and know too much about marketing. As a result, their ideas will be limited in scope. Bringing together a dozen people from a dozen departments is a far better approach to generating a wide range of creative ideas.

Enthusiastic facilitator. The facilitator is the person who manages the brainstorming session. Normally, she does not contribute ideas, rather she makes note of the ideas, encourages participation, prevents squelching, watches the time and directs the session. A good facilitator will have a sense of humour and a knack for encouraging people to contribute ideas and be creative in their thinking. A good facilitator compliments ideas and gives high praise to the most outrageous ideas – that's because she knows that outrageous ideas encourage outrageous thinking which generates creative ideas. Moreover, what at first might seem a crazy idea may, on reflection, prove to be a very creative idea. Incidentally, if the facilitator is in the same company as the participants, care should be taken not to use a facilitator who is significantly higher in the corporate hierarchy. A high ranking moderator can make participants reluctant to take the risk of proposing an outrageous or highly unusual idea.

Good environment with no disturbances. An uncomfortable environment, an overly small room, mobile phone calls and secretaries calling their bosses out of the room for a moment all not only interrupt a brainstorming session, but also interrupt the continuity and thinking of participants. If you want an effective brainstorming session, you must insist participants turn off their telephones and inform their staff that they are not to be disturbed short of a total catastrophe. You should find a space that is large enough for the group and comfortable. A supply of water and coffee should be provided. Sometimes a little alcohol, such as wine or beer, can loosen people up and reduce inhibitions about proposing crazy ideas. Where possible, hold the brainstorming session outside your office, in a pleasant environment where participants are less likely to be disturbed or worry about their other work obligations.



Pitfalls

Not all Brainstorming sessions are effective. Many times these types of meetings suffer due to various factors, such as:

- unclear objectives or ill-defined goals
- disorganized or less-than-enthusiastic participation
- failures in note taking
- conflicts among team members
- strong or overbearing personalities
- "class system" in a pecking-order hierarchy
- micro-management by various decision makers
- "not invented here" (NIH) syndrome

Having a defined and communicated plan or objective, having agreed-upon and enforced "meeting guidelines," and knowing what kind of brainstorming techniques to use will make your creativity and decision making meetings more effective.

Variations of brainstorming procedures

An important rule of facilitation is: "The goal determines the methods". This naturally applies to brainstorming as well. Sometimes time constraints are the most important consideration; sometimes the aim is an abundance of creative answers, and sometimes the social process. Depending on the situation, there are many variations of brainstorming that can be used to achieve the desired results in a short time.

In a "pure" brainstorming participants are invited to contribute as many ideas as possible. However, when planning brainstorming sessions, it is helpful to fix three variables deliberately for staying within the time limit and also limiting the number of cards. A brainstorming session should fulfil a purpose; depending on the goal, it may last for shorter or longer periods according to whether many or only a few ideas are collected. The three variables are:

X = Number of participants per brainstorming group (N = 1 ... 5)

Y = Number of minutes for thinking and writing

Z = Number of answers per group

Facilitator leads the brainstorming

Goal: To group a number of idea-cards in clusters.

Procedure: Ask a clear question. Give participants time to write their ideas on cards. Collect all cards, shuffle them, and with the support of the group form meaningful clusters.

Alternative procedure: Collect one first card, read it out and hang it on a pinboard. Ask for cards from other participants with same/similar content and form a first cluster. Collect a second card, etc. until all cards are clustered.

Participants group the cards

Goal: To group a large number of cards and simultaneously get participants to make contact with one another. This has the added advantage that participants become actively engaged and identify with the result.

Procedure: Plan the brainstorming session so that grouping will be required for several topics (e.g. for a party: bar, food service, entertainment, decorations). All participants write cards; then they divide into four groups. Each group receives a set of cards, groups them together on the pin board, and then presents the cards it has grouped in a plenary session. It is advisable for participants to put their initials on the cards they write in case they need to answer questions about them.



Checklist method

Goal: To make a comprehensive compilation of equivalent ideas in a short time.

Procedure: Participants write ideas on a piece of paper. Each participant specifies his/her most important idea, and the facilitator (or a secretary) writes these on a card or flip chart (in the form of a list or mind map). Other participants who have the same idea strike this idea from their list; only new ideas will thus be mentioned. The facilitator collects ideas until all the lists are exhausted or until a predetermined number of answers have been compiled.

The paper carousel

Goal: To collect as many creative ideas or suggestions as possible in a group.

Procedure: Each participant writes an idea in response to the question asked on a piece of paper, and passes it to the person on his/her right. The neighbour reads the idea and writes a second idea underneath it, and so on. Normally five to seven steps are sufficient before participants run out of creative ideas. Participants meet in groups of three with their pieces of paper and choose three to five of the best ideas from the total of approximately twenty ideas, and write these ideas on cards which the facilitator then collects. This method is limited by the fact that some ideas will not be explained and thus be eliminated hastily.

Autumn leaves

Goal: To have participants move about and develop plenty of creative ideas.

Procedure: Participants write while standing and strolling around the room, recording answers to a brainstorming question on cards, which they deposit in a visible place on the floor. Cards with related ideas are already combined while being arranged on the floor. Participants may be inspired to think of new ideas while reading the cards that have already been written.

Brainstorming in small groups

Goal: Participants exchange experience and opinions on selected ideas.

Procedure: Brainstorming takes place in groups of 3-5 participants. Participants give answers to a brainstorming question and exchange opinions. The revised answers are written on cards. This variation is a mixture of brainstorming and discussion that offers a chance to rank the ideas. It is a procedure that requires proportionately more time.

Poster Chat

Goal: To collect simultaneously ideas under several headings in a big group.

Procedure: The topic of interest is subdivided into six to twelve aspects (or: the topic seen from different perspectives). For each aspect, a brainstorming question is written on a chart paper. Participants move around and write their ideas, suggestions, and answers on the respective chart. After half to three quarters of an hour, at least 100 suggestions are made and documented.

Weighing or Ranking of Options

After numerous ideas have been collected in creative steps in a group, the ideas must be reduced to manageable proportions with which the group can work. Establishing priorities is the best method for doing this. The process of establishing priorities among many different ideas can already be initiated during brainstorming by using a suitable procedure such as forming discussion groups or limiting the number of cards per person.

Simple weighing

Brainstorming frequently results in a number of options. The task at this point is to select the options that the group considers most important. First, however, all participants must understand the available options, and they must be visible to everyone. The facilitator distributes stickers to each participant, taking care to see that each person has approximately one-third as many



stickers as there are options. No clear majorities will become apparent if too many or too few stickers are distributed. It is also important for participants to be in clear agreement about how to apply the stickers: should ideas be evaluated in clusters or individually? Can only one or several points be attached to one option?

If stickers are not available, participants can also make marks with a felt pen. Using initials rather than ticks will prevent shy participants from giving undue weight to their preferred option.

Making rankings

Participants rank the options from 1 to X. This step can take place through discussion in a plenary session or as a group task where the group has to reach agreement. It is helpful to make a simple preliminary weighing in order to rank the options, which can then be examined in discussion and adjusted wherever the scores are the same.

Cherry-picking

Cherry-picking is appropriate as a follow-up to the “autumn leaves” or “paper carousel” method. Participants “pick cherries” from among the ideas they find on cards on the floor or from a list for further work.

Open or anonymous prioritisation?

With respect to some topics or in certain cultures, participants are fearful of expressing their opinions openly and prefer to assign points inconspicuously. To accommodate this situation, the pin board can be turned around, and each participant may then assign points privately, and thereby express an opinion or make an assessment. If this procedure really needs to be “top secret,” ballot boxes (large envelopes for each option) or paper ballots can be used, completed anonymously, and then collected and evaluated.

Delegation

Ranking can be delegated to decision makers or the responsible person, if the role of the brainstorming is to produce a lot of ideas only. Ideas thus may be submitted to an evaluation process with formal and transparent criteria. A process that is tiring to be done in bigger groups.

I am sure brainstorming is an appropriate method whenever we look for ideas, a complete view of a problem or creative solutions. Brainstorming not only produces a broad variety of answers, but also identification with the result and solid ownership among the participants. In my working area, the conception period of mandates, evaluating strengths and weaknesses of projects and partner organisations, etc. are concrete applications of the brainstorming method. I always take care to never use a brainstorming just for participatory reasons; participants would reject this kind of “activating therapy”.

It depends on the concrete situation whether I start the brainstorming with one open question or in a more structured way. Most often I work with cards; in small groups we sometimes limit to the oral sharing of ideas. I always take care to reserve some space for un-expected ideas outside the focus of the brainstormed topic. Valid ideas happen to appear whenever it is; up to us to catch them and assure the follow-up. Maybe the simplest form of a brainstorming is answering a question or commenting a report: I express in words what “storms in my brain”.

One word regarding documentation: We usually keep the original documentation of important results for some time. Other – less important – results are kept on digital photo; intermediate steps are directly used in the next step and not specially documented.

Brainstorming always produces high quality results; there are always ideas appearing I never thought about: A group is definitely more intelligent than a sole individual. Well prepared and only used for real case situations (serious questions), brainstorming motivates participants, and broadens the support for concepts or projects. In my view, the cost – benefit ratio is always positive.

Ruth Huber, Deputy Head Employment and Income Division

I use the brainstorming method at uncountable occasions. The reason for using a brainstorming is to allow people to search in an unstructured way what they bear in mind or store in their brains. I would like to aggregate ideas, arguments, and opinions regarding a concrete issue of a whole group of people. Visualizing the result of a brainstorming is a key issue. Cards automatically produce a "report" of the brainstorming. A mindmap as a result of an oral brainstorming offers the possibility to find a logic structure for the ideas; this is often a better starting point for a next working step.

There is another form I would like to pinpoint at: The Flip-Chart-Chat or Poster-Chat. We used it at the CoP Dare to Share event in January 2007. Nine key-questions regarding CoP at SDC have been prepared and written on charts. Participants of the CoP Dare to Share have been invited to write their answer directly on the charts, including reactions on statements of other participants. After three quarters of an hour, two core staff commented the results, and participants could react on the comments. Half an hour later, the 20 CoP-activists had collected basic material for the CoP-Manifesto.

I am always impressed how fast people start working in a beehive atmosphere, whenever the brainstorming structure (thematic domain, objective, meaningful questions, and a suitable logistic) makes sense to them. I am again impressed to see a slow down after ten, fifteen or even twenty minutes, all agreeing that what was in the heads is now noted on a joint flip chart or pinned on a wall. A good result: If the participants out of the clustered ideas find a way to decide, how to proceed with their quest: "Now I know whom I have to consult" or: "Now it is clear to me what categories of partners we want to address".

Manuel Flury, Head Service Knowledge and Research

Variety in methods here as well

To get priorities, many other procedures are possible to imagine. When the expected result is clear, an appropriate method can be chosen. Here are several possible choices:

- Distribute the various options throughout the room. Participants choose their preferred option. Only these options are subsequently dealt with. When there are many participants and few options, this process is suitable for simultaneously forming working groups that will work further with these options; it should be possible to change the groups prior to beginning the work.
- Multi-step procedure: After each round of voting, the option (or options) with the least number of votes is eliminated.
- In large gatherings, sub-groups dealing with a particular topic have the task of reaching a joint decision about their preferred idea.
- Participants evaluate options according to a list of criteria. When a parallel evaluation takes place in smaller groups, differing assessments must be discussed. This method is relatively transparent but very demanding.
- Project marketplace: Participants use play money to decide in which project they want to invest. Beans, coloured glass beads, pieces of cardboard or bricks can be used as play money.

Sources

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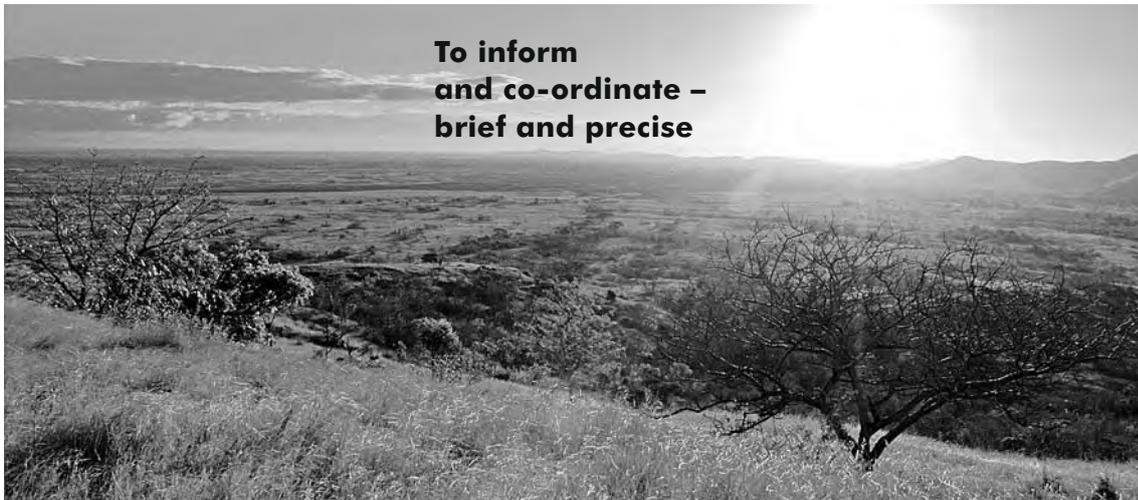
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Briefing and Debriefing



What is a briefing?

Briefing, according to Wikipedia, is a short meeting among stakeholders of an activity immediately before (briefing / in-briefing) or after the activity (debriefing). Briefings are most common in sports, army, and aviation, but also used in advertising, teaching, psychology, etc. Briefings are often made based on checklists. The aim is to inform about (or to recall on) important issues.

Briefings, whether in the form of briefing notes, longer briefing papers, or oral briefings, are used to keep decision makers informed about the issues they are responsible for. In public and private organisations, briefings are the principal means of communication between managers and CEOs or other senior officials.

Senior officials must constantly learn and retain information about an enormous range of topics and issues, which change rapidly. The only way they can do this is to rely on concise, clear, reliable briefings.

In development cooperation, briefings are used to update consultants and other staff with newest context information, debriefings to inform decision makers about findings of evaluations and studies and respective recommendations.

The briefing note is key for every form of briefing, be it oral or written, face to face or distant.

What is a briefing note and when is it used?

Written briefings are usually done in the form of briefing notes. A briefing note is a short paper that quickly and effectively informs a decision-maker about an issue. A useful briefing note distils often complex information into a short, well-structured document.

Briefing notes usually deal with “issues” – subjects of debate. But briefing notes are also prepared for any topic someone needs to be informed about. It might be a policy matter, a situation, a report, action by the government or another organisation.

Briefing notes are typically written for those senior-level decision-makers who

- have to keep track of many, often unrelated, issues
- may not be familiar with the issues and may not have any related background
- for whatever reason, cannot spend time doing their own research
- need a capsule version of the key points and considerations about an issue.

What are the characteristics of a good Briefing Note (BN)?

A well-prepared briefing note quickly and efficiently fills a person in on an issue. The most valuable BN is clear, concise and easy to read. To succeed, a briefing note should be:

- short:** one to two pages, and always as short as possible
- concise:** a short document isn't necessarily concise; concise means every word is used as efficiently as possible
- clear:** keep it simple and to the point; always keep your reader firmly in mind and include only what matters to that reader
- reliable:** the information in a briefing note must be accurate, sound and dependable; any missing information or questions about the information should be pointed out
- readable:** use plain language and design your BN for maximum readability (use empty space, subheadings, lists, font, and other means of making reading easier).

How is a BN structured?

Briefing notes often follow a standard format, but THERE ARE MANY VARIATIONS on that format. We will look at a variety of sample briefing notes and briefing note templates in class. The most important point to remember about the structure of briefing notes is that they have three main parts:

- the **purpose** (usually stated as the issue, topic or purpose)
- a **summary of the facts** (what this section contains and the headings used will be determined by the purpose of the briefing note)
- the **conclusion** (this may be a conclusion, a recommendation or other advice, or both).

These three main parts are presented under some or all of the following section headings. Remember, any briefing note you write will only have the sections that are relevant to your purpose and audience.

Issue (also Topic, Purpose): A concise statement of the issue, proposal or problem. This section should explain in one or two lines why the BN matters to the reader. It sets out in the form of a question or a statement what the rest of the note is about.

Background: The details the reader needs in order to understand what follows (how a situation arose, previous decisions/problems, actions leading up to the current situation). Typically this section gives a brief summary of the history of the topic and other background information. What led up to this problem or issue? How has it evolved? Do not repeat information that you're including in the Current Status section.

Current Status: Describes only the current situation, who is involved, what is happening now, the current state of the matter, issue, situation, etc.

Key Considerations: A summary of important facts, considerations, developments – everything that needs to be considered now. While you will have to decide what to include and what to leave out, this section should be as unbiased as possible. Your aim is to present all the details



required for the reader to be informed or to make an informed decision. Keep the reader's needs uppermost in your mind when selecting and presenting the facts. Remember to substantiate any statements with evidence and to double check your facts. Additional details may be attached as appendices.

Options (also Next Steps, Comments): Basically, observations about the key considerations and what they mean; a concise description either of the options and sometimes their pros and cons or of what will happen next.

Conclusion and/or Recommendations: Conclusions summarize what you want your reader to infer from the BN. Many readers jump immediately to this section, so be sure it covers the points you most want your reader to be clear about. Do not introduce anything new in the Conclusion. If you are including a recommendations section, it should offer the best and most sound advice you can offer. Make sure the recommendation is clear, direct and substantiated by the facts you have put forward.

I use briefings in several cases for instance for preparing consultancy missions, e.g. for a self-evaluation with external assistance.

During the in-briefing (at the start of the action), I negotiate the ToR (terms of reference) in a triangle between concerned partners, consultant and me. Beside the aspects that can be defined in words and figures, I invite my partners to follow their intuition, to be attentive to the unplanned. Assist in a self-evaluation means guiding people in the reflection of their own activities, behaviour, chances and risks.

The de-briefing (after the action) helps to put emphasis on a critical reflection and specially the external view. Beside the discussion of the key findings, a de-briefing always contains elements beyond what is written in a report, including impressions and speculative new ideas.

Every in-briefing is built on mutual trust. It is a chance of identifying the best possible set of questions and being prepared to perceive a reality open-minded through different lenses, thus less judging unexpected situations.

Every de-briefing is a chance to learn more about a reality through the eyes of another person and to develop ideas that go beyond the usual routine.

Anne Zwahlen, Deputy Head, West Africa Division

Briefings (and debriefings) I use in three different situations:

(1) Evaluations: Evaluations normally start with briefing the consultant. At the end of an evaluation, a debriefing offers a perfect occasion to check all the recommendations together with the partners, to discuss them and to identify elements for the forthcoming planning process. Briefing and debriefing are formally part of the ToR of an evaluation.

(2) Field visits: Briefings take place with different partners in a partner country, more formal briefings at the level of governments, less formal ones with staff of partner organisations.

(3) SDC job rotation: If the handing and taking over of the desk from one person to the other is extended over a period of one to two months (job rotation within headquarters), a series of short briefings can be arranged, partly even during a joint field visit together with partner organisations. It is helpful to select a topical focus for every briefing and to combine the briefing with focused reading, questions and answers.

Briefings and debriefings are an efficient form to check content issues, to clarify questions, to communicate clear guidelines. It forces the parties for own reflection, and it gives access to the most pertinent information within a reasonable amount of time.

Andreas Gerrits, Programme Manager, Desk North Korea & China

Before you start writing, be sure you are clear about:

- why you're writing the BN (your purpose)
- who you're writing the BN for (your reader)
- what that person most needs to know
- the points you will cover
- how you will structure your information.

After you have drafted your BN, use the following questions as an editing guide:

- Is the purpose of the briefing note clear?
- Is the language simple, economical and clear?
- Is everything there that needs to be there?
- Is anything there that isn't essential to the purpose?
- Is the BN easy to read, understand and remember?
- Do the sections lead logically from one to another?
- Is the BN designed so that it is inviting to the reader?
- Is there a good balance between empty spaces and text?
- Has the briefing note been carefully edited and proofread?

Written Briefing Note or Oral Briefing?

A written briefing note is the best way to prepare an oral briefing. In your briefing note, select the issues to present orally. Be prepared to go in-depth according to the interest and questions of your partner.

Source

<http://web.uvic.ca/~sdoyle/E302/Notes/WritingBriefingNotes.html>



Collegial Coaching



Components

What is collegial coaching? Collegial coaching is a process in which two or more professional colleagues work together for a specific, predetermined purpose in order that professional performance can be improved as well as validated. The purpose may be to reflect on current practices or to expand, to refine, and build new skills. Collegial coaching can be utilized to share new ideas; to teach one another; to conduct observations of meetings or workshops; or to solve problems in the workplace. Collegial coaching is non judging and non evaluative. Collegial coaching is focusing on the collaborative development, refinement and sharing of professional knowledge and skills, as well as developing alternative behaviour.

There are a variety of collegial coaching terms and models: technical coaching, peer coaching, team coaching, cognitive coaching, and challenge coaching are a few of the more common types of coaching used.

Each model is slightly different but all have the same final goal – to improve professional performance – and all involve the use of peers/colleagues to achieve this goal.

Collegial Coaching has been developed by professionals in the field of teacher training. The concept is convincing and practice oriented; it can easily be transferred to other professional fields.

Why Collegial Coaching?

Statistical support for collegial coaching comes from many sources. Bruce Joyce states following figures:

- 5% of learners will transfer a new skill into their practice as a result of theory
- 10% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration
- 20% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration, and practice within the training
- 25% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration, and practice within the training, and feedback
- 90% will transfer a new skill into their practice with theory and demonstration, and practice within the training, feedback, and coaching



I know myself and propose this method in different situations equally to others, because I made good experience with it.

- I. I request peers for a collegial coaching, expose the situation and the problem I face and ask a guiding question. Then I turn round, do not observe the others, but just listen attentively to the answers given to my question. After a given time, I turn back and state the most meaningful options I have selected.*
- II. Another form we are often applying in a peer group follows the principle "do not talk – ask!" After having exposed the problem, the peers ask open questions (H&W-questions). The open questions provoke own thinking (reflecting own experience and investigating further options) instead of dumping advice.*
- III. In our yearly appraisal dialogue ("Mitarbeitergespräch" – dialogue between collaborator and direct supervisor) we normally include one typical challenge of the collaborator into the dialogue making use of the principles of collegial coaching.*

Peter Paul, Head, East and Southern Africa Division

Benefits

After a period of practicing collegial coaching you may hear professionals saying:

"The level of trust we developed made it possible for us to support and listen to one another."

"The feedback has also given me insight into what is actually going on through another pair of eyes. I feel that my effectiveness has been greatly increased through the collegial coaching process."

"It brought to life a lot of things I knew I should do and had tried, but had not continued. It gave me an impetus, having a coach/colleague I respect."

Some of the benefits reported by professionals who have been involved in collegial coaching are:

- enhanced sense of professional skill
- increased ability to analyse the own way of working
- better understanding of what we know about best practices
- wider repertoire of professional skills
- deeper sense of efficacy
- stronger professional ties with colleagues
- more cohesive organisational culture and working climate.

How to do a Collegial Coaching

Make sure you have a team with an open and trustful working spirit. The minimum number would be one colleague, the maximum number a team of five to six members. Reserve enough time during the team meeting or invite for a special collegial coaching session. Act along the following steps:

1. Collect the cases of your team mates (there might be several cases asking for a coaching).
2. Select the case to be checked according to the interest, importance, urgency. Prospective cases (there will be an immediate step to be taken) provoke more passion than retrospective cases (lessons to be learnt).
3. Distribute roles: In groups of more than four members it is advisable that one assumes the role of a facilitator (checking the time frame and orienting the discussion if needed).



4. Expose the case: Describe the situation, tell the “history” of your case, make clear why this case is important to you, explain what you feel being difficult, share what you already tried out, and formulate a clear question the coaching should focus on.
5. Clarify questions of understanding asked by the coaches. Keep this step as short as possible! Coaches should restrict to what they really need to know.
6. Open a dialogue among the coaches. The person having exposed his case listens carefully, but does not intervene in the discussion. The dialogue may relate to:
 - the facts you perceived during the exposure of the case (“the red thread”, key words characterizing the challenge, surprising facts)
 - what you perceived regarding the way the case has been exposed (voice, tone, body-language related to a special moment in the story)
 - the own feelings you had during the presentation
 - what you perceive as the core challenge or what you assume might be a hidden challenge not mentioned by the presenter.
7. Optional: The presenter of the case comments on what has been said so far and states in how far his own perception of the case has already changed. He repeats or re-formulates his question for the coaching (focus-question).
8. The coaches resume their dialogue. In the second part they might share:
 - a. Their hypotheses and fantasies about the case
 - b. Questions they would clarify if they were concerned
 - c. Information they feel important to know if they were concerned
 - d. Experience they gathered in a similar case
 - e. Possible solutions they would go for.

It is up to the facilitator to structure the discussion. The presenter only intervenes if the dialogue goes completely “off-road”, i.e. the presenter is no more able to relate it to his main question.
9. The presenter of the case states what elements of the dialogue attracted his interest and what was most meaningful to him.
In a common discussion the whole team might clarify and probe the most promising track(s) and analyse benefits and possible risks.
The most promising option might be explored through a role play, tentative action or comparison with a real similar case.
10. The presenter states what will be the next steps he is going to do. If needed, he may ask a team member to act as an accompanying coach (observer) in this next step.
11. The group reflects about the process and shares learning insights. Most often, other team members profit as well of the coaching by discovering parallel aspects with cases they are facing.

Time frame for a collegial coaching

If there are only two persons (the coached person and a coach), 10 to 30 minutes will do.

If you conduct a more formal collegial coaching in a group (the coached person and four coaches), half an hour to one hour and a half will be an appropriate frame.

Who is a good coach?

Any team member or colleague can be a good coach. The following prerequisites are helpful:

- Own experience in a similar situation
- Capacity to understand and analyse social systems
- Ability to reframe an experience (transfer it into another context)
- Empathy with others.



Source

Peer Coaching for Improvement of Teaching and Learning (see Web-links) and coaching documents of AGRIDEA Lindau (translation).

References / Links

Peer Coaching for Improvement of Teaching and Learning

A short and informative presentation of peer coaching within the educational system, highlighting reasons and benefits of the method. A lot of convincing arguments to include it into the daily routine of other professionals as well, such as development workers. <http://teachersnetwork.org/tnpi/research/growth/becker.htm>

Peer Coaching: An effective staff development model for educators of linguistically and culturally diverse students.

By Paul Galbraith and Kris Anstrom.

This article highlights benefits and process of peer coaching in the light of staff development in educational settings. <http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/directions/03.htm>

Collegial Coaching at High Tech High

Though the Website aims at teaching situations, it is full of questions that help a lot in guiding a coaching process. Four pages full of inspiring questions, grouped according to various purposes of the coaching process.

<http://staff.hightechhigh.org/~tfehrenbacher/Misc/Collegial%20Coaching.htm>

Mentoring and Coaching Models

This Website explains the collegial coaching process. It clearly states the difference between coaching and mentoring and suggests splitting the coaching process in three parts, the pre-conference, the observation and the post-conference.

http://209.85.129.104/search?q=cache:ndR-W100urQJ:my-ecoach.com/online/resources/925/peercoaching_ef.pdf+collegial+coaching&hl=de&ct=clnk&cd=15&gl=ch



Community of Practice (CoP)



From Own to Shared Knowledge

Learning Organisations aim to enhance learning across organisational units and empower people in their work. A Community of Practice is a convincing way of doing so.

A Community of Practice (CoP) is a group of committed people, active in a common domain, with a genuine interest in each others' expertise based on their own practice. Members combine their own interests with an open mandate from their organisation and work together in a rather informal structure.

The six essentials of a CoP

1. There is a **Community**. A Community has active members with a lively interest in sharing their knowledge. Being a community means something special to the members, and the community has a certain priority. It is not just "what I do after six in the evening". Members are keen to meet each other because they benefit from the community.
2. There is a **Domain**. A CoP has a clear domain, a thematic orientation that is neither too narrow nor too large. This domain is relevant and meaningful to the members; they are interested in specific topics and expect to improve their own practice by sharing experience related to what they do.
3. There is a **Practice**. Each and every member has his/her own practice within the domain of the CoP, and members know about each others' practice. One's own practice serves as a kind of reality check when sharing experience, concepts and strategies. Reflecting on one's own practice against the background of other practices is one of the essentials of a CoP.



4. There is **Motivation**. A CoP exists only through the motivation of its members. This motivation is recognizable by their personal interest and the priority they assign to the CoP in their daily work. Adhering to a CoP often means developing a passion for it.
5. There is a **Mandate**. By means of a mandate, the management of the organisation shows its interest in and commitment to the CoP. It defines, on one hand, the thematic focus and the expected concrete results. On the other hand, the mandate provides an open space for self-commitment to its members, in terms of time and financial resources.
6. There is a **balance of formal and informal structure**. A CoP is a structure beyond organisational boxes and lines. Hierarchy is not an important element. Most CoPs crosslink organisational units and organisations.

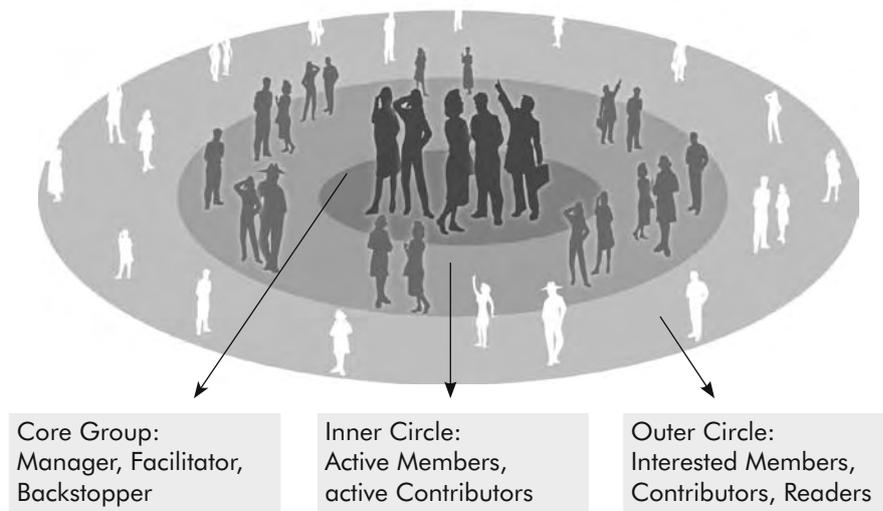
The basic structure of a CoP

Most communities of practice have a threefold concentric structure: A core group, an inner circle, and an outer circle.

The core group acts as a managing group based on an agreed co-ordination mandate. It coordinates the activities of the CoP and ensures secretarial support if necessary.

The inner circle functions as a steering committee with an informal structure, meeting once or twice a year. Individual members of the inner circle may be in contact with the core group on demand.

The outer circle consists of interested people, contributors, and readers, forming a loose network.



In their business unit, collaborators shape the organisation; in their teams, collaborators take care of projects; through networks, collaborators form relationships; in their CoPs, collaborators develop the knowledge that lets them perform these other tasks.

A CoP exists in a concrete context and depends on it

An organisation is ready to host a CoP or to allocate time and resources for a CoP if:

- The domain has a strategic importance for the organisation
- The CoP and the organisation share common values
- The organization recognises learning and knowledge management as an important asset
- The results are relevant and beneficial for the organisation and its members (i.e. there is an added value).

A successful CoP is able to cope with the values, the culture and the pragmatism of all supporting organisations.



CoP ... or ... task force ... or ... interest group ... or ...???

A CoP is a kind of a network. But what is the difference between a CoP and other groups of cooperating people? The most striking differences are:

| Description of the cooperating group | Main differences with a CoP |
|--|---|
| Interest Group: Group of persons interested in a topic that invites experts and shares experience. Open for new members, and supported by facilitation. | Loose form, passive role of participants |
| Task Force: A group of specialists working on a specific task given by the management, often under time pressure. | Guided by management, result-oriented, limited time frame |
| Self-Help Group: Individuals with similar problems gather for mutual support. Frequent focus on topics related to health and addiction. | Focus on individual problem-solving, coping with a difficult life situation |

How to start a CoP

Every CoP has its own history, milestones, highlights and pitfalls. Knowing this history is a key to understanding the nature and the development potential of a CoP. Like every organisational form, a CoP has a life cycle and goes through different stages – from its creation to its phasing out.

| | Phases | Associated metaphors |
|---|--|--|
| 1 | Express your need to interact with peers: I know – you know – we together might know better! | Germination Creation |
| 2 | Start a discussion of a domain in a core group and discover a common interest in this interaction. Dare introducing new forms of sharing experience. Encourage others! | Inspiration Budding stage |
| 3 | Contact potentially interested people by phone, by mail, and in informal talks during workshops and gatherings. Attract their attention and awaken their interest. Involve them in a first small and useful interaction. Let them feel the possible benefits. | Growth Flowering |
| 4 | Design the interaction in terms of time and place: Contributions in journals, discussions in electronic platforms, and meetings. Pay attention to early, intermediate results, summaries and conclusions of discussions. Assure the flow of the process; assure added value for all participants. Motivate individuals through back-channel contacts. Organize the core group (owner, convenor, facilitator, experts) and take care of the inner and the outer circle. | Adventure group Starting an expedition |
| 5 | Organize workshops and face to face meetings on core topics. Strive for concrete products. Live and learn within the CoP – this important phase of a CoP can last up to several years or even decades. | CoP in full swing |
| 6 | Phase out when the domain of the CoP is becoming less relevant. Determine whether re-orientation might open a new vision. Organize a closing event: Celebrate the farewell with results achieved! Use the empty space and time for new initiatives or contributions. | Mission accomplished Happy ending End Year Party |

I experienced a CoP within the thematic domain “donor intervention in value chain development”. We conducted an internet discussion over a period of two and a half years, organised in 9 discussion cycles, all starting with a focal topic and closing with a summary / conclusion of the topic. Some debates were more and some less intensive.

The concrete products at the end of the whole process are a working paper, a lot of personal contacts among the members of the platform discussion and a silent platform still containing the content of the whole discussion. Whether to take up the discussion after a sleeping period of 6 to 10 years or not can be decided in future; there might be new people interested; or there might be new topics coming up within this thematic domain.

There was a broad variety of field experience appearing provoked by questions and discussion hypotheses. The interaction among the discussion partners was intensive. There were roughly one dozen people involved intensively and another dozen occasionally. Furthermore, lurkers could profit from the discussions as well.

One problem was the quantity of mails at times, making it difficult to read them all. Regular syntheses of the discussions are a must in such discussions, and they have been very helpful to me and the whole community.

The CoP on Value Chains was relatively short (2 years) but intensive. The benefit for SDC was the identification of relevant knowledge and experience available within the community – both in the field and at the headquarters. The working paper «Donor Interventions in Value Chain Development» is a very useful result that is based on the well-structured and well-managed discussion. The working paper was an important input for the «International Working Conference on Value Chains and Linkages» in Berlin (May 2007) and also a valuable reference paper for any project working in this subject matter area. For the thematic division of SDC it is also a good base for their future support to SDC operations in Value Chain. Last but not least the CoP provided SDC with an expanded network with other organisations active in the domain of value chains.

Andreas Gerrits, Programme Manager, Desk North Korea & China

Neuchâtel Initiative came forth from a meeting between bilateral donors and the World Bank in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. This meeting had the aim of sorting out problems around the so-called “Training and Visit” approach to agricultural extension that the World Bank applied in many African countries. The first meeting was successful: Donor organisation met informally on neutral ground and started a fruitful dialogue. Based on this positive experience in Neuchâtel, the Neuchâtel Initiative was born and continued with annual meeting called “Informal Donor Consultation”. Up to present several issues regarding agricultural extension have been taken up, were discussed and the results published in the – among insiders well known – green brochures of the Neuchâtel Initiative (common framework and various thematic guides).

Today we are discussing about harmonisation. The Neuchâtel Initiative has done it in a concrete way for the past 13 years. And even though this was not on a compulsory basis it had a broad effect. Till today the Neuchâtel Initiative has functioned without a secretariat; every year another organisation took the lead for the next period and the next theme. Now the Neuchâtel Initiative is about to re-orient itself towards becoming more operationally oriented with increasing involvement of the south partners, thus moving away from the initial “donor-club”. To be followed...

Transnet is a CoP for practitioners in the domain “Transport for Development”. Some ten years ago, Transnet has been the CoP for road and bridge construction people from SDC, NGOs and consulting companies. Today, with the road / bridge construction business (hard ware) diminishing and focussing more on soft ware (maintenance, capacity building), the CoP lost many members and has to revisit its “raison d’être”. On the other side the recent Newsletter “Focus on Mobility” attracts a substantial number of international practitioners and experts.

Aguasan, existing for more than 20 years, stands for corporate identity in the water domain. Its structure of three concentric circles deserves special emphasis: The core team (2-3 persons) managing the daily business, the core group (15 persons) meeting four times a year and all other members, meeting either in the annual workshop and/or being involved in a lively e-mail exchange. Aguasan was able to always identify future-oriented themes.

Thomas Zeller, Senior Advisor, Social Development Division



Does your CoP pass the fitness test?

Experience shows that a successful CoP fulfils the criteria of the fitness test. Check your own CoP and tick (☑) what applies to it!

| Criteria | Concrete check questions |
|-----------------------|--|
| Purpose | <input type="checkbox"/> Are the selected topics of interest to all members? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the domain strategically relevant to the involved organisations? <input type="checkbox"/> Do all members have their own practice in the domain? |
| Members of a CoP | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the relevant experience on board? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the heterogeneity of the members assured? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the CoP open to new members? |
| Norms and rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Are roles and accountability defined in a common agreement? <input type="checkbox"/> Are both distant contacts and face-to-face meetings possible? <input type="checkbox"/> What is the balance between giving and taking among members? |
| Structure and process | <input type="checkbox"/> Is the chosen structure clear and flexible enough? <input type="checkbox"/> Are key roles in the core group defined, such as owner, manager, facilitator, and expert? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the step-by-step planning process open and transparent? |
| Flow of "energy" | <input type="checkbox"/> Do members care about common interests, commitment and trust? <input type="checkbox"/> Are there regular face-to-face events; celebrated (social) key moments? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the history of the CoP alive and told to new members? |
| Results | <input type="checkbox"/> Is there a common concern as a basis for producing tangible results? <input type="checkbox"/> Do members get direct and practical benefits? <input type="checkbox"/> Are results officially recognised by the CoP members' organisations? |
| Resources | <input type="checkbox"/> Do the members have a sufficient time budget for the CoP? <input type="checkbox"/> Are the member organisations willing to provide time and money? <input type="checkbox"/> Is the facilitation attractive and stimulating? |
| Values in a CoP | <input type="checkbox"/> Is listening to others a living virtue? <input type="checkbox"/> Are members willing to give without immediate return? <input type="checkbox"/> Is diversity in thinking and practice validated? |

Result? How many ☑ did you mark?

- 0 ... 8 Your CoP is still in its infancy.
 9 ... 15 Your CoP may be in need of serious coaching.
 16 ... 19 Your CoP is running well. Some aspects may require improvements.
 20 ... 22 Please tell us about your CoP! It must be a fine experience!
 23 ... 24 You probably have a too optimistic picture of your CoP! Please check again!

Source

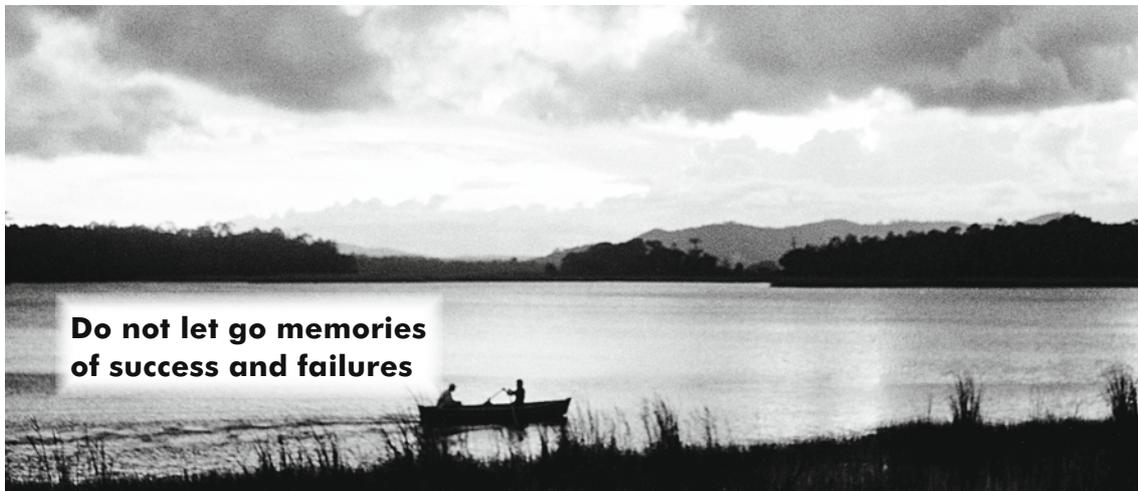
SDC CoP Flyer (www.daretoshare.ch)
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 CoP in Public Sector: http://www.anecdote.com.au/papers/Callahan_ActKM_Chapter.pdf



Exit Interviews



What are exit interviews?

Traditionally, exit interviews are conducted with employees leaving an organisation. The purpose of the interview is to provide feedback on why employees are leaving, what they liked or didn't like about their employment and what areas of the organisation they feel need improvement. Exit interviews are one of the most widely used methods of gathering employee feedback, along with employee satisfaction surveys.

More recently, the concept of exit interviewing has been revisited and expanded as a knowledge management tool, as a way of capturing knowledge from leavers. Rather than simply capturing human resources information, the interview also aims to capture knowledge about what it takes to do the job.

What are the benefits of exit interviews?

- vital knowledge is not lost to the organisation when people leave
- the learning curve of new people joining the organisation is shortened
- they can be done relatively quickly and inexpensively
- they can result in the leaver having a more positive view of the organisation.

Done correctly, exit interviews can be a win-win situation for both the organisation and the leaver. The organisation gets to retain a portion of the leaver's knowledge and make it available to others, while the leaver gets to articulate their unique contributions to the organisation and to 'leave their mark'.

How do I go about it?

Traditional exit interviews can be conducted in a variety of ways: face-to-face, over the telephone, using a written questionnaire, or via the Internet using an exit interview management system. In a knowledge-focused exit interview, a face-to-face interview is needed.

You will need to think carefully about the information you would like to gather before the interview and start your preparations early. While the traditional exit interview will tend to collect mainly human resources information, the primary focus of the knowledge-focused interview is on knowledge that would be helpful to the next person who will do the job or to others in the organisation doing similar jobs.

Start planning the handover and exit interview as soon as you know a person is leaving. Identify who in the organisation might benefit from that person's knowledge and what they will need to know. Then work out a plan to capture the leaver's knowledge during the time remaining before he leaves. This should include both explicit knowledge (knowledge that is already documented such as in files and e-mails, and knowledge that can be easily documented), and tacit knowledge (knowledge that is less easy to capture and that needs to be explained or demonstrated).

In the case of explicit knowledge, make sure the leaver moves relevant files – both hard copy and electronic – into shared folders or a document library. Ask them to prune and organise these files and to create role and task folders or notes for their successor.

For tacit knowledge, you will need to interview the leaver face-to-face. Prepare for the interview by reviewing the key tasks the person does based on a job description or annual performance plan. You can then use that information as the basis for discussing how they go about those tasks, what knowledge and skills they need, any problems or pitfalls to be aware of etc. Find out about their network of contacts and sources of knowledge. If possible, create an overlap period between the leaver and their successor so that a 'live' handover can be done.

When conducting exit interviews, think carefully about who will be the interviewer. Someone from the Human Resources Department conducts traditional exit interviews. However this need not be the case in the knowledge-focused interview. Often a peer or a relevant subject expert will be most appropriate. Over and above the obvious interpersonal and interviewing skills needed, you will need to consider issues of trust and honesty. For example, if an employee has had a difficult relationship with a manager or colleague, that person might not be best placed to conduct the interview. Whoever you select, make sure they are appropriately skilled and trained.

I try to use exit interview techniques often at the end of a "career period", so every 4 to 6 years. My key question is: What is my special knowledge worth being shared with colleagues. Pro-actively, I am organizing short sessions to share my experience. In the Rural Development round table, we invite field people and assistants to share experience with an interested audience, especially new staff, using a combination of presentation, common talk and story telling.

In one case, in a COOF context, I wrote "learning sheets" about a particular theme. That was well appreciated by my successors and colleagues.

SDC culture does not include exit interviews as a standard feature. Being pro-active in this respect avoids from being frustrated about disinterested colleagues. Exit interviews are a kind of emergency tool, if experience has not been capitalized throughout the working period.

A risk of exit interviews is to nail down not only experience but also too narrow visions for the future and thus limiting newcomers in their own approaches.

Willi Graf, Senior Advisor, Natural Resources and Environment Division



Exit interviews: I read them on the train, remember the main topic and forget all the details.

A phone call of five minutes normally brings exactly the information I am looking for, far more than an exhaustive written interview made at the end of a posting. In my opinion, the latter would be producing too much information for unknown purposes and users.

Peter Meier, Senior Advisor, NGO Section

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

Traditional exit interviews are usually only appropriate for employees who voluntarily resign or retire rather than those who are fired or made redundant. In the case of the knowledge-focused interview, much will depend on the extent to which the organisation has a culture that encourages knowledge sharing.

Be clear about who will use the knowledge gathered and how it will be used, before you begin to gather it; the purpose of the interview is not to gather knowledge per se, but to gather useful knowledge that will actually be used.

The less you capture knowledge on a regular basis, the more you need to capture it at exit. However you may decide that you could gain more value from capturing knowledge at more regular intervals. For example, The Post Office uses exit interviews as one part of a series of 'cradle-to-grave' interviews to collect knowledge, using a method called 3E. The three Es are Entry, Expert and Exit. Entry interviews allow you to gather knowledge when employees first join the organisation when they have 'new eyes' and a fresh perspective, and also to ask them what they would like to know to help them 'get up to speed'. Expert interviews are conducted as they develop skills and become experts in a particular role or field. For more information about this wider approach, see knowledge harvesting.

Source

NLH <http://www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/ViewResource.aspx?resID=93605&tabID=290&catID=10404>

Reference / Link

Disappearing knowledge: are exit interviews the wit's end?
by David Skyrme – I3 Update, 2001, November, No 55

Experience Capitalization



Accumulating experience capital to prepare change processes

A conceptual definition of experience capitalization

Experience capitalization refers to the transformation of (individual and institutional) knowledge into capital by those directly involved in order to change a collective, institutional practice. It aims at changing one's own practices or structures.

Experience capitalization is one method of reviewing experiences in order to produce knowledge. It is a **learning process** which brings about **changes** by reverting to existing but latent experiences. Capitalizing on experiences paves the way for change – or is a partial step in a process of change already in progress. It supplies a basis for the planned and purposeful sequence of changes. Although experience capitalizations are performed by experience holders, they can be used by anyone desiring to change a practice.

Experience capitalizations can be directed at both the **strategic orientations** of organizations and activities and their conceptual basis, as well as at improving **operations** and processes. In both instances the initiative may stem from the geographical divisions or from a topical department.

All of us continually undergo a learning process in the scope of our activities so that capitalizing on experiences is an ongoing process. But only when individual knowledge is made relevant to the organization it is **capitalized institutionally**. Only if experience capitalizations are configured and planned as collective events, when a procedure is agreed upon by all participants and is directed towards achieving a predefined goal, do they exhibit a useful and communicable form or become processes with controllable results which can be implemented methodically in order to improve a practice.

Conceptual differentiations

Experience capitalization is not the same as **experience documentation**. In addition to archiving and accountability functions, experience documentation is directed at „learning in the future“, and making information available to third parties. The objective is to create a retrievable memory.

Experience capitalization is a form of organizational learning. It overlaps with a variety of other procedures, with the documentation and exchange of experiences, with evaluations, case studies, cross-section analyses and other methods used to evaluate, present and apply experience. One important difference is the fact that in the process of experience capitalization, available experience is collected from the “stakeholders”, from the persons and organizations directly involved, and then assimilated and used to plan and implement changes.

Regarding contents, the experience capitalization process does not require the involvement of third parties. The processes and results of experience capitalization belong to the participants themselves – although its results can be made available to other organizational units or third parties.

Experience capitalization cannot be delegated. External players will only be called in when those directly involved – the experience holders – ask them to participate. In such case, a specific role is delegated to them, such as that of structuring processes.

Purpose of experience capitalization

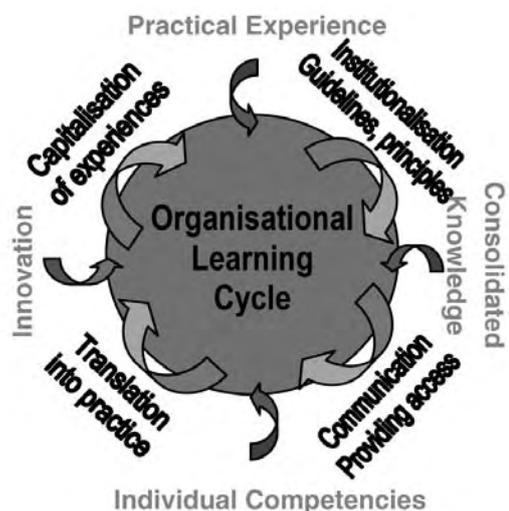
Experience capitalization aims at changing a practice – within projects or programs (country programs, sectorial or thematic programs, etc.), or within concepts, strategies and policies. The accumulated and structured experience capital is then to be invested and implemented in order to achieve improved performance.

Typical questions in experience capitalization are e.g.:

- “What do we know that can help us improve our future performance?”
- “What experiences can we use to realize our project or program more purposefully and how can we accomplish this, or how can we do more justice to context when shaping our concept or strategy?”
- “Our project or master plan is improved with respect to these aspects (cite aspects).”
- “We need insights on the following aspects (cite aspects) to improve our project or strategy.”

Experience capitalization must be seen as a part of a bigger organizational learning process.

Experience capitalization is a learning process which paves the way for change. Capitalizing experience means consolidating already acquired experience into common viewpoints within organizational learning processes and translating them into a basis for a new orientation of activities, for the adaptation of concepts.



Lessons learned and good practices are the output of experience capitalization. Their outcome refers to triggered changes. The application of experiences must be prepared and agreed upon by all participants. The investment of “knowledge” capital must be planned with a maximum of consensus and implemented as a project of change. The purpose of experience capitalization is only achieved when a practice has actually been modified.

Consolidated experiences are not automatically implemented as a logical consequence of experience capitalization. This depends on the willingness of the persons and organizations involved to change, including those in hierarchical functions, as well as on existing structures and decisions which experience holders cannot make on their own. Last but not least – local partners and target groups must also support the changes. Unlike experience capitalization, the players involved in projects of change are usually not “autonomous”.

Based on five case studies, SODEV led a process of experience capitalization on the key question “How to reach the poorest?”. Spread over one year, the process was intended to be an internal learning process with transferable results. Based on documents, some interviews with directly involved people, individual reflection and four workshops the outcome is a six page document, describing the process on three pages and the results in form of FAQ (frequently asked questions) on another three. The biggest challenge of the facilitator was to keep the attention focused on the initial key question. A carefully agreed process design was a key to success.

The time used for this capitalisation is about 20 days for the coordinator and 5 to 8 days for each of the 12 participants, in total roughly 100 days.

The FAQ (frequently asked questions), resumed on three pages is reader friendly and easily transferable to other situations. The topic is part of the mid-term strategy of the division. The process – internally facilitated by a SODEV member – led to a change of mindset among the participants: “Reaching the poorest” is well present in the mind of all.

Reto Wieser, Senior Advisor, Social Development Division

Methods for experience capitalization

Experiences can be capitalized in very different ways, using a variety of instruments and procedures. Common to all forms of experience capitalization is the objective of changing a practice. To this end, individual and organizational knowledge are integrated and relevant actions undertaken.

The form of experience capitalization and the **selection of appropriate instruments** depend on the motivation and the objective of experience capitalization, on personnel and institutional participation in the process, and on the geographical range. Finally, based on their form, experience capitalizations also become part of institutional traditions. Processes and reasons for experience capitalizations and participation therein are thus also determined by the history of the organization which capitalizes on experience. Hence, process managers and participants must also select the appropriate instruments or even create them. However, the use of instruments is not an end in itself since experience capitalization is not limited to the routine application of methods and procedures. The results of having applied such instruments must be **interpreted**, compared and **evaluated** in order to suitably serve as a basis for planning changes.

Brief and quick experience capitalization

In the scope of smaller projects or a community of practice, or when very specific questions are formulated within complex structures or systems, experience capitalization can be performed quickly (within days), with a minimum of logistics and without elaborate process structuring.

The experience holders themselves, i.e. those directly involved, can realize this form of experience capitalization without external support. The enlistment of process supporters is only required when time resources are limited.

Appropriate methods for rapid experience capitalization processes include brainstorming sessions; surveys; and previously realized, easy self-evaluations in the sense of the SWOT procedure (S = success, W = weakness, O = opportunities, T = threats), etc.

This type of experience capitalization can be realized in the form of short workshops, written questionnaires or interviews, etc., and should take advantage of any already-scheduled events in the scope of projects and the SDC's annual, country and medium-term programs, including annual planning, mid-year and mid-term reviews, etc.

Comprehensive and far-reaching experience capitalization

Basic adaptations of projects and programs, of concepts and strategies and their thematic orientation require a more broadly structured experience capitalization process which extends over weeks or even months. It may get by without a central event and without all participants encountering each other face-to-face.

When required, external experts (who may have only an indirect connection to the theme of the experience capitalization process) may also be enlisted as experience holders, in addition to those directly involved, to the employees from the regional offices and from Headquarters. In any case, external advisors must receive a clear mandate to function as process supporters based on a detailed functional specification.

Depending on the need, all available instruments can be used in comprehensive experience capitalization to record, present and consolidate experiences. These include, for example, brainstorming sessions, surveys, interviews and consultations, previously realized self- or internal evaluations, cross-sectional evaluations, partner analyses, case studies, the evaluation of existing documents, cognitive mapping, portfolio analyses, scenario techniques, etc.

Usually this procedure cannot be completed within a few events (integrated, most of the time, within the framework of other events). Instead, it requires detailed process planning, with clearly defined stages, responsibilities and the presentation of intermediate results, etc. In comprehensive experience capitalization, it is imperative that participants be informed of (intermediate) results, and that they are invited to assess and comment on them as soon as a first synthesis of results achieved in the process has become available. The respective feedbacks flow into the experience capitalization process and its final results. Such concluding feedback rounds help to bring about a consensus (or to determine differences) in addition to having participants support the final results.



Organizing the experience capitalization process

SDC defines experience capitalizations as one of its key processes in a table (overview):

| Experience Capitalization (EC) | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--|--|---|---|
| | Who with whom? | Tasks | What to think about? | F Department |
| Identification of Needs | Geographical and specialist divisions / cooperation offices (COOFs) / in certain cases external experts  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Determine objective and purpose (required knowledge). ■ Decide if and what type of experiences should be systematically capitalized. ■ Define expected output. ■ Set the time frame. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Are people open to EC and to change? ■ Is there a willingness to make investments? ■ Are changes possible (time!)? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supports the identification of needs. ■ Stands behind the objective. |
| Planning | COOFs / geographical and specialist divisions / in certain cases external support  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Precisely formulate the objective of EC and how results will be applied. ■ Define fields to be observed and key questions. ■ Determine the process, length and rhythm. ■ Appoint those in charge, select participants and beneficiaries and other interested parties. Define their roles and earmark the required resources. ■ Select instruments. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EC guide ■ Goal orientation: the more precise the question, the clearer and more implementation-oriented the EC process. ■ Be realistic! Plan expenditures and instruments in line with defined needs and objectives. ■ Time frame: plan short processes! ■ Transparency: EC is more efficient when the interests of participants are laid open on the table. ■ Do not capitalize experience for others! | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Supports a detailed objective. ■ Supports detailed planning. ■ Co-defines participation, roles and resources. ■ Selects instruments. |
| Implementation and Support | Experience holders with supporting group (COOFs / geographical and specialist divisions / invited partners / in certain cases external support)  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Ensure that experience holders retain ownership. ■ Define process management. ■ Document results. ■ Synthesize results. ■ Discuss results with experience holders. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EC is a learning process. ■ The EC process should not be misused to assert individual interests. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Controls the process. ■ Documents results. ■ Consults and synthesizes. |
| Change Practices | COOFs / divisions / departments / COOFs with local partners  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Plan the application of capitalized experiences. ■ Make decisions on strategy and/or practices. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ EC is not an end in itself, but rather a basis for making change and planning improvements. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Advises during implementation phase. ■ Applies results in comparative analysis. |

Stages

It makes sense to divide experience capitalization processes into four stages: (see next side)

1. Identification of needs
2. Planning
3. Implementation (and support)
4. Change of practice.

It is important to understand that any preliminary and follow-up procedures are part of the experience capitalization process. Without clarification of the need, careful planning and the implementation of results, i.e., without the application of any knowledge gained in a (changed) procedure, experience capitalizations are incomplete. At the same time, processes should be kept as brief as possible – capitalization does not necessarily improve with longer process times.

Identifying the goal and theme

A prerequisite for the success of experience capitalization is the clear definition of a goal. The theme of experience capitalization must also be defined. Frequently, experience capitalization focuses on very specific aspects identified as needing revision and which are of more interest than large-scale or global topics. The more precisely these are formulated, the more solid will be the basis provided by the experience capitalization process for the planning and implementation of any changes.

Participation

Participants must be selected in accordance with the nature and demands of the respective experience capitalization process and the changes to which it should contribute. Two roles must be coordinated with one another: The experience holders and the process supporters.

Process quality

Regarding planning experience capitalization, there is a contradiction. On one hand, they need to be planned as precisely as possible; on the other, they remain learning processes with a limited scope for planning. Experience capitalizations are unpredictable, dynamic ventures because of their participative structure. By involving various players with diverging interests and perspectives, the objective is to illuminate all the different experiences and assessments rather than reach a consensus. It is not wise to strive for agreement on experiences; on the contrary, the presentation of different experiences should foster discussion among the players and thus enrich the process of experience capitalization.

Timing – experience capitalization and project, i.e. program cycle management

Experience capitalization taps into past experiences in order to adapt future practices and is thus basically future-oriented. In other words, capitalizing on experience is a meaningful process when a need for change exists and when the opportunities to initiate change are actually given. In cases where estimates reveal only a small chance for change to even take place within a program or project, experience capitalization is superfluous. For example, the end of projects and programs is not a suitable moment to carry out experience capitalizations because there is no longer any leeway for changing an unsatisfactory procedure.



By comparison, the most significant opportunities for capitalizing on experiences are given during periods of crisis in medium- and long-term projects and programs, as well as during routine planning. Nevertheless, systematic experience capitalization is not necessarily a part of managing project and program cycles since many of these do well without it. But whenever experience capitalization is realized in the scope of routine project sequences, it should consider and use such significant milestones as planning sessions, mid-year and mid-term reviews, etc. Experience capitalization is always used in organizational learning processes.

Participants and roles

Experience holders: The most important players in experience capitalization processes are the experience holders themselves. Not only do they own the process and its results, they are also concerned with making capitalized experiences available to third parties. Experience holders initiate the experience capitalization process, define its objectives and integrate their knowledge and experiences into the process. Often, they – or at least some of them – are also responsible for implementing capitalized experiences. In other words, they are the ones who change their own practice.

Process supporters: External players who are not necessarily familiar with the contents of an experience capitalization theme can be called in to support the experience holders in the process of capitalizing on their experiences. They can provide advice on the **structure of the experience capitalization process**, document intermediate and final results, and may even participate in planning the implementation of capitalized experiences.

Other participants: Besides experience holders and process supporters, other functions can be involved in experience capitalization, e.g., external experts who support the validation of consolidated experiences, those responsible for change processes, decision-makers, as well as persons and functions entrusted with transfer and networking tasks.

For the last two years we are engaged in experience capitalization in the field of gender mainstreaming in the Latin America programme. A Community of Practice composed of members of the gender desk (F-department), gender focal point within Latin America Section at headquarters and gender focal point in the cooperation offices conducts a balanced process including both, structured as well as open elements. The annual workshop is a “moment fort”, taking stock of and documenting the capitalized experience so far and defining further steps.

The motivated community acquired a common language and defined relevant lessons learnt, based on long lasting local experience. Within the community, there is a lot of mutual support and coaching.

Annemarie Sançar, Gender Advisor, Governance Division

Source and Reference

Guide to Thematic Experience Capitalization. SDC, 2005; available as flyer (short version, 6 pages) and as brochure with case studies (long version, 32 pages). Print versions available from SDC, Thematic and Technical Resources Department, CH 3003 Berne, e-mail: thematicinfo@deza.admin.ch.

Facilitation



When talking about facilitation, French speaking people use the term “animateur / animatrice” and thus emphasize on putting some life into a group while the German term “Moderator / Moderatorin” stresses the fact that discussions shouldn’t get out of hand. In English, the term “Facilitator” is currently used to designate the function of supporting a group of people in the process of addressing a topic with purpose and efficiency and working together to achieve results. It definitely includes more tasks than those of a chairman or chairwoman. And these differences is exactly what the following paragraphs are about.

Facilitation is the art of guiding the discussion process in a group. The facilitator is responsible for the planning and implementation of an appropriate process; the concerned group is responsible for the content by contributing expertise. Facilitation aims at being economical (goal oriented and time efficient) and at the well-being of all involved participants (giving room to all voices in a group, establishing an atmosphere of listening to each other, and ensuring that decisions are backed and owned by all).

The four basic rules of facilitation

1. First be clear about the expected result, then choose the appropriate method!

The first step in any sort of facilitation is identifying the expected result, together with the client. Only when this is clear an appropriate method can be selected and a suitable procedure planned. This may sound banal; experience has shown, however, that many people who commission facilitators are themselves not clear about what results they expect.

2. Make clear agreements with participants for every event!

The agreement at the beginning of an event normally includes:

- Overall goals / purpose of the event / expected results
- Content and programme
- Participants and respective roles
- Procedure (methods, resources)
- Time, duration, venue.

Experience has shown that a careful agreement with participants is the magic element in making facilitation successful.

3. Successful facilitation begins with preparation!

Although this statement may seem obvious, preparation involves more than is usually assumed. It extends from clarification of the mandate to proper advertising, invitations, a carefully thought-out program, planned seating arrangements, and preparation of material for each individual step in the procedure intended. Preparation often takes far more time than the facilitated event itself.

4. Limit yourself to what is feasible!

Ultimately, a certain amount of experience is needed to determine how much time the planned sequences will require, or what can be achieved at all with a given group. In this area as well, it is the task of the facilitator to advise the mandator to limit him or her to what is realistic, i.e. to focus what is attainable. Facilitators will damage their own reputation if they try to meet demands that are not within reach.

The function of the facilitator

Many people in positions of responsibility think it is their task to lead meetings and workshops, taking on the role of the chair. They seem virtually unable to imagine that they could express their own concerns and opinions equally or even better as participants. They probably never experienced the relief of focusing their attention on one role only, i.e. being responsible, even as the superior, only for the subject matter, while entrusting another person with the responsibility for the process of the debate.

Superiors and facilitators each have a leadership task. While the boss has a permanent position within the hierarchy, the facilitator's function is limited to a specific period of time. It is the task of the facilitator to lead a group towards attainment of a goal upon which the group has previously agreed. A facilitator assists members of the group in determining and attaining the goals of their particular event. He or she assumes responsibility for reminding a group of the task at hand, and for ensuring that members of the group address the topic of discussion and involve themselves in the group process.

The facilitator proposes procedures, but does not make decisions about the topic or take on tasks, functions or responsibilities that are the responsibility of the group or the person in charge. A good facilitator makes participants understand that the group itself is responsible for the event, and that the desired results can be reached through contributions made by each individual member of the group.

The facilitator is responsible for the discussion process, while the group is responsible for the content of the discussion. They have a joint responsibility to achieve the desired results. The facilitator's function is limited in time by agreement with the group. To this end, the group grants the facilitator responsibility for the process and hence the authority to play the role of facilitator.

Requirements for facilitators

In small groups that meet regularly, participants can assume the function of facilitator by turns. In larger groups, or in demanding meetings, an external facilitator should be employed. The facilitator should not be personally affected by the results of a discussion.

Anyone who wishes to serve as a facilitator needs to have certain qualities in terms of knowledge, skills, and behaviour. The following list consists of qualities mentioned by participants in training sessions for facilitators. By referring to this list, each facilitator can determine for him or herself which qualities he or she already possesses and where something is lacking.



For SDC staff, facilitation is a key skill. I use facilitation several times a week, in situations such as regular meetings, planning and reviewing country programmes, team retreats, donor coordination, etc. Regular meetings require only little preparation; clarifying objectives (concrete expected results), roles and interests normally is sufficient.

For larger meetings, workshops or retreats, careful preparation is the key for success; clarifying the task (including a vision of a possible good result), defining roles and a suitable discussion process. During the events, I regularly visualize key elements of the process and the results on flip charts and cards. Ideally, facilitation is done by a person that is not involved in the content. I am rather often asked to step in for the facilitation for even difficult meetings organized by other units of SDC. This is a challenge I voluntarily accept.

Facilitating internal meetings often means: putting myself in a double role. This is a tricky issue, but I think I found my way to cope with this double role. Some hints are: First, I am open to question my own agenda. Second, I insist in defining the objective of a discussion as concrete as possible (expected results). Third, I trust the group to find the best possible solution. Forth, I facilitate with a strict product oriented attitude. And finally, I do not feel shy to facilitate in my very personal style: open, direct (but never aggressive), and remaining as neutral as possible). An emotionally coloured setting provokes lively discussions and well supported results.

The most important motivation to take over the role of a facilitator, is my conviction (and experience) of thus reaching good results. Numerous feedbacks confirm my attitude. With less time better results are achieved; all participants feel themselves understood and accept the result of the meeting. Facilitation is the strong instrument to achieve objectives and satisfy the participants.

Through my facilitation services I have managed to open many doors. I feel, as a facilitator I do not exert power, but I often get great influence by convincing people.

A further effect I often observe: Whenever I am clear and self-confident, also the group is likely to be clear and self-confident.

Willi Graf, Senior Advisor, NRM Division

Knowledge

A facilitator should know:

- The goal of the event
- What is involved in the topic to be addressed
- The backgrounds of participants
- How people behave in groups
- Which methods and techniques are available.

Skills

A professional facilitator must have the ability to:

- Speak clearly and articulately
- Listen, understand quickly, and grasp what is essential
- Structure and organise the topic at hand
- Paraphrase participants' contributions
- Summarise and visualise main points of the discussion
- Motivate and enliven participants
- Apply methods in the right place (asking, questions, guiding brainstorming, etc.)
- Guide group work with clear instructions
- Integrate results of intermediate group work in the main process
- Allocate time appropriately
- Recognise group dynamics and react accordingly
- Keep an overview.



Behaviour

Participants usually demand the most from a facilitator in this area:

- Treating participants respectfully and modestly
- Engaging with groups in an open and friendly manner
- Radiating a sense of calm and commitment in every situation
- Following clear lines while remaining flexible in responding to the wishes of participants
- Sticking to the role agreed upon and remaining neutral
- Remaining above and tolerating conflict.

Basic assumptions and principles

It is helpful for facilitators to start from several basic assumptions; their behaviour will then be more likely to correspond to the wishes of participants.

All participants have positive intentions: They want to get something for themselves, for the group, or for people whom they represent. The facilitator's task is to discern or discover this positive purpose and respond to it as far as possible. The mere acknowledgement of a positive intention does much to relax the atmosphere and enhance the willingness of participants to cooperate.

Participants want first of all to be understood: "Basically people do not want to be right; they want to be understood." This insight applies not only in private discussions but also in discussions at scheduled events. This is why the facilitator's task consists first of all in making each participant feel that at least s/he understands them. A participant experiences this directly when the facilitator summarises his or her contribution accurately. This activity is called "paraphrasing", the essential basic skill a facilitator needs to have.

Good facilitation enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of an event: Clear leadership of discussion and consistent visualisation help to save time. Facilitators use these qualities to ensure that participants' contributions are short and to the point, that unnecessary repetition is avoided, and that the most essential points are summarised concisely. This helps to ensure that meaningful results and agreed-upon goals are achieved.

Good facilitation makes participants feel more comfortable: Participants feel contented when questions are formulated clearly, everyone contributes in an appropriate way, and everyone listens attentively to what others have to say.

Conditions for successful Facilitation

There are a number of aspects, which can be taken into consideration to define the necessary conditions for successful facilitation:

- commitment for openness and sharing among the involved people and organisations
- willingness to think 'out of the box' and to change
- benefits for partners/stake holders
- competence, neutrality, independency and credibility of the facilitator
- legitimacy and respect for the facilitator.



I make use of my facilitation skills in five situations, ranging from formal to rather informal:

1. *Annual workshops and conferences, where a group of 20 to 25 (internal and external) participants are discussing issues like country strategies, annual programmes, and team reviews are the most formal and challenging situation. Colleagues from SDC divisions usually request me to step in as a facilitator. This happens 5 - 6 times a year.*
2. *In the South Asia Division we share the role of facilitation of the weekly meeting in turn among all staff. Since it is a regular meeting, the role of the facilitator is almost limited to keeping the discussion focused on the agenda and controlling the time.*
3. *I often assume the facilitation role in meetings of different working groups I am adhering to. I normally find myself in a double role: facilitating the process and contributing as a member to the content.*
4. *In small bilateral mini-groups I mostly feel responsible for steering the discussion in the direction we agreed upon. Again, I find myself in two roles*
5. *Finally, during missions abroad, there are numerous meetings and workshops, where I often find myself – at least part of the time – in a facilitating role.*

I always feel that facilitation enhances the quality of meetings and workshops, and often, participants express a feeling of having made good use of time compared with other events. In facilitation I am specially paying attention to responding to the expectations of the participants. I strive for participants leaving the meeting with the feeling of having made essential contributions in a good atmosphere.

Attentively listening to each other is a key to success. My role is steering the discussion process through creative-chaotic and structured phases without losing the objective out of sight. Facilitation in an inter-cultural context is a special challenge: What is a sign to agree, to disagree, to support, to have some reservations. Being able to interpret the body language and develop a feeling for the non-said is a permanent challenge.

Preparation is a must. For important meetings it easily takes 2 or 3 times as long as the meeting itself. Whenever I have a double role, I try to be conscious about my interests in the topic of discussion. Facilitation is only possible with openly declared interests. If – by tactical reasons – I cannot declare my interest (hidden agenda), I better refrain from facilitation.

Peter Sulzer, Senior Advisor, South Asia Division

Meetings – the most frequent form of a facilitated event

Ten Commandments for Facilitating Meetings*:

1. Prepare well!
2. Start on a positive note!
3. Define the goals!
4. Visualise to make things transparent for all!
5. Explain the procedure!
6. Remain neutral!
7. Manage through questions!
8. Stick to the subject!
9. Abide by concrete agreements!
10. Close on a positive note!

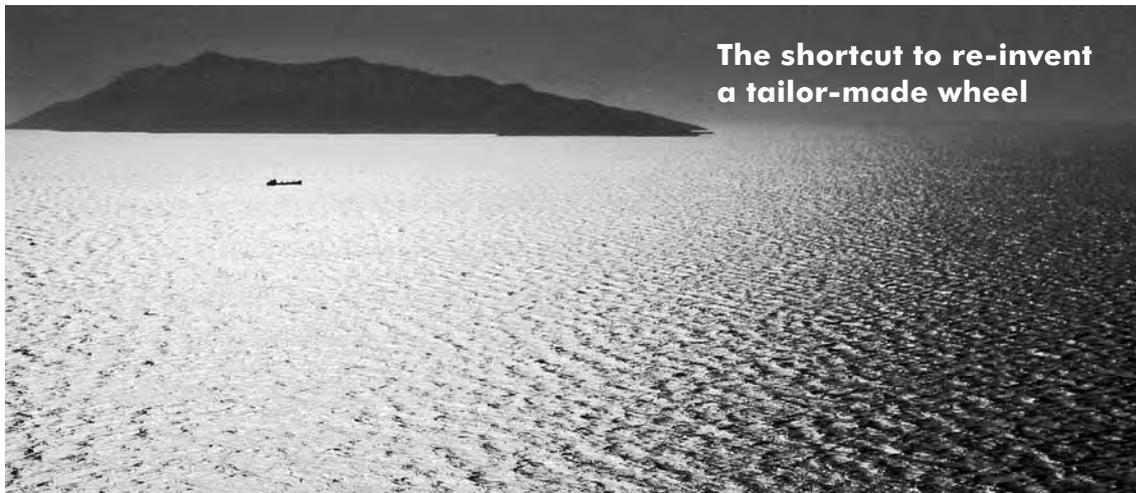
* Josef W. Seifert: "Besprechungsmoderation". Gabal Verlag

Source

Facilitation – the art of making your meetings and workshops purposeful and time-efficient. AGRIDEA, Lindau, Switzerland. 2007. ISBN 978-3-906776-12-5.



Good Practice



What is identifying and sharing good practices?

The sharing of practices is often one of the first things to be carried out in a knowledge management initiative. In most organisations it is already being done to some degree. This often begins with common practices such as instruction manuals or 'how to' guidelines. The next step from there is to identify and share good practices.

A good practice is simply a process or a methodology that represents the most effective way of achieving a specific objective. Some people prefer to use the term 'good practice' as in reality it is debatable whether there is a single 'best' approach – and of course approaches are constantly evolving and being updated. So another way of defining a good practice is one that has been proven to work well and produce good results, and is therefore recommended as a model.

Much of good practice knowledge is tacit – held in people's heads and not always easy to document. Therefore most good practice programmes combine two key elements: explicit knowledge such as a good practices database (connecting people with information), and methods for sharing tacit knowledge such as communities of practice (connecting people with people). These two approaches are complementary. A database can provide enough information for a potential user of the good practice to find it and decide if it is worth pursuing further. However the best way of sharing good practices is 'on the job' and so communities and personal contact with others who have used the good practice is key.

What are the benefits?

The essence of identifying and sharing good practices is to learn from others and to re-use knowledge. Effective sharing of good practices can help organisations to:

- identify and replace poor practices
- raise the performance of poor performers closer to that of the best
- avoid reinventing the wheel
- minimize re-work caused by use of poor methods
- save costs through better productivity and efficiency
- improve services to clients.

Good practice programmes are most appropriate in organisations where processes are quite well developed and where a certain amount of knowledge and experience has been accumulated. They are most useful where an organisation has several units or people performing similar tasks but who are widely dispersed and so do not tend to learn from each other through day-to-day contact.

How do I go about it?

In “Best practices in best practices” (see ‘Resources and references’ below for details), David Skyrme recommends a 6-step approach to identifying and sharing good practices. This is summarised here. The overall approach is aimed at documenting the essential features of a good practice, giving pointers to relevant experts in that practice, deducing general guidelines, diffusing basic knowledge, and using subject matter experts to apply and adapt the practices in a new context. The key steps are as follows:

1. Identify users’ requirements

This step may sound obvious, but it is not uncommon for someone given the task of capturing good practices to start by designing a database, when clearly this is a case of putting the cart before the horse. Start by considering where you can really add value. Look at what areas of the organisation need attention because of poor performance or difficult challenges. Who can most benefit from better knowledge and understanding of good practices? How will they access and use them?

2. Discover good practices

There are various methods of identifying good practices. One approach is to look at who is producing excellent results and is therefore likely to be using good practices. Having discovered these people, you will then need to discern which parts of their overall approach or methods being used are actually good practice. This is best done by people knowledgeable in the relevant practices such as subject matter experts, internal auditors, consultants and peers. A range of alternative approaches for identifying good practices can be found within various knowledge management tools. These include communities of practice, after action reviews, knowledge harvesting and exit interviews. Don’t necessarily limit your search to only include practices within your organisation; much can be learned from the practices of other organisations in your field, or even organisations in other industries.

3. Document good practices

Good practice descriptions are usually kept in a database in a standard format. A typical template might include the following sections:

- Title – short descriptive title; this can be accompanied by a short abstract
- Profile – several short sections outlining processes, function, author, keywords etc.
- Context – where is this applicable? What problems does it solve?
- Resources – what resources and skills are needed to carry out the good practice?
- Description – what are the processes and steps involved?
Improvement measures – are there performance measures associated with this practice?
- Lessons learned – what proves difficult? What would the originators of the practice do differently if they were to do it again?
- Links to resources – experts contact details, workbooks, video clips, articles, transcripts of review meetings
- Tools and techniques used.

The aim at this stage is not to describe the practice in great detail, but to give enough information to allow users of the database to decide whether it matches their needs and where they can find further information. A key consideration is how you organize and classify the information in your database so that users can readily find what they need.



In our section (controlling), we use Good Practice mainly to enhance the quality standard in the annual programmes. We select parts of various annual programmes that are of exemplary quality and present them on the IntraWeb, together with a short comment. Short and specific is our slogan.

Apart from annual programmes, we also use the good practice approach for credit proposals; however, in this field the practice is less developed.

“Good practice” approach provokes peer competition, and thus has an influence on quality. It also enhances sharing of information and experience and fosters a critical dialogue.

Regula Bähler, Head E&C Division

I used good practice examples to illustrate planning tools for the core processes at headquarter, such as credit proposal, annual programme, cooperation strategy, contracting, evaluations, etc. All these processes are accessible in the SDC IntraWeb.

Few feedback made by colleagues showed that good practice examples helped in understanding rules and regulations and contributed to improve the quality of SDC key processes.

Peter Meier, Senior Advisor, NGO Section

4. Validate good practices

A practice is only ‘good’ or ‘best’ if there is a demonstrable link between what is practiced and the end result. In most organisations, and especially in areas where practices are constantly evolving, rigorous cause-and-effect analysis is impracticable. Hence a degree of subjective judgement is needed as to what constitutes ‘best’. A common approach is to have a panel of reviewers comprising internal and external subject experts and peers, who evaluate a potential good practice against their knowledge of existing practice. It is equally important to ensure that you seek input and feedback from customers (i.e. the ultimate beneficiaries, such as patients) of the good practices.

In the context of the National Health Service (NHS), a further important consideration is that of evidence-based practice. When identifying and validating good practices, it is important to ensure that these are based on a combination of both on-the-job experience and sound research evidence.

5. Disseminate and apply

While a database of good practices is a useful starting point, most organisations find it essential to complement this with face-to-face knowledge sharing about those good practices. This is where the real value is added. Not only does it help the recipient dig beneath the explicit knowledge and gain more in depth insights, but it can also provide a two-way benefit in that a dialogue between the conveyor of good practice knowledge and the recipient can enrich the knowledge of both.

Common ways of sharing good practice knowledge include: communities of practice; improvement groups or quality circles in which teams within an organisation meet regularly to discuss ways of improving a process; visits to other departments or organisations with good performance; organised learning events such as share fairs that bring people together to share specific knowledge and experience; job secondments or exchanges; etc.

6. Develop a supporting infrastructure

To successfully implement a good practice programme, you need to ensure you have the required infrastructure in place. This infrastructure is often developed as part of a wider knowledge management strategy. Typically, several generic aspects need attention:

- ❑ The people to facilitate and drive the process through its initial stages, until it becomes embedded in the organisation's ways of working (e.g. a good practices team, or a network of good practices co-ordinators).
- ❑ The technical infrastructure for document sharing and databases.
- ❑ The content management infrastructure to ensure that good practices are documented and classified electronically in a way that makes them easy to find.

Good practices are key criteria for:

- a. *the integration of projects as part of the RPSA (Regional Programme Southern Africa). E.g. REPSI programme (psychosocial care and support for HIV/AIDS orphans) builds its strategy on good practices in the different regions.*
- b. *good practices are a must for the participation of SDC and our partners in the policy dialogue, e.g. the health sector programmes in Tanzania.*

There are other domains with documented good practices: Suspension bridge programme, water sector (Aguasán), post harvest technology (Postcosecha). Good practices need two ingredients:

- *practical work being reflected, valued and documented*
- *curious people interested in good practice of others and being able to transfer it into the own context.*

Good practice is one of the key factors not only in knowledge management, but also in quality management. Good practices set benchmarks and help saving time considerably. Good practice asked for values the others' work.

Paul Peter, Head of South / East Africa Division

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

- ❑ Establishing a programme to identify and share good practice is not generally a 'quick fix' solution for organisations that are relatively new to knowledge management. Setting up the required processes and infrastructure can be quite a big task, unless you already have some aspects of a knowledge management infrastructure in place.
- ❑ As with any knowledge management initiative, don't forget the importance of motivation and culture. The ease with which good practices emerge and are shared depends on the culture of your organisation. If there is a 'not invented here' culture, then good practices will be slow to emerge and spread, as each part of the organisation will defend its own way of doing things rather than learning from, and sharing with, others. Where people are generally encouraged to seek out knowledge and learning, good practices are more likely to emerge and spread.
- ❑ Try not to get too prescriptive about good practices. Rather than putting in rigid rules that say 'this is good practice and you should follow it', focus more on encouraging people to develop and share good practices voluntarily.
- ❑ Do not make the mistake of focusing on capturing good practices for the sake of capturing them. Focus on how they can be used to add value. Who are the users? What are their issues? What kind of knowledge do they need to perform better? How might they best assimilate that knowledge?
- ❑ You will need to actively promote your good practice resources. Otherwise you may end up with databases and people that are under-used and not making use of their potential.



- ❑ Be sure to demonstrate the benefits and the evidence. Use case examples to show the benefits of sharing good practices, and as far as possible, demonstrate how a good practice has contributed to better performance.
- ❑ Remember that good practice is constantly evolving. Therefore feedback mechanisms must be built in so that the value of existing good practices is constantly assessed, and feedback used to create further improvements.
- ❑ Resist the temptation to focus on explicit knowledge – it cannot be emphasised enough that databases of good practices are insufficient. Databases point to examples and people, but it is through people that deep knowledge is transferred.
- ❑ Spreading good practice across the NHS is already happening on a number of levels. On a national level, as part of the Modernisation Agency, the NHS Beacons Programme (see 'Resources and references' below) is identifying services that have been particularly innovative in meeting specific healthcare needs, and encouraging them to share their experience so that others can benefit by using or adapting original ideas to suit their own circumstances, saving time and resources and avoiding duplication of effort.

Source

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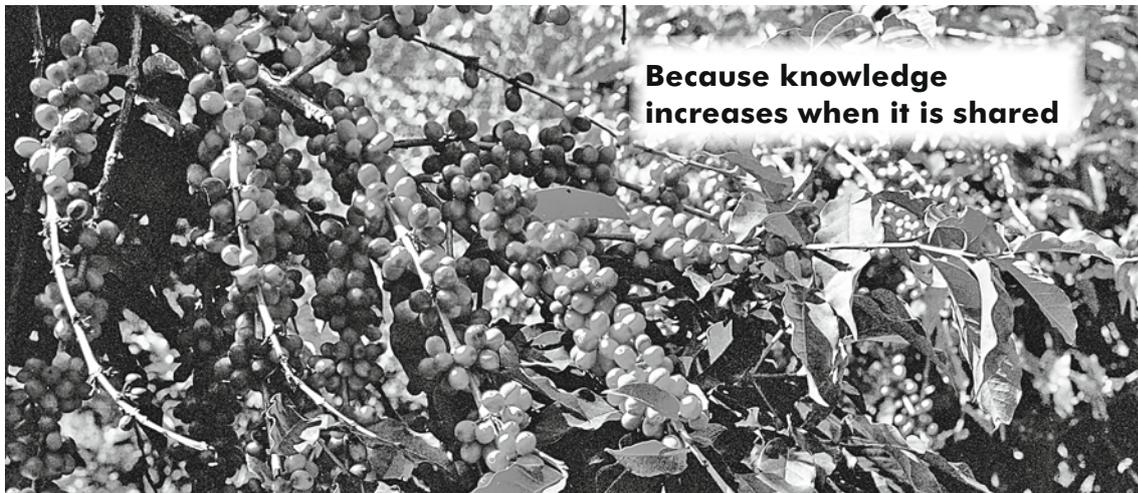
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Knowledge Fair



What is a Knowledge Fair?

A Knowledge fair is an event designed to showcase information about an organization or a topic. It can be organized in many ways using speakers, demonstrations, or more commonly, booths displaying information of interest to the attendance.

What are the benefits?

A large amount of information can be made available and visitors can focus specifically on what they are interested in learning. They can interact directly with the presenters, getting immediate answers to their specific questions. They also can establish contacts for further exploration of topics if needed.

Visitors often network with one another and booth developers' often strengthen their teamwork. Knowledge fairs also provide opportunities to draw attention to best practices and recognize employee and team achievements.

Knowledge fair is particularly recommended when there is a lot of information to share with a lot of people and participants need a broader perspective, as well as an opportunity to interact on a one-to-one basis on specific topics. Knowledge fair is an alternative to traditional presentations when more interactive experiences are desirable.

A knowledge fair is also pertinent if the organization is to adopt and sustain horizontal modes of operating and co-operating. Such a method can then foster a new organizational dynamic.

How do I go about it?

1. Get top level support.
2. Publicize the fair widely.
3. Put the fair where there is a lot of foot traffic, e.g. in the atrium of the organization. Don't accept a decision to put the fair in an out-of-the way space - location is essential for a successful fair.

4. Put your best communities of practice on display.
5. Be realistic about how much time it takes for communities to prepare and display.
6. Get common displays for booths so as to convey an image of diversity with integration.
7. Plan ahead for electric power which can be substantial if computers are used.
8. Plan to have technicians on hand when things break down.
9. Plan for security of equipment when booths are not staffed.
10. Don't plan in too much detail for the actual booths – communities can self-organize within a common framework.
11. Don't be too serious – a fair can be fun.

A "CoP-Fair" – almost three years after the Dare to Share Fair (www.daretoshare.ch) – in the main hall of SDC's head office aimed at highlighting the importance of Communities of Practice as knowledge and learning networks. More than 20 CoPs explained their stories, their successes, challenges and flops, the ways they organise themselves to interested colleagues. They did so with simple market stands – a table and a pin board. Some exhibited publications, others showed short videos and all presented orally in a few minutes the highlights of their endeavours. The experiences were shared directly, in front of the stands, on some chairs arranged around them or during the lunch buffet in the same place. In a short brainstorming session, the exhibitors identified most salient experiences of CoPs.

At the end, a "CoP-Manifesto" was compiled and a lively pin-board-debate around the relevance of knowledge and learning networks "penetrated" strategic discussions. Knowledge fair is a unique chance for a short-cut: participants get to know new ideas and solutions proven in a comparable context."

My lessons:

- (1) Knowledge fair is a unique chance for participants to get to know new ideas and solutions proven in comparable contexts; and
- (2) Have people exhibit their experiences outside of offices and meeting rooms and allow direct exchanges in a pleasant and stimulating setting of "give" and "take".

Manuel Flury, Head Knowledge Management Service

A few lessons based on practical experience at SDC and ILO

Thematic focus

Clarify why you are staging a Knowledge Fair and what theme it is focussed on. Make sure the theme is valid and supported by stakeholders from all levels of the organisation. The thematic focus needs to be both accurate and open: There needs to be a focus and room for innovation and surprise.

Nature of the fair

Be clear about the nature of a fair: There is a common theme, a broad variety of presenters and a multi-faceted public with diverse interests. A fair offers broad opportunities for getting information, for making contacts, for interaction and for agreeing on follow-up activities. Be aware about the impact the venue may have on the event.



Target audience

Identify the target audience and tailor the knowledge fair to it. Market the event appropriately to the target audience. Take into account the cultural aspects for the audience(s) identified. Analyze the formal/informal mood you wish to and can achieve with the audience(s). Be open for surprises: There might be visitors that do not correspond to the expected profile.

Commitment

Get commitment from key stakeholders and involve them in appropriate ways at the planning stage and in execution. The values of the organization have an impact on the event.

Language

Decide if you want a multilingual event and accordingly prepare space for the different languages, decide about necessary translations. Be aware of budget impacts.

Preparation

Do not underestimate the time and resources required. 12 months are a minimum; 18 to 24 months are a more realistic frame. Decide about infrastructure and logistics provided; communicate it clearly to all presenters. Provide distance coaching to all presenters; half of them will need it.

Publicity

Publicize the event before, during and after. Provide a feedback mechanism for fair participants. Identify in advance how to measure impact in relation to the audience(s) identified. Capture the process – its ups and downs could help others later.

Interaction

Include a broad variety of interactive forms in the fair: Exhibition boards with attractive, but silent information; Market stands with “sellers” and “buyers”; short presentations with room for interaction; workshops with more formal presentations or experimental learning; video-corners or showrooms; an arena for innovative and crazy ideas; coffee corners with drinks and snacks and comfortable seating arrangements.

Sources

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Knowledge Map



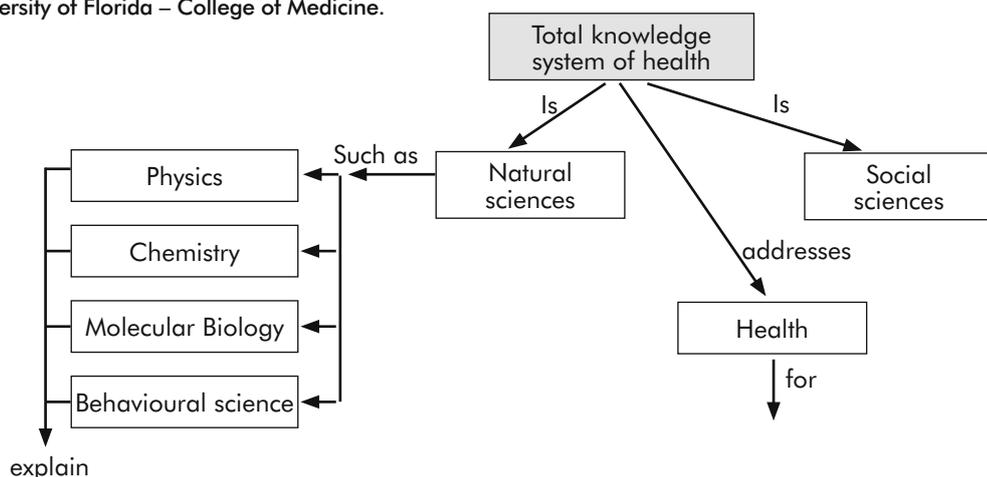
Creating and Using Structural Knowledge Maps

The idea of a map that shows the structure of knowledge rather than the knowledge itself is something that has been defined here. The main point is to provide a visualisation for a knowledge domain. In addition, the visualisation will have an independent value because of the method used to create the structure. The knowledge can be managed directly using the map as a focus for discussion and there are fewer implications concerned with definitions.

Concept Maps

Concept diagrams/maps are closely related to semantic networks. Concept diagrams are also composed of nodes and arrows that have similar functions. Concept diagrams can be used to describe fairly complex concepts and are suitable for both machine and human interpretation. They are seen as a knowledge representational method that employs graphical structures (Sowa 1984). There is a body of work relating to concept diagrams and their use as a graphical logic (Sowa 1993). This offers interesting opportunities for future work on knowledge mapping by creating the framework that could allow knowledge maps to be transformed into other machine understandable representations such as the Knowledge Interchange Format (KIF) (Genesereth 1992).

Figure 1: Extract of Concept Diagram for knowledge system of health, University of Florida – College of Medicine.



Concept diagrams are a powerful way of representing knowledge, of creating a common visualisation and also a powerful learning tool. Figure 1 shows a very small portion of a diagram created by the College of Medicine at the University of Florida. The diagram does not require too much explanation because explanatory sentences can easily be created from the diagram itself. The main point to note as far as this reference is concerned is that each arc (or line) has a label that specifies the function of the line. In the work to be described here, arcs have one common function.

Learning Dependency

The common function of an arrow for our type of knowledge structure map is 'Learning Dependency'. Each arc on the knowledge structure map is directional and shows that the target item of knowledge must already be known before it is possible to fully understand (or possibly learn) the source item of knowledge.

Figure 2: Illustration of learning dependency

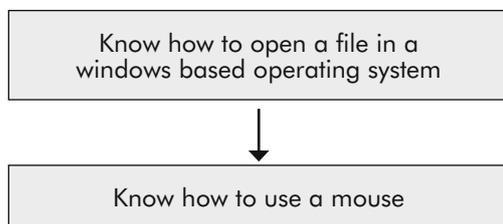


Figure 2 shows that in order to know how to open a file in a windows based operating system it is first necessary to know how to use a mouse. It could of course be argued that this is not the case and it is only necessary to know how to use a mouse in order to actually open a file not to know how to do it. However, the concepts of mouse movement and related pointer movement and button clicking would be meaningless without the prior knowledge of how to use a mouse.

Learning dependency is a human centred approach to mapping the structure of knowledge. Learning dependency means that it is necessary to know knowledge 'Y' before knowledge 'X' can be fully known.

Learning dependency also provides at least some encouragement that it is really knowledge that is being managed. The dependency structure, as used when acquiring expert knowledge, provides some justification as to truth value. One of the reasons I am justified in believing 'X' is that I already have knowledge 'Y' and 'Z' and I know that the knowledge of 'X' is dependent on a knowledge of 'Y' and 'Z'.

We have been using Knowledge Mapping in Bolivia during my time in the Coof to map outstanding capacities of our partner organisations and their staff in fields relevant for development cooperation (www.cosude.org.bo ; gestión de conocimientos). The idea behind this mapping was to foster the access to skilled and experienced people within the SDC network. The Coof thus got a less central position in the knowledge sharing, but more the role of a knowledge broker. The knowledge map has also been used to identify lessons learned presented on the SDC Website.

A strong aspect of knowledge mapping is the identification of relevant skills for development cooperation and to localise these skills in the network of the partner organisations. Rather tricky was the balance between the self assessment "We are good in ..." and the external appreciation of the respective skills; too often, the two views did not correspond. We decided against censoring contributions to avoid negative incentives for sharing experience. The knowledge map made the information about available skills explicit; however, the Site has not been used extensively. Probably most of our partners knew this information anyhow based on their informal contacts or were convinced that they could access the information easily when needed.

Today, I use informal mapping as a basis for commenting papers and documents. Based on a mapping of competencies within the house, I send incoming documents with specific questions to those persons, where I feel their comment will be an added value. A relevant knowledge map can thus shorten considerably time needed and enhance the quality of feedback.

Willi Graf, Senior Advisor, NRM Division



Attaching parameters to Knowledge Nodes

Interviews are used as the main vehicle in the construction of structural knowledge maps. During interviews, people are asked to provide information about the structure of knowledge in the domain in question. There are many possibilities as to what this information should be and of course an acknowledgement that interviewees will often need to estimate answers based on their own experience. Several parameters and combinations of parameters have been tested and the following four have been found to be the most useful in all audits.

- Importance** How important is the knowledge to the company?
- Difficulty** How difficult would it be to replace this knowledge?
- Study-Experience** Is the knowledge acquired mainly from study or practice?
- Known By** What proportion of the staff in the knowledge area knows this?

Each of these parameters will have a value attached between 0 and 9.
 0 -> unimportant, not difficult, none of it etc.
 9 -> core knowledge, very difficult, all of it etc.

Parameter values are estimates and can be subjective. However some validation does occur during the interview process and it is important to inform managers that the parameters reflect what their staff think and if this is a problem then this may also be something that requires attention.

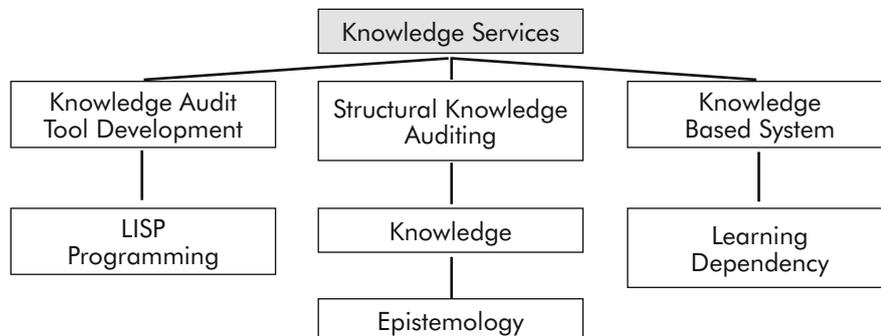
A map of the structure of knowledge

The interview procedure is fairly rigorous and consists of group and individual interviews. The outcome of the process is a structural knowledge map based on learning dependency with parameter values attached, as identified above. Maps are either viewed with a computer based tool or can be printed out, often on A0 size paper to be hung on a wall.

A typical map will consist of between 60 and 100 knowledge nodes. In order to investigate a knowledge area in more detail than this it would be better to work on separate, linked maps rather than have maps of more than 100 knowledge nodes.

It is difficult to reproduce a full map in a paper like this but the idea can be conveyed through samples. The next two figures are from a self audit of the Applied Knowledge Research Institute (AKRI) which was carried out for demonstration purposes but which actually provided useful information. Figure 3 shows a part of the map without parameter figures. Figure 4 shows the full map without details.

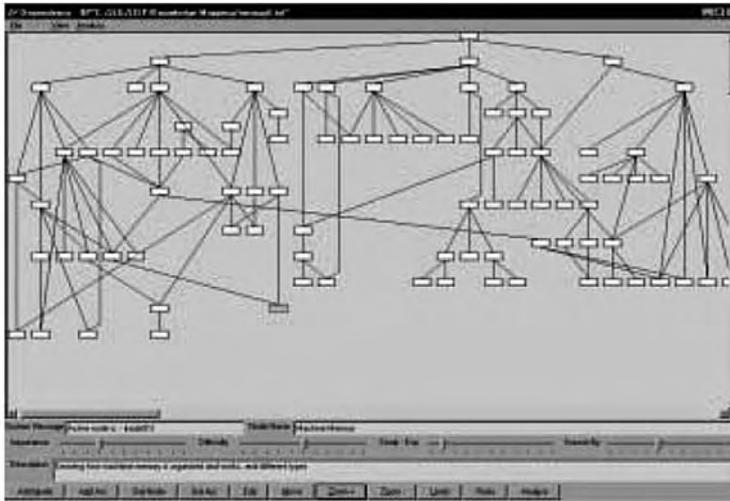
Figure 3: Extract from a knowledge structure map



The extract shown in figure 3 is for illustration only and several peripheral arcs and nodes have been removed for clarity and the layout has been changed from that shown in figure 4.

The figure shows that in order to have a full knowledge of the AKRI knowledge services, it is necessary to first have a knowledge of 'Knowledge Based Systems', 'Structural Knowledge Auditing' etc. In order to know how to do 'Structural Knowledge Auditing' it is necessary to know about 'Learning Dependency' (and other things of course). The complete strategic map of the structure of the AKRI knowledge is shown in figure 4.

Figure 4: Strategic level map of the structure of AKRI knowledge



Detail has been omitted from the map but the layout of the support tool has been included to provide an idea of how parameter elicitation is coupled with the elicitation of the structure of knowledge (the software is being written with Harlequin LISP). Managers can manage the knowledge resource by using the structure and leave the truth value to the experts in the knowledge domain.

Analysing the results for management decision making

The software tool that is being developed to support the interview and map creation process, also supports a capability to provide statistical analysis of the map, its structure and the parameters assigned. The software provides tables of data that are sorted in various ways.

For instance:

- A list of all nodes in alphabetical order along with their parameter values
- A list of all nodes and parameters in 'importance' order
- A list of all nodes and parameters in 'difficulty' order
- A list of all nodes and parameters in 'study-experience' order
- A list of all nodes and parameters in 'knownby' order
- A list of all nodes and parameters in 'risk' order
- A list of nodes in alphabetical order along with connectivity data
- A list of nodes with connectivity data in highest prerequisite connectivity
- A list of nodes with connectivity data in highest postrequisite connectivity
- A list of all node names, prerequisites and associated notes.

A table showing the most important knowledge or the knowledge known by the least number of staff is useful to support management decision making.

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{I + D + S + (10 - K)}{4}$$

Where: I = Importance
 D = Difficulty
 S = Study / Experience
 K = Known By
 Values between 0 ... 10



In this case, risk is a derived value and provides additional information for managers to help guide them towards knowledge that may require their urgent attention. In the current system, risk is computed as follows.

Within the context of this work, a risky piece of knowledge is one that is very important to the organisation, very difficult to replace, mainly experience based and known by only a few staff.

There is not space here to fully describe all of the information that the process produces.

However, it is important to state that all of the information is intended to inform managers about the state of the knowledge resource and allow them to use their management skills to take decisions and plan action based on the analysis.

We used knowledge mapping during the portfolio analysis in the thematic domain of SDC, whereby we reduced from 64 to 10 themes and 2 transversal themes, where SDC will be active in the future. SDC thematic activities – according to the country programmes – have been represented on a world map.

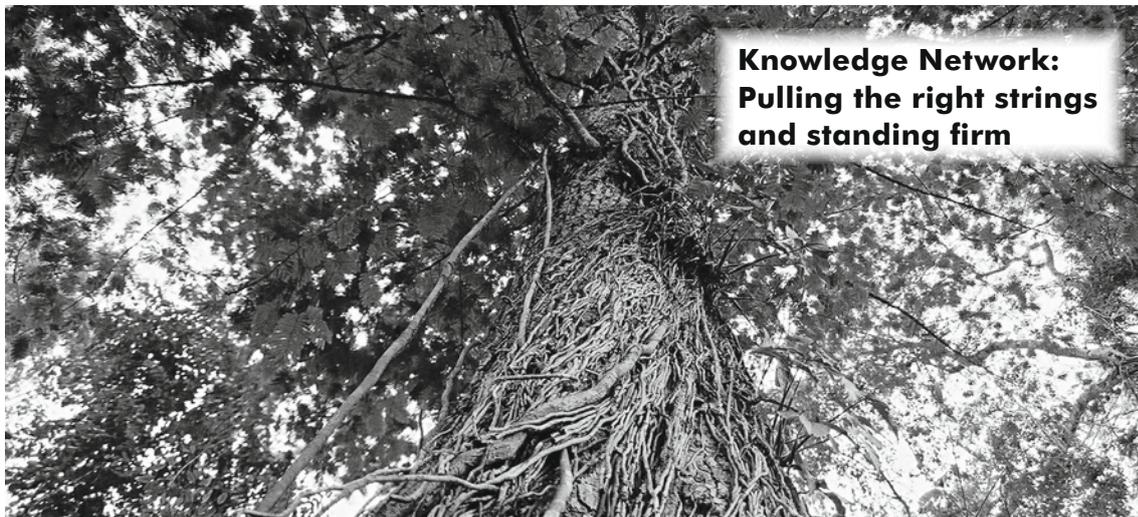
This thematic mapping was a good instrument to visualize where what thematic focus exists and where respective support is offered. Transversal themes simply went all around the globe.

Thomas Zeller, Senior Advisor, Social Development Division

Source

Applied Knowledge Research Institute (<http://www.akri.org/papers/pdf/es2000.pdf>)

Knowledge Networks



What is a Knowledge Network?

While it is difficult to come up with a good definition of Knowledge Networks, the following quotes help to grasp the nature of a knowledge network:

- ❑ A process of human and computer networking where people share information, knowledge and experiences to develop new knowledge for handling new situations.
- ❑ A different way of working that is about openness and collaboration across departmental, organizational and national boundaries and about building multiple relationships for mutual benefit.
- ❑ The process of combining and recombining on another's knowledge, experiences, talents, skills, capabilities and aspirations in ever-changing profitable patterns.
- ❑ Networks, by definition, connect everyone to everyone. Hierarchies, by definition, do not; rather they create formal channels of communication and authority. Networks operate informally with few rules, they depend on trust.

Characteristics of knowledge networks

The key characteristics of a knowledge network are:

- ❑ Knowledge networks are not just about providing access to data and documents: they are about **interconnecting the social network of people who produced the knowledge**; people are not necessarily related to each other, join through mouth to mouth propaganda; interaction based on exchange relationships: exchange of mutual services, obligations and social networks; the more members the better.
- ❑ **Individuals often belong to several networks** and take different roles in them – in some they are more central than in others.
- ❑ Consequently **different networks are interconnected and there is often no discernible boundary between them**. The nature and strengths of these connections and links varies over time and are difficult to map.
- ❑ **Non-hierarchical structure; self-organizing and self-regulating**; network as such is normally not a topic of discussion.
- ❑ **Knowledge flows both on deliberately chosen and on unanticipated paths.**

The Global Knowledge Partnership (GPK) is one of the important and huge networks SDC is a member of. GPK's main focus is sharing experience, coordinating and using synergies on ICT4D (Information and Communication Technologies for Development). Main events of GPK are the conferences/events/fora held in Geneva (2003), Tunis (2005) during the WSIS process, and the coming Third Global Knowledge Conference in Kuala Lumpur (2007). A Website with rich information, showcases, news, etc. (http://www.globalknowledge.org/gkps_portal/index.cfm) is available. Being the assistant to the Chair of the Executive Committee for GPK, member of the membership committee, and support person for several events, I use about 50% of my working time for GPK.

The conferences are important events with intensive networking activities. It has been possible to integrate civil society organisations actively into GPK and to facilitate their active participation in the WSIS process: The lively application of the Multi Stakeholder Partnership principle has become a core feature of GPK. Awards for best solutions and practices in ICT have had a stimulating effect on many stakeholders. Good relations and communication with peers in partner organisations are one of the positive assets of this network and have led to new partnerships in several cases.

Alexander Widmer, deputy head ICT4D

Components of knowledge networks

- ❑ **Nodes and links** (structural components): Nodes are the focal points (individuals or teams) for activities or formal organizational processes. Links provide paths for communication, knowledge flows and for building of personal relationships. The pattern of nodes and links continually changes. The intensity of the individual links resp. connections between nodes varies. Some links/connections may be more circular with obvious hubs others may be more diffuse and not easily traceable.
- ❑ **(Informal) inner structure** with a smaller core of very active members (e.g. founding members) and many passive members around.
- ❑ **Member-generated content** (e.g. profiles, ratings, documents)
- ❑ **Member-to-member interaction** (e.g. discussion forums); one-to-one and multiple conversations; asynchronously or synchronously)
- ❑ **Events** (e.g. expert seminars)
- ❑ **Outreach** (e.g. newsletters)

Networks vs. Communities of Practice (CoP)

In literature and in real life it is often difficult to clearly differentiate between networks and communities of practice in the framework of knowledge management.

There are some **shared characteristics**:

- ❑ Both are hybrid forms of social interaction, developed by humans to pursue a common goal.
- ❑ Communities and networks are characterized by the exchange of information. Both claim to generate individual as well as collective knowledge.
- ❑ ICT plays in both cases a major role, because members no longer meet only at physical places.
- ❑ Both are based on the understanding that a) knowledge is produced and actively constructed through the shared understandings that emerge through social interactions, where through mutual influence shared constructions of reality are created, and b) as opposed to document management that can be conducted in a more or less automatic manner, knowledge management cannot be accomplished without involving people as well as tangible content.



There are several knowledge networks I am currently involved in. The thing common to all these networks is: without these networks I would not be able to do my job. There is a lot of information I am getting aware about and hold of; there are a lot of questions raised that have an impact on my own thinking and acting; and finally there are colleagues ready for support and peer coaching whenever I make a request. That means, I make passive and active use of the knowledge networks.

What are the most prominent knowledge networks for my job?

Definitely, there is the km4dev (knowledge management for development), a community with over 500 members and a well developed and furnished platform. At times, the information accessible through this network largely exceeds my capacity of reading and digesting.

Then, there is the "thinktable" – a d-group based community of Swiss KM-specialists meeting twice a year for sharing experience, information, discussing challenges and peer coaching.

Finally there exists a special informal network within SDC, the sounding board of SDC's service "Knowledge and Research". The sounding board is composed of colleagues working in other units; their main roles are to cross-check, comment and orient the major projects of "our" unit.

What is the quality of results?

With km4dev I am impressed about the competence available within this group. Any question raised by a member is answered within a few hours or days – obviously satisfactory as per the feedback given. The wiki page with summaries of the discussions is a gold mine for all newcomers in the km scene.

The much smaller thinktable is very valuable for staying in touch with the KM-reality in Switzerland (also beyond the "development scene") and for collegial coaching. Every meeting I am participating is a source for concrete results brought back to my office.

And finally the sounding board prevents me from running off-side or in directions there is no demand from other colleagues.

Manuel Flury, Head Service Knowledge and Research

There are, however, also some **differences** as the following two descriptions show:

Networks: Non-hierarchical structure; self-organizing and self-regulating, people might come from very different settings and backgrounds but have a shared interest in a given topic; mostly free membership/membership by choice; interaction based on exchange relationships; exchange of mutual services and obligations; diffuse boundaries, very difficult to map; network as such is normally not a topic of discussion; large membership base is thought to allow for a lot of heterogeneous input; the more perspectives, the more criticism, the more innovative and valid is the result. The large number of members, the lack of strong leadership and clear roles make it easier for networks to substitute lost members; networks form because people need one another to reach common goals;

Communities: Partly hierarchical with clearly defined roles and responsibilities; people who are faced with same problems and issues (task-oriented); not constrained by typical geographic, business unit, or functional boundaries but rather by common tasks, contexts, and interests; Interactions based on exchange relationships (experiences, tips, knowledge in order to enhance learning and create a shared value for the group) and on a community feeling, solidarity, coherence and identity; clear boundaries; membership can be defined by specific criteria; community exists as a topic and forms part of the members' identity;

In general coherence and feeling of identity within a community is stronger. The degree of organization is higher whereas networks in their structure follow more the anarchistic approach and focus on fuzzy, unanticipated growth.

I experience Knowledge Networks as formal networks but also as personal networks and I would rather talk about the second type this time with special reference to the network within SDC. This means not only having the information on peoples' background (yellow pages), but being in a personal and trustful contact with partners and specialists. Then, there is the aspect of "the old man's network": The older I grow, the richer my knowledge networks are becoming. Let me explain this with two examples.

I asked a well known active staff of the World Bank to be a key speaker in a workshop about food security, of course, based on the knowledge network I had. A few weeks before the workshop, the key speaker withdrew – he had left the World Bank. "Who else to ask now? With whom did I have trustful contacts these last few years I could ask – last minute – for a key input?" Four or five ideas come up – all requested persons had good reasons for not stepping in. And at once, my network seemed to be void. Empty. But finally – last second – after so many attempts, a new contact helped to find a suitable person I did not know before. And my knowledge network grew even bigger.

Within SDC I systematically network with new SDC staff – though being one of the older chaps of the organisation. Topics such as "Critical reflection about SDC as an institution" or "Revisiting agriculture for development" kept us motivated to share and network actively. I realize again and again, how important it is to build up a network in "quiet" periods, so as to have reliable alliances in stormy times. Good functioning task forces have their roots often in formerly established informal networks. A small detail can become a factor for success. For instance, I really try not to miss annual excursions of units I work in. There are so many possibilities for informal contacts, lots of opportunities to get to know strengths and hidden talents of my colleagues I ignored so far, but often very useful for later challenges.

Finally: In all the networks I experience: Trust, based on commonly shared values, is the key-factor for successful networking. Without trust – no network.

Willi Graf, Senior Advisor, NRM Division

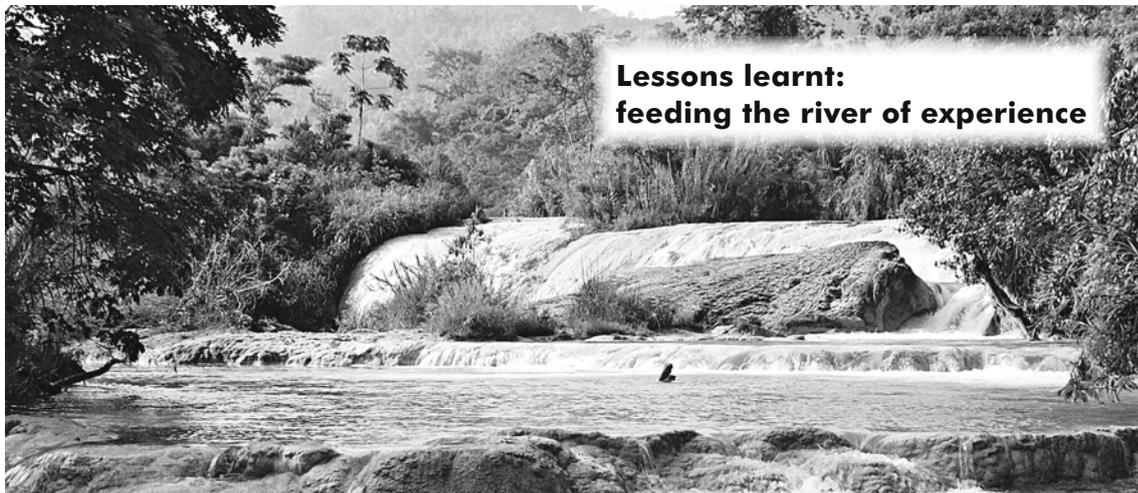
Source / Reference

A comprehensive book about establishing and managing knowledge networks (can be downloaded for free from the SKAT webpage www.skate.ch/publications):

Egger U. et al., *Working the Net- A Management Guide for Formal Networks*, 2006, gtz German Technological Cooperation, 140pp.



Lessons Learnt



What are lessons learnt?

The formulation of lessons is the collection, validation, consolidation and finally documentation of experiences, developments, hints, mistakes and risks found during a project or programme. Drawing lessons learnt makes sense at the end of any project, activity and work phase. Doing so not only gives credit to the efforts made, it also leads to a valuable selection of information that can be useful in the planning and preparation of new endeavours. The analysis of a series of lessons learnt in a sequence of projects can yield ideas for improving project management in an organization in general. Lessons learnt are drawn first and foremost at an individual level. In a team these (often diametrically different) individual lessons can be consolidated into lessons learnt by the team. Likewise lessons learnt by various teams can be consolidated and made useful for the whole organization.

A short story at the beginning

A man was walking along a street at night. There was a deep hole. The man fell into that hole. It took him a good while to get out, but finally he managed.

The next day again at night, the same man was walking along the same street. There was still this deep hole in the street. The man fell into that hole. He managed to get out of the hole rather fast.

The third day, the man walked along the same street. There was a deep hole in the street. He fell into it, realized immediately what had happened and – based on his experience – he got out easily.

The next day, he walked along the same street. There was a hole in the street. He tried to walk around it, but still, he fell into the hole. He got out without effort.

The fifth day, he walked along the street. There was still the same hole. He walked around it.

The next day, he took another street. There was no hole.

From the individual lesson learnt ...

Lessons learnt have a lot to do with making mistakes and avoiding making the same mistakes again.

Making mistakes is normal business in life. We have to try out what works best in any new situation we are facing. It is likely that we will not find the optimal way in the first go. In such a trial and error approach making mistakes is normal. Making mistakes is one important source for lessons (to be) learnt. The question is: How many times do we have to repeat the same mistake to recognize it as a mistake and to learn a lesson?

Two main questions are behind lessons learnt:

- “Did we do the right thing?”*
- “Did we do it right?”*

We learn lessons based on good or bad experience. We tend to repeat, imitate or transfer a good experience into new contexts; we try to avoid a bad experience in future. Learning lessons most often implies an analysis of the situation, the frame conditions and the specific elements that made it a success or a failure.

The concrete result of a lesson learnt is most often a recipe, a slogan, a guideline, a procedure, combined with memories of a concrete situation. Lessons learnt are most often – consciously or unconsciously – based on and combined with perceiving and valuing: We liked or disliked an experience for some reasons. We perceive one aspect as important, while others are less important in our perception.

... to a lesson learnt by the team and ...

In a team, the situation becomes more complex. The team members often draw different lessons after having gone through the same process. Different perception and different value-systems lead to different lessons learnt. Lessons learnt in a team need sharing different views and values, discussion and consolidation of differences.

A team intending to identify lessons learnt must refer the reflection process to agreed upon objectives. A common reference grid is a prerequisite for common lessons learnt.

... by the organisation

What is true for a team is even more true for an organisation. The organisation has to respond to different interests. These interests materialize at different levels. The step from individuals to team lessons learnt will be repeated from the team to the organisational level: The lesson learnt by a team, may not be identical with the lesson learnt by the organisation. In an organisation, strategic considerations and systemic effects may lead to drawing different conclusions from those of a team or individuals.



Seven steps for learning lessons in a team

1. Clarify a) the area for which lessons learnt are to be drawn, b) who (else) could have an interest in these lessons.
2. Delineate the system boundaries (project, area of activity, action-learning).
3. Then formulate guiding questions corresponding to the above.
4. Collect (individual) answers to these questions and any other spontaneous idea.
5. Consolidate individual lessons into shared lessons (team, organization).
6. Describe the lessons learnt (and the surrounding setting) in an attractive and well-structured way.
7. Make lessons learnt accessible to all interested persons.

*In 2003 the **Cooperation Strategy in Tanzania** was reviewed. For this review, the “Views of the Poor” action learning approach was selected in addition to documentary review, a review made by an external (and critical) consultant, and a peer assist.*

The “Views of the Poor” approach aimed at getting direct feedback from urban and rural poor, “target groups” of SDC’s programmes. The SDC team wanted to learn “what really happens in the field”. Information provided by the government and taken from “nice reports” should be complemented by first hand information and experience. Under the guidance of two external experts, staff from SDC headquarters and the COOF conducted field interviews and experienced a one day exposure in a poor family acting as a work force in daily routine work. The focus of the action learning was about: “How do poor people perceive the changes within the past five years? What is assessed as a positive, what as a negative change?” Poor people expressed themselves by means of words, drawings, and commented photos.

The results were published in a study report and in an exhibition; they were spread further through the networks of concerned staff and the two accompanying consultants.

After the exercise, the concerned staff drew lessons learnt. First – as expected – there was sometimes a huge gap between the nice words of government officials and the nice strategies presented in reports on one side, and the felt reality on the other.

At the level of the cooperation strategy a much more systemic view guided the definition of the future programme. The views of the poor influenced the logic of the programme.

At the level of the action learning approach, several more lessons were learnt:

- *The initiative and motivation of individual staff for alternative approaches is key. It is the individual, not the organisation that brings a change in methods.*
- *There is a high risk that alternative approaches remain a pilot activity; scaling up in programmes of neighbouring countries did not take place.*
- *If scaling up is aimed at, stakeholders of other programmes need to be associated from the very beginning. It is worth stepping back from individual interests (and “impatient” motivation) for the sake of group interest and motivation; the priority of the group (section, domain) must have priority.*

The more one has been involved in an exercise, as we have been for this action learning “Views of the Poor”, the more you feel like learning lessons. In my view, learning lessons is a natural human reflex. The amazing thing is to share in a team, what (often different) lessons we have learnt based on a common experience and to learn common lessons.

Gerri Siegfried, Head of Controlling Division

The idea to create six topical working groups (“**knowledge sharing networks**”) within the **West Africa Division** came up by mid 2005: sustainable agricultural and pastoral development, local economy, education, health, local governance and decentralisation, and gender. Within the overall aim of getting more sustainable results (effects and impacts) on field and policy levels, the specific objectives of these working groups were clearly defined: (1) Enhancing the professionalism, capacity and empowerment of the working group members; (NPOs from five COOFs, desk officers West Africa Division in Berne, topical specialists in Berne); (2) Fostering continuity and evolution of the strategic choices and the relevant programs by sharing knowledge and commitment among a larger group of competent persons; (3) Capitalization of experience in the West Africa region and beyond; (4) Sharing information about alternative and successful approaches within the region; (5) Active contribution and participation of the working group members in the strategic discussions of the West Africa section. In addition to SDC staff, local partners, local specialists and knowledgeable persons were also involved.

On one side, the idea of these working groups provoked scepticism by several coordinators. They could not see a clear benefit, argued in terms of “costs” rather than in terms of “investments”, and feared using too much time for these networking activities. On the other side, there was a growing enthusiasm by NPOs having access to a broader experience within their topical domain and the opportunity to contribute as experts to a specific topical domain.

Headquarters staff had a strong role in the launching period, that proved to be a rather long lasting process. Finally, after two and a half years, each working group was composed of a core group (4 to 7 SDC staff) and a bigger member’s group.

After three years of existence, a review based on interviews and casual feedback showed positive to highly convincing results in 5 of the 6 groups.

The launching of and participation in a working group (topical network) is fostered by:

- topic and themes in direct relation to day to day challenges of network members
- pragmatic questions, shared and relevant for the members of the group
- freedom for the network to define its own functioning according to needs within a pre-defined frame
- face to face meetings at least every year and a half
- clear objectives negotiated within the working group and between the working group and the division
- direct contact between peers

The working group is hindered by:

- scepticism and resistance of some coordinators (the feeling of costs and not of investments, the feeling that too much time of COOF staff is “lost” to working groups)
- network facilitators neglecting their role
- routine activities eating up the 5% to max. 10% of time reserved for network activities.

For selected activities, it is worthwhile to sit back and check from a certain distance and to draw “bigger” lessons learnt. The above lessons learnt from our West Africa experience can be a valid input for the design of the topical “Focal Points” within the new SDC structure.

Sabine Schenk, former Head of West Africa Division



Mentoring



A Tale of Two Travellers

In the town square of a small mountain village, two travellers became acquainted and began to discuss and compare how they had arrived at their remote location. Each had travelled alone and had followed a similar path from the same major city; however, for each the overall experience turned out to be quite different. For the first traveller, the journey became a long and frustrating ordeal. He found his map of limited use because of several encountered detours and obstacles and it took considerably longer than anticipated to cross the various mountain passes. At times he felt lost, confused, and as if he were wandering in circles. He prayed he would never need to make the trip again.

For the second traveller the opposite was experienced. She described her trip as enjoyable and eagerly anticipated future return trips “up the mountain”. Upon further questioning, the second traveller revealed a key distinction. As she had made her final preparations for the journey, she happened upon an individual who frequently travelled to and from the village. This individual took the time to explain some of the important geographical features that would be encountered on the journey. Not only did the experienced individual counsel the traveller on how to prepare and plan for the required changes in route, but he pointed out interesting sites to see along the way, places to rest, and what to anticipate upon arrival. This information was found to be accurate and useful.

Why the differences in the experiences of these two travellers? Both started from the same place, both had similar maps and plans, and both were travelling to the same destination. The key difference appears to be the information provided by a more experienced individual to someone with less experience. In today’s world, where change is the norm, constant upgrades of skills are required. More and more individuals with little or no experience are being required to adapt to change quickly – they are being asked to frequently journey “up unknown mountains”. Now, more than ever, there is a need for those with greater expertise and experience to assist those at a novice level. This need may be addressed by pairing experts and novices so that one can help, guide, and teach the other. This is the role of Mentoring and it shows the need for a systematic Mentoring process.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is a method of teaching and learning. Although it has been defined in many different ways, our choice is to select a broad definition that includes several key elements. We believe that Mentoring involves the use of an experienced individual to teach and train someone with less knowledge in a given area (see Newby & Heide, 1992).

As shown in Table 1, this definition highlights three important elements of Mentoring relationships. First, the experienced individual, or **Mentor**, is one who possesses important/critical information, skills, and/or past experiences. Second, a less informed or inexperienced individual, the **Mentee**, is in need of getting specific information, training, or experiences pertaining to a given area or topic. And finally, a **relationship** between the experienced and the inexperienced individuals that allows for the knowledge of one to be used by the other. For example, in our opening tale of the travellers, one had a significantly better journey due to the information provided by an individual (the Mentor) who had prior experience with the route the travellers were taking. Because of that input, the second traveller was able to reach her destination more efficiently, have a more enjoyable trip, and achieve her goal more confidently. This is very similar to what occurs in a good Mentoring relationship. Someone with more experience helps an individual with less experience. This does not mean that the Mentor takes over and completes the tasks for the Mentee, but that the Mentor through explanations, guidance, coaching, and encouragement helps the Mentee while he/she develops s/he own skills and expertise.

Table 1: Key Individuals and Roles within the Mentoring Process

| Key elements in the Mentoring process | Commonly related terms | Role(s) performed in the Mentoring process |
|--|--|---|
| Mentor | Expert, coach, counsellor, tutor, guide | An individual with the experience, knowledge, and/or skills of a specific content area who is able, willing, and available to share this information with another individual. |
| Mentee | Protégé, novice, apprentice, trainee, student, learner | An individual who lacks experience, knowledge and/or skills in a specific area and who looks to another individual(s) to learn what is lacking. |
| Relationship between the Mentor and Mentee | Association, pairing | A dynamic association between an individual who needs to learn and another who is willing to help and guide the learner. |

When and with whom can mentoring be used?

Have you ever had (or been) a Mentor? Reflect on your past experiences and ponder those instances in which you have interacted with another individual in such a relationship. What was the situation involving your association? What type of experience was it?

Mentoring, in some form or another, has been used as an instructional technique for centuries. Its use has continued because it has proven to be a very effective means of teaching and learning. Table 2 illustrates the wide range of areas in which potential Mentoring relationships can occur. As is shown, Mentoring may impact individuals across all types of content areas and settings.



Table 2: Examples of Potential Mentor/Mentee Relationships

| Potential Mentors | Potential Mentees | Potential learning relationship |
|---|---|--|
| Mother of 4 children | New parents | Coach new parents on how to identify illnesses that need a doctor's attention. Help them understand what to expect during different stages of a child's development. |
| Teacher with 10 years of classroom experience | Student teacher | Help the student teacher understand the practical constraints that will be experienced in the classroom. Help the student teacher learn how to plan, implement, and evaluate classroom lessons. Offer assistance in learning how to respond to classroom management problems. |
| A middleschool computer whiz kid | Teacher with 25 years experience in teaching | Coach the teacher on how to use the computer for different tasks (e.g., e-surfing, spreadsheets, word processing). |
| Plumber | Plumber apprentice | Teaches how to estimate jobs. Instructs how to design home plumbing that will meet building standards. Teaches how to identify and resolve different plumbing problems in commercial settings. |
| Computer technologist | Any individual within a company needing assistance regarding a new technology | Works with groups of individuals who need this technical knowledge quickly, but have been unable to attend a formal training. |
| Office professional at a banking firm | New employee in the banking firm's secretarial pool | Guides the new secretary through office procedures (e.g., phone protocol, general duties). Describes the culture of the organization and how one survives within the organization. |
| Senior project manager | New project manager | Advises regarding specific problems encountered in projects within their own organization, department, and division where "theory" becomes "application". |
| Director of Marketing for a major corporation | District sales manager within the corporation | Gives special assignments and projects to the sales manager and tutors him on how to accomplish them effectively. Indicates to others what capabilities the sales manager possesses. Gives the sales manager opportunities to learn skills needed for a promotion to a marketing director. |
| Administrative assistant | Vice President of Sales | Teaches word processing and e-mail skills so that the VP can use his new laptop computer while travelling. |

In reviewing the different examples in Table 2, note how the typical image of the "old sage" type of Mentor paired with the "young and eager" type Mentee does not always hold (e.g., the computer whiz kid and the teacher). Frequently the best Mentors are those with a special knowledge or capability in a given area of expertise – regardless of their age, skill level, race, gender, or expertise in other unrelated areas. Additionally, it must be pointed out that Mentoring is not a stagnating relationship – but one that is dynamic and always changing. As situations change, the Mentor and Mentee roles evolve and change. Moreover, in a society in which change is the norm, those who may be quite capable serving as Mentors in one area of content, find themselves seeking help from other individuals in other areas.

The next section outlines several different ways Mentoring can be structured. In this way you will see how encompassing this instructional technique is and how widely it can be applied.

In what ways can mentoring be focused?

Just as there are different types of individuals with different types of learning needs, there are different ways in which Mentoring can be focused to enhance a novice's learning. Generally, these can be categorized into one of the following: (a) a skill-based emphasis, (b) an organizational and cultural emphasis, or (c) an emphasis on one's career path. After briefly describing each of these types, Table 3 presents situations where each would be an appropriate selection.

Skill-Based Emphasis

This emphasis of Mentoring concentrates on helping individuals improve and develop skills in areas where they are deficient. Not only is information provided, but frequently the Mentor designs specific situations in which the Mentee can practice these new skills without risk or "being on the line." Examples of this, in Table 2, include the middle-school student mentoring the teacher in computer skills, the surgeon coaching the medical student on a new procedure, and the administrative assistant helping the VP acquire computer application skills.

Organizational and Cultural Emphasis

The focus of this Mentoring is to foster an understanding of the organization, its culture, its vision, its history, and its status in today's world. This is much more than the standard "orientation program" presented to many new employees. This type of Mentoring is normally facilitated by individuals who have been with the organization for many years. These individuals have typically witnessed many changes and can share this type of "history" so that the Mentee understands what the organization stands for, how the culture operates, and how it has evolved. Frequently the novice is mentored on how to "manoeuvre" within the organization to get things accomplished, as well as, which individuals to contact for specific needs. Moreover, some of the organization's customs and policies, both those that are stated and those that are "unstated but understood" may be explained. Table 2 includes the example of an office professional in a banking firm and describes how the "culture" of the organization was taught and explained and shared with the new secretary. This example illustrates Mentoring with an organizational and cultural emphasis.

An application of this Mentoring focus also occurs when organizations desire to change their culture (e.g. going from a "high tech" culture/business to a more "consultative" culture/business). Individuals who are the best examples of the new culture (which in some cases may be new individuals to the organization), are called upon to be Mentors for others within the organization.

Career Path Emphasis

The focal point of this Mentoring is on "upward" mobility and career enhancement, as opposed to behaviors and activities that promote skill performance. From a business viewpoint, this is the more traditional way in which Mentoring has been carried out. Normally with this emphasis, Mentors are at higher levels in the organization and the goal is to "showcase" or "champion" the Mentee to other senior levels. The Director of Marketing and his emphasis on championing the younger sales director in Table 2 is an illustration of this type.



Table 3: Examples of How the Mentoring Process Can be focused

| Focus of the Mentoring | Example situations with a need for a specific Mentoring emphasis |
|------------------------------------|--|
| Skill-Based | <p>John is a newly appointed shop foreman. He has been in the shop for several years, but he has never had direct supervisory responsibilities. Although he knows the jobs of each of his employees, he does not have prior experience managing his crew.</p> <p>Landon has been with the company for a number of years but has repeatedly been rated below average on his work output. He is frustrated with his ratings and with the quality of work that he is required to produce.</p> <p>Karen is a Restaurant Chef. She has just completed a course in "State Health and Sanitation Procedures". She has some ideas that she would like to try out within her restaurant, but she is not sure that her manager will allow her to do so.</p> |
| Organizational and Cultural | <p>Helen has worked with a small consulting firm for a number of years. Recently she has accepted a position in a large international accounting firm. Her responsibilities will require her to interact frequently with partners in the corporation and with others who will be dealing directly with the company and its products.</p> <p>Bill is about to be transferred to Germany. He has taken several language courses and classes regarding the business and social customs/norms. He has not actually been able to use his knowledge, given that there are very delicate negotiations going on at this moment, he is a little anxious about how he will handle situations when he first arrives.</p> <p>Maria is of Hispanic origin. She is very interested in growing and developing within the organization but is not quite sure how to do this. Her immediate manager is a white male and Maria is having difficulty talking with him regarding how to make the transition from "where she is now" to "where she wants to go" in the future.</p> |
| Career Path | <p>Alexis is a young college graduate with a very promising future at her new job with Apex Publishers. Unfortunately for Apex, Alexis is still receiving offers from several competing firms. To retain her, Apex must come up with a way to ensure that she quickly feels comfortable and clearly sees where she is going within their organization.</p> <p>For the Carew Bottling Company it has been determined that a higher percentage of females and minorities should hold management and leadership positions. The objective is to identify those individuals within diverse categories who have the necessary leadership skills and prepare them for advancement.</p> <p>For Johnson Chemical the future looks very promising with predictions of accelerated growth during the next five years. To accomplish this feat, a group of 50 candidates who possess the skill necessary for management have been identified. The objective is to ensure that the organization will meet its growth objectives and be prepared to fill management positions as they arise.</p> |

It needs to be pointed out that although Mentoring may have a general focus (e.g., career path), this does not exclude other information (e.g. skill-based) from being explored, experienced, and learned. There will naturally be cross over during the Mentoring process that should be expected and desired. The main reason for Mentoring may be, for example, to teach a new skill, however, during that process a career path may be discussed and outlined, and suggestions for growing within the culture of the organization may be made.

Within SDC, systematic mentoring is not a general practice, but should be promoted more. Ideally, mentoring is installed during the introductory period of all JPOs (Junior Programme Officer), NPOs (National Programme Officer), and any new (and less experienced) staff joining SDC. Even for experienced staff, a mentor may have an important role, mainly for questions of organisational culture (values, communication patterns, etc.). The need for mentoring is often underestimated.

A strict separation of the two roles – boss and mentor – and a fair mutual respect and recognition between the two is a must. It proved to be helpful to establish a programme for the whole introductory period including all important learning moments, contents and objectives. Other aspects to make a mentor's input successful are: Mutual personal acceptance between mentor and mentee, adequate priority for the mentoring, a defined time frame, a concept, a clear acceptance by the line (boss) and last but not at all least, a special liking for taking over this role.

I experienced all mentor activities as enriching, getting exposed to the questions and realities of new staff in my organisation. For best results it is important that the hierarchical superior of the newcomer fully supports the mentoring situation.

I estimated that well mentored new colleagues can have up to 50% higher productivity and much better job satisfaction than without mentoring in the first three years of his/her work in the institution.

Willi Graf, Senior Advisor, Natural Resources and Environment Division

I take on a mentor's role whenever a younger or new staff is asking for. There is more informal than formal activity as a mentor. What is most important to me as a mentor is to take people and their demand seriously and to take time for the mentoring process. Often I have to read quite some papers to understand the background and to find relevant questions to guide the mentoring. I often work with role plays, also with interchanging roles, in order to get in touch with the emotional dimension. Mentoring can be a kind of a provocation based on sound knowledge of the situation the mentored person is facing. A prospective imagination is a helpful basis for questioning the mentored person. What I try to avoid are lectures and lessons; usually a question is better than a talk.

I like mentoring situations. There is a satisfaction in helping other (young or new) professionals to get stronger in their professionalism, to be self-asserted without falling into the trap of arrogance.

Anne Zwahlen, Deputy Head, West Africa Division

What are the different Methods of Mentoring?

As illustrated by the examples in Table 2, Mentoring relationships can be developed across all types of content areas and throughout all types of professions and learning situations. Additionally, Mentoring can take several different forms, based on the specific situation in which participants find themselves.

The Standard/Traditional Mentoring Method

When the term "Mentoring" is used, we traditionally picture an older, wiser sage taking a younger enterprising person "under his/her wing". The inexperienced individual has the benefit of gaining information from the sage, as well as other valuable advice, encouragement, and protection. The focus is on the one-to-one relationship between these two individuals. Frequently, this relationship requires a longer period of time to develop, grow, and thrive.

Examples include the master glass blower who spends extra time and effort to help a new apprentice gain the skills needed to create the needed glassware, or a top executive of an international telecommunications firm who guides and encourages a younger member of his staff so that she can "step into his shoes" once the expert is no longer available. Both examples stress



the traditional need for the Mentor/Mentee pair to spend time together in order for the novice to grow and develop under the watchful eye of the expert. Moreover, this “traditional” type of Mentoring may come to emphasize skill development, organizational and cultural knowledge development, and/or career path development.

Throughout the Mentoring process, the relationship between the participants will naturally change and evolve. As the Mentee gains more confidence and experience, for example, the Mentor usually needs to pull back and allow the Mentee to take on more responsibility. A progression usually occurs with the Mentee being fairly dependent on the Mentor and ends with the Mentee becoming quite independent. This progression usually continues until the Mentee comes to be seen by the expert more as a colleague and resource rather than as a student or apprentice.

The Peer Mentoring Method

A major problem that frequently develops with the traditional Mentoring method is the lack of qualified, desirable Mentors. This problem is often compounded because of Mentor/Mentee gender, race, and/or age differences. To address some of these issues (especially with skill deficits and with organizational and cultural issues), individuals can focus on developing what is known as peer Mentors.

For example, if an individual needs to be coached or mentored on a specific skill (e.g. the use of a new computer application), s/he may find it easier, more efficient, and potentially more effective to associate with a peer who possesses the required skill and capability. Peer Mentoring generally focuses on a specific skill, develops in a short period of time, and usually concludes once the new skill is acquired. Frequently, as peers begin to use this form of Mentoring, the Mentor/Mentee roles may begin to interchange. That is, a Mentor for one specific skill may assume the role of a Mentee in order to develop or upgrade a another skill.

In a rapidly changing environment (e.g., computer technology) the interchanging roles of the peer Mentor/Mentee is often facilitative. Thus an individual both mentors and receives mentoring.

The Team Mentoring Method

Although this is similar to the peer method, this method expands to include a group or team of individuals. In this case, a given Mentee may have more than one Mentor (with each Mentor addressing a different aspect of the Mentee’s professional needs and pursuits). It is happens with this method that an individual may play two roles simultaneously, that is, as a Mentee receiving organizational and cultural Mentoring from one member of the team, while at the same time providing skill-based Mentoring for another team member. Frequently such teams are created by bringing together individuals who have experienced the benefits of peer mentoring, but who see a need to broaden the levels of skill expertise or increase their base of information.

Source

Cornerstone Consulting (<http://www.cornerstoneconsults.com>): Timothy J. Newby and Judy Corner: Mentoring for Increased Performance: Foundations and Methods (originally published in Performance and Improvement, 1997)

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Open Space



Overview

Open Space Technology is a meeting method that helps individuals and groups become more effective in work environments that are rapidly and constantly changing by developing their skills as collaborative problem solvers and lifelong learners. Open Space Technology captures the knowledge, experience and innovation in the organization not captured through conventional closed system processes.

It is a self-organizing practice guided by a mix of collective activity and personal commitment, releasing inherent creativity and leadership in participants. By inviting people to take responsibility for what they care about, Open Space establishes a marketplace of inquiry, reflection and learning, bringing out the best in the whole group, community or organization.

Because the nature of this process is open, risks are high; once the “door is opened” there is no turning back – committing the sponsor to support activities defined by the group.

Examples of operational questions the tool can help answer

- How can we cope with change as we move into an increasingly unclear future?
- How can we best utilize complex elements and diversity of players in X situation?
- How can we manage this conflict productively (at any organizational level or between the organization and the government)?
- How can we begin to tackle complex internal issues or issues with partnering organizations or governments that have strong emotional aspects or implications? (Issues in which passions run high?)
- How can we improve communications at all levels?

Considerations

- a. Do you have a predetermined agenda or desired outcomes? If that is the case than Open Space is not a recommended approach. Only the topic is prechosen. The Open Space process allows the participants to create the outcomes. Open Space creates the “space”, the opportunity for those who are passionate about the topic to raise the issues and decide outcomes. In that way strong commitment is almost sure to follow.
- b. How open is the invitation list? The right people are those who care about the topic, who are already interested. Invitations should not be limited or determined by position or role, but by the interest the person shows in the topic. Passion is the key word. If the people are passionate about the topic, they are the right ones to invite. Passion and willingness to take responsibility should guide the invitation list. Open Space is about leveraging knowledge that people bring into the Open Space. There can be a limit, however, to how many people are invited.
- c. How focused is your issue. The broader the issue or topic, the more time it will take for common understandings to begin to take shape. Broad topics will attract a broad attendance; a more focused topic will likely attract a more specific group. The scope of the focus will influence how much time you allot for the Open Space meeting.
- d. Be sure you have the right audience for the topic. The topic and audience should be matched or tailored for each other – lack of energy means a bad match.
- e. Are stakeholder leaders prepared to lead differently, giving control of the agenda? Open Space depends on freedom for process and outcomes to unfold. Leaders can send signals seriously inhibiting or risking the success of an Open Space meeting. Stakeholder leaders must commit to the topic and to the openness of the process. It would be wise to hold a smaller Open Space if a larger Open Space is eventually in view. It is essential the stakeholder leaders understand and commit to Open Space processes and assumptions.
- f. Do you have enough “critical mass” for this issue to move forward? The connections and communications set up during the process are essential for further movement. Again, shared passion for the topic is essential.
- g. Boundaries are necessary even for such freewheeling process as Open Spaces. Limits often give freedom to act. Some starting boundaries might revolve around budgetary restraints, schedules, and project domain.

Facilitating the Process

The Open Space tool relies on two basic assumptions: (1) Groups will work well with democratic processes and (2) Groups will need little guidance. For facilitating an Open Space process, check three items:

The Group: Who will use the tool: Staff, government partners, implementing organizations? When in development operations can the tool be used? Which sector(s) of operations is the tool suited for? Evaluation and assessment, project inception, project design, program strategy formulation (organization planning), project implementation, problem solving.

How long does it take? One day of Open Space produces good conversation; Two days - common understanding; Three days -tangible results (resolution, leadership and plans).



Questions for Measuring Impact:

- Was it a safe, inclusive environment where ideas could be freely exchanged emerging?
- Are people satisfied that issues have been fully explored?
- Were there significant knowledge gaps (missing people) from the process?
- Are plans ready for implementation or are parts still unclear?

The Rockport Company

On the morning of Thursday 21st October 1993, the Rockport Company, a subsidiary of Reebok International, closed for two days. No shoes were shipped. No orders were processed. Scheduled meetings were canceled. The head office was locked. Except for a skeleton crew left behind to answer the phones, all 350 members of Rockport's workforce, including John Thorbeck, the company's president, and his senior executives, gathered in a cavernous warehouse for a two-day meeting which had no agenda. Harrison Owen stepped into the center of the loosely formed circle of intrigued participants to make his opening introduction. Half an hour later his briefing was complete, and it was time for people to make their offerings. It took a little while for things to move, eventually one Rockport employee stepped forward, then another.

Within an hour an energized group had posted dozens of issues on the wall: distribution, on-time delivery, customer service, excess raw materials. Some topics had never before been recognized as issues of concern, such as women's opinions of the Rockport environment, eliminating political games, overcoming "we vs. they" thinking, getting rid of paperwork. By the end of day two, 66 different sessions had taken place, with the number of participants ranging from five to 150 or more on the hot topics

At one point during the event a security guard (who wasn't even a Rockport employee) happened to mention that he spent much time on his feet and would love to wear the kind of comfortable shoes that Rockport made. But his company would never buy them as they didn't go with the security company's uniform. Why couldn't Rockport redesign the uppers to match the uniform? And so a new product range was born. Even if it were nothing more than an average performer in the market, sales would be around \$20 million a year.

At the planning stage of the Open Space meeting, Anthony Tiberii, Rockport's senior vice president and chief financial officer, had been one of its most vocal opponents. He felt the company could not afford to lose two whole shipping days. After the gathering he changed his mind, and was easily able to justify the investment.

Follow up Activities

Project teams can themselves select which emerging projects they will take part in according to those for which they have the most energy. Each team is encouraged to appoint a coordinator who is accountable to management for stewardship of resources. Each team decides the goal of the project and target completion date, team roles, identifies key challenges and essential resources needed and steps needed to achieve the goal.

In Open Space, even though the meeting ends, issues evolve. The on-going learning and discovery are important benefits that need to be nurtured. On-going, energized communication is essential. Create places where successes, new issues, and concerns can be shared. Key to eventual success is to keep the learning alive.



Doing an open space – a two page primer

WHAT IS OPEN SPACE?

It is a self-organizing practice of inner discipline and collective activity which releases the inherent creativity and leadership in people. By inviting people to take responsibility for what they care about, Open Space establishes a marketplace of inquiry, reflection and learning, bringing out the best in both individuals and the whole.

WHEN TO USE IT:

- ① Where conflict is holding back the ability to change
- ① Where the situation is complex
- ① Where there is a high degree of diversity
- ① Where there is an urgent need to make speedy decisions
- ① Where all stakeholders are needed for good decisions to be made
- ① Where you have no preconceived notion of what the outcomes should be.

PROBABLE OUTCOMES:

- ① Builds energy, commitment and shared leadership
- ① Participants accept responsibility for what does or doesn't happen
- ① Action plans and recommendations emerge from discussions as appropriate
- ① You create a record of the entire proceedings as you go along.

HOW IT WORKS:

The Law of Two Feet means you take responsibility for what you care about – standing up for that and using your own two feet to move to whatever place you can best contribute and/or learn.

Four principles apply to how you navigate in open space:

- ❑ Whoever comes are the right people: Whoever is attracted to the same conversation are the people who can contribute most to that conversation – because they care. So they are exactly the ones – for the whole group – who are capable of initiating action.
- ❑ Whatever happens is the only thing that could have: We are all limited by our own pasts and expectations. This principle acknowledges we'll all do our best to focus on NOW – the present time and place – and not get bogged down in what could have or should have happened.
- ❑ When it starts is the right time: The creative spirit has its own time, and our task is to make our best contribution and enter the flow of creativity when it starts.
- ❑ When it's over, it's over: Creativity has its own rhythm. So do groups. Just a reminder to pay attention to the flow of creativity – not the clock. When you think it is over, ask: Is it over? And if it is, go on to the next thing you have passion for. If it's not, make plans for continuing the conversation.

HOW OPEN SPACE WORKS WHEN THERE IS CONFLICT:

The Law of Two Feet gives participants freedom to move at any time to a discussion they care about. Caring creates common ground, and helps to remind participants of higher purpose.

GROUP SIZE:

To date, we know that Open Space accommodates groups from 5 to 1500 people. It can be run for a couple of hours to 3 or more days; consecutively or over time; at one site or at multiple sites connected by computer and/or phone and video. The longer the space is open, the more transformative the outcomes.



THE STEPS IN BRIEF

1. Select a focusing statement or question for your gathering. It should frame the higher purpose and widest context for your discussion in a positive way.
2. Invite the circle of people: all stakeholders or all the people you'd like to have in the room. Include the theme, date, place and time of gathering in the invitation.
3. Create the circle: Set up chairs in a circle or in concentric circles, leaving space in the center. Choose a blank wall for the Agenda Wall and label it AGENDA: AM, PM across the top. Set up a table for computers near a wall you label NEWS. Put blank sheets of news print (about quarter size of a flip chart page) and colored felt pens in the center of the circle. Near the Agenda Wall and the News Wall put masking tape for people to post papers on the walls.
4. To begin the gathering: Facilitator explains: the theme, the simple process the group will follow to organize and create a record, where to put things up and find out what is happening, the Law of Two Feet, and the Principles of Open Space. Then, facilitator invites people to silently meditate on what has heart and meaning for each of them.
5. Opening the marketplace: the Facilitator invites anyone who cares about an issue to step into the middle of the circle and write the topic, their name, a time and place for meeting, announce it and post the offering on the Agenda Wall – one sheet per topic – as many topics as he/she wants. They will be convenors who have responsibility for facilitating their session(s) and seeing to it that a report is made and shared on the News Wall.
6. When ALL offerings are concluded, the Facilitator invites people to sign up for what they are interested in and take responsibility for their schedules, using the Law of Two Feet.
7. People participate in discussions. The Facilitator takes care of the space. Reporters enter discussion reports in the computers and printouts are posted on the News Wall.
8. Closing Circle: all reconvene an hour before closing to share highlights, "ahas" and key learnings in a Dialogue format: simply listening to whatever people have to offer without discussion, or you can pass a "talking stick" for each person to hold as s/he is talking, or to pass along if the person doesn't want to contribute anything.
9. Mail out whatever record is created and an address list to all who came.
10. If it is a several day gathering, do steps 3 through 8 daily.

Open Space in the true nature (as it is described here) I probably neither used myself nor came I across in practice. However the principle, the basic idea behind, we used often during workshops or retreats.

In Aguasan Workshops or meetings on regional approaches for issues related to social cohesion (e.g. health system reforms, new roles of trade unions in eight countries of South Eastern Europe), we regularly came to the point of collecting issues for further discussion from the participants. This is very similar to the Open Space methodology.

In South and East Africa Division we organise retreats and thematic meetings. Here again, we collect topics for discussion from the team members and decide together about priorities. A discussion in interest groups is not the final result, but an input to a plenary discussion or an exchange in the form of an on-going carousel discussion.

Using Open Space method in this restricted form, I regularly have the feeling that (1) we work on real priority topics, (2) participants are highly motivated and (3) the team as a whole is more efficient and effective.

Paul Peter, Head of South and East Africa Division

Source

Adapted from: <http://www.openspaceworld.org/tmnfiles/2pageos.htm>

References / Links

World Bank used Open Space. An Excellent overview of Open Space by Owen <http://www.worldbank.org/participation/LearningFinal.pdf>

USAID Best practices box halfway down page. http://www.usaid.gov/about/part_devel/docs/anthol5.html

OSLIST Archive – discussions on the OSLIST have been archived since 1998. The archives are fully searchable and contain countless stories, discussions, and musings on OST. <http://listserve.boisestate.edu/archives/oslist.html>

Link to Open Space World: <http://www.openspaceworld.org/cgi/wiki.cgi>

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Peer Assist / Peer Review



What are peer assists?

A peer assist is simply a process where a team of people who are working on a project or activity call a meeting or workshop to seek knowledge and insights from people in other teams. While seeking help from peers is certainly not new, the formal use of this process as a knowledge management tool and the coining of the term 'peer assist', were pioneered by British Petroleum (BP).

What are the benefits?

Peer assists are part of a process of what BP calls 'learning before doing', in other words gathering knowledge before embarking on a project or piece of work, or when facing a specific problem or challenge within a piece of work. The benefits of peer assists are therefore quickly realized: learning is directly focused on a specific task or problem, and so it can be applied immediately.

A peer assist allows the team involved to gain input and insights from people outside the team, and to identify possible new lines of enquiry or approach – in short, reusing existing knowledge and experience rather than having to reinvent the wheel. Peer assists also have wider benefits: they promote sharing of learning between teams, and develop strong networks among people. Peer assists are relatively simple and inexpensive to do: they do not require any special resources or any new, unfamiliar processes.

It is worth using a peer assist when a team is facing a challenge, where the knowledge and experience of others will really help, and when the potential benefits outweigh the costs of travel.

How do I go about it?

There is no single right way to hold a peer assist. The following is a method that has worked well for BP.

1. Clarify your purpose

Peer assists work well when the purpose is clear and you communicate that purpose to participants. Define the specific problem you are seeking help with, and be sure that your aim in calling a peer assist is to learn something (rather than seeking endorsement for a decision you have already made).

2. Has the problem already been solved?

Do some research to find out who else has already solved or tackled a similar problem. Also, share your peer assist plans with others, as there may be other teams who are currently tackling a similar problem who could also benefit from participating in the peer assist.

3. Get a facilitator

You will need a facilitator from outside the team, to make sure the meeting participants reach their desired outcome. The facilitator also may or may not record the event: be sure to agree on that before the meeting.

4. Timing is important

Ensure that you plan a date for the peer assist that is early enough in your project to make use of the input you receive and to do something different on the basis of what you have learned. A frequent mistake is to hold the meeting too close to the decision date to make a real impact. Consider that you might get a different response to the one you expect: will you have time to do anything about it?

The length of a peer assist depends on the complexity of the problem and tends to be somewhere between half a day and two days long.

5. Select the participants

Once you are clear on your purpose, select participants who have the diversity of knowledge, skills and experiences needed for the peer assist. Six to eight people are a good number. Look 'across' the organization rather than 'up' it – hierarchies can hamper the free exchange of knowledge whereas peers tend to be much more open with each other and can challenge without feeling threatened. Avoid the temptation to select 'the usual suspects': if the same experts are selected for peer assists again and again, you may be limiting the number of fresh ideas and perspectives available to you. Similarly, seek to select people who will challenge your ways of thinking and working and perhaps offer a different angle, rather than looking for people who will validate your current approach. You might consider inviting people from outside your organization.

6. Get clear about the deliverables

Get clear on what you hope to achieve during the peer assist and then plan the time to achieve that. The deliverables should comprise options and insights rather than providing an answer. It is up to the person or team who called the peer assist to then make the relevant decisions, based on what is learned. Provide the participants with any briefing materials in advance so that they have adequate time to prepare.

7. Allow time for socializing

Allow time in your agenda for the teams to get to know one another; this might be a dinner the night before or time for coffee at the start of the day. It is important to build rapport so that the group can work openly together.

8. Define the purpose and set the ground rules

At the start of the meeting, ensure that everyone is clear about the purpose of the peer assist and their roles within it. The role of the host team is to listen in order to understand and learn. The role of the visiting team is to share knowledge and experience to help resolve the challenge without adding to the workload. Agree that where there are areas of contention, you will focus on the activity rather than the individual people involved.



9. Start by sharing information and context

Divide the meeting time roughly into four equal parts. During the first quarter, the host team will present the context, history and their future plans regarding the problem or challenge in question. Keep this part short and sharp – you only want to say enough to get the visiting team started in the right direction. Remember that the purpose of the peer assist is to learn rather than tell.

When communicating the problem or challenge about which you are seeking input, be prepared for it to be redefined as part of the peer assist process. It may be that the problem you have identified is in fact the symptom of a further problem and the peer assist will help you identify the root cause.

10. Encourage the visitors to ask questions and give feedback

In the second quarter, the visitors consider what they have heard, and then begin by discussing what they have heard that has surprised them, and what they expected to hear but haven't. The host team should take a back seat at this stage and simply listen; in some cases they may even opt to leave the room. The visitors then consider what else they need to know to address the problem and where might they find that knowledge. It may be that they want to make some telephone calls and talk to some other people, or request some data or reports. Remember, they are not seeking to solve the problem but to offer some options and insights based on their own knowledge and experience.

11. Analyse what you have heard

The third quarter of the meeting is for the visiting team to then analyze and reflect on what they have learned and to examine options. Again, the home team remains largely in the back seat; it might be appropriate to involve one or two of them, provided that they continue to listen and learn rather than closing off options or seeking to draw conclusions too early.

12. Present the feedback and agree actions

In the fourth and final quarter of the meeting, the visiting team presents their feedback to the host team and answers any questions. The presentation will be along the lines of 'what we have learned, what options we see, and what has worked elsewhere'. As with all feedback, this should start with the positive – what has been done well, and then what options there are to do things differently. When presenting what has worked elsewhere, presenters should simply tell the story rather than prescribing 'you should...'

In closing, the person who called the peer assist should acknowledge the contribution of the visiting team, and also commit to when he or she will get back with an action list of what the team are going to do differently.

Finally, invite the visiting team to reflect on what they have learned and what they will take away and apply. Learning is never one-way.

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

In most contexts, an important consideration is that of evidence-based practice. When conducting peer assists, you will need to ensure that lessons learned are based on a combination of both on-the-job experience and sound research evidence.

You might wish to carry out an "after action review" following your peer assist to look at whether the process went according to plan, what was different and why, and what can you learn from that for the next time.



While the peer assist process is designed to provide input for a specific purpose or project, consider who else might benefit from the lessons learned. Always look out for opportunities to share and re-use knowledge and learning.

Source

NLH Homepage: <http://www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/ViewResource.aspx?resID=125167&tabID=290&catID=10413>

A variation – the rotating peer assist

A rotating peer assist works with parallel sub-groups in one room, dealing each with a part of the problem. It works specially in cases you have several questions and a lot of visiting peers. While the hosting people remain with their initial question, the visiting people rotate to the next discussion place. In each round the problem is re-explained based on the insights gained in the previous round.

Source

KM4Dev: <http://europeandcis.undp.org/files/uploads/Aquirin/KM4dev%20contribution%20to%20Learning%20to%20Fly.doc>

Peer Assist

I understand the term peer assist more at individual than at team level, and I use peer assist regularly in the context of the cooperation with the Secretariat of the Global Knowledge Partnership (GKP). Peer assist in this context consists in checking and commenting texts of the secretariat. I have seen peer assist within SDC regarding annual programmes where annual programmes have been commented at the annual programme presentation meeting. Another – maybe more typical situation for a peer assist was planning the ISPINE (Improving Support Practices for International Networks / Partnerships Effectiveness) analysis. In that case a colleague from the SDC Knowledge and Research Service assisted me.

Individual peer assists in writing documents is part of daily business, and it is key for quality standards in my work. For the ISPINE analysis I got an essential support through the in-built peer assist at several crucial steps of the analysis.

Alexander Widmer, deputy head ICT4D

References / Links (Peer Assist)

Two Canadian organisations, Bellanet and the University of Ottawa Centre for E-learning, created a Flash presentation on peer assist, in English and in French. Flash is a popular animation technology authoring software.

Link to access the English version of animated peer assist:

http://www.saea.uottawa.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=682&Itemid=649&lang=en

Link to access the French version of animated peer assist:

http://www.saea.uottawa.ca/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=682&Itemid=649&lang=fr_FR

Link to download Flash software:

http://www.adobe.com/shockwave/download/download.cgi?P1_Prod_Version=ShockwaveFlash



Peer Review: What is the difference to Peer Assist?

While peer assist is a tool in a planning stage, peer review is the tool in the evaluation stage. Peer review is an evaluation of the performance of individuals or groups of practitioners (hosts) by members of the same profession (guests). The status of hosts and guests are similar, there is no formal link between hosts and guests, no hierarchical, managerial or important business relationship. They are real peers.

Peer review may be formal or informal; it may be focused on a learning process in one organisation or to both sides. Peer review may also be used in the context of multidisciplinary teams to incorporate feedback from peers with different professional background being members of the same organisation.

Peer review usually aims at:

- Self regulation within the profession (quality standards)
- Organizational development
- Create awareness of standards and quality of performance
- Improvement of collaboration between professionals.

Peer Review

There are different forms and occasions to use peer review. The "softest" application is at the level of the regional seminars with participants of all respective COOFs, where peer review is a nice feature to share and compare experiences in thematic sequences. It is somehow a standard feature, though not very systematically applied. Participants like this form of giving and getting feedback, even beyond the limits of the own continent. It is always useful to start peer reviews from a concrete situation.

On the other extreme, there are formal peer reviews such as the DAC peer review. DAC (Development Assistance Committee) is an OECD unit to assess the performance of the development programmes of their member countries. DAC peer review is kind of an evaluation and learning process, aiming at making development programmes comparable and enhancing their credibility. According to the composition of the peers and the situation, the peer review can be more of an evaluation or more of a learning process.

Between these two extreme forms, peer review can be used for legitimating the multilateral aid. In the case of UNDP, the peer review group, composed of delegates of (national) donors, meets UNDP peers reviewing their organisation and procedures – a joint learning and assessing process. The peer review is not about evaluation of results; this task is taken care of UNEG (UN Evaluation Group).

Peer review as a tool never developed to be used systematically and being standardized within SDC, despite several attempts that have been made in this respect. However – to set out a visionary idea – it might be a future issue to replace part of the evaluations by peer reviews led by the F-division.

Peer reviews (and peer assists) including soft elements are highly motivating for participants. The learning effect is high and creates accountability towards the peer team, if agreed upon.

Gerhard Siegfried, Head of Evaluation and Controlling Division

Guidelines for a successful peer review:

Structure: Plan the peer review thoroughly, select an experienced facilitator, and follow the planned structure of the review.

Trust: Be cooperative, supportive and non-judging in your responses and feedback. Refer to the insight that “people do the best they can with the resources they have”.

Honesty: Be as honest as you can. You do not have to look competent in front of the group. Opt for a learning culture: It is vital to learn from mistakes, not to hide them.

Conflicts of interest: Declare conflicts of interest openly and sort them out. Most often, conflicts are sources of energy and the entry point of unexpected new solutions.

Be self directed: You are responsible for yourself. Choose your own process, take what you want and leave the rest.

Diversity: Be alert to and respect differences in culture, gender, professional orientation, and personal values that may show up through differing options, viewpoints or ways of working.

Reference (Peer Review)

Planning an Effective Peer Review: A Guidebook for National Focal Points
http://saiia.org.za/images/upload/apr_focal_point_guide_20070803_en.pdf



Storytelling



What is storytelling?

Storytelling is quite simply the use of stories in organisations as a communication tool to share knowledge. Traditionally, organisational communications have had a tendency to be somewhat dry and lacking in inspiration. Storytelling uses a range of techniques to engage, involve and inspire people, using language that is more authentic (everyday language as opposed to 'textbook buzzword speak') and a narrative form that people find interesting and fun.

Storytelling has of course existed for thousands of years as a means of exchanging information and generating understanding. However, as a deliberate tool for sharing knowledge within organisations it is quite recent but growing very rapidly, to the extent that it is becoming a favoured technique among an increasing number of management consultants.

What are the benefits?

Simple stories can illuminate complex patterns and deeper truths – one should never underestimate the power of the particular. The process of telling your story – and seeing it touch other people – can be empowering. Being touched by the stories of others makes a difference to bonds of trust, as well as insights. In addition the weaving in of narrative elements into more traditional reports not only captures the reader's attention but also sends a strong signal that many voices and perspectives are valued.

Storytelling experiences can create:

- shifts in attitudes and behaviour
- shared understanding about future ambitions and direction
- a sense that the "whole person" (the heart and the mind) has been engaged at work
- lasting personal connections that survive the immediate situation
- re-usable processes and raw materials
- story selection which identifies those stories that move beyond anecdotal and become small stories which illuminate bigger themes.

Beyond these more basic interventions, you might be facing more complex challenges, for example developing a policy or strategy, a country programme or undertaking an evaluation.

In this case it will be necessary to adopt a more sophisticated approach, combining methodologies or embedding narrative elements into your processes in more systematic or strategic ways.

Storytelling is not suitable for every situation. Methodologies should be selected by practitioners with due care to the wider working context and intention. Some methods need time to be accepted as part of the organisational culture; patience and management backing is asked for.

What makes a 'good' story?

Larry Prusak (see links below) defines 4 attributes of a good story:

- Endurance** – Good stories endure. They may change a little – or even a lot, but the key lessons remain the same. They also need to be succinct enough for people to remember.
- Salience** – Good stories are relevant to their audience, they have a point, and they have emotional impact.
- Sensemaking** – Good stories explain something, make sense of something. Perhaps they show you how to behave in a particular situation, how to resolve a problem, or why something happened the way it did. They have a prescriptive normative value: do x and y will occur.
- Comfort level** – To be effective, stories must make sense within the context of the listener's experience – they need to ring true.

Steve Denning (see links below) adds:

- Fact versus fiction** – Storytelling can be counter-productive when the story told is not true. A story can be factually accurate while being authentically untrue and many corporate communications take this form, particularly those that are told more as a public relations exercise than as a means to promote genuine learning.
- Oral versus written stories** – In the written word there is a distance between the speaker and the spoken, and so in an organisational context, it can lack some authenticity. Practitioners have found that oral storytelling has a greater impact than putting stories into booklets or videos or online. This doesn't mean that written stories can't achieve good effects, but that they work in different kinds of ways.
- The 'happy ending'** – Steve Denning (see 'Resources and references' below) reports having had no success in telling a story along the lines of: "Let me tell you about an organisation that didn't implement knowledge management and it went bankrupt." In other words, focus on the positive.
- The 'hero'** – A story needs to be told from the perspective of a single protagonist, someone who everyone in the organisation can instantly understand, empathise with, resonate with their dilemma, and understand what they were going through.
- The 'plot'** – A story needs to have a certain strangeness or incongruity – something that is remarkable and therefore grabs attention. ('That's remarkable that you could get an answer to a question like that in such a short time frame'). But it is nevertheless plausible (email exists, the web exists).
- A beginning, a middle and an end** – A story needs to embody whatever it is you are seeking to get across as fully as possible. Don't leave loose ends.
- Timing** – A story should be as recent as possible – older stories can work, but the fresher the better. 'This happened last week' conveys a sense of urgency.

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

- Storytelling is not a panacea – it doesn't always work. Storytelling can only be as good as the underlying idea being conveyed. If that idea is unsound, storytelling may well reveal its inadequacy.



- ❑ Even when the underlying idea is good, there are times when storytelling is inappropriate or ineffective. For example: routine situations in which nothing new, unexpected or different happened; or situations that require objectivity in reporting.
- ❑ Storytelling does not replace analytical thinking. It supplements it by helping to give it context and meaning. Abstract analysis is often easier to understand when seen through the lens of a well-chosen story.
- ❑ Try to avoid telling a story for the first time at a high-profile, high-risk occasion. Test the story in advance on a variety of similar audiences, so that you know exactly the effect that the story will have.
- ❑ When using the knowledge contained in the stories of others to support your own decisions, consider how you will balance that anecdotal knowledge with evidence-based knowledge: how will you assess and integrate the knowledge from stories?
- ❑ We are all storytellers and spend much of our lives telling stories whether we realise it or not. However we can all get better at storytelling, particularly at using stories to achieve specific effects. Understanding how and why storytelling works and learning what kinds of stories work in different situations, and what kinds of effects different kinds of stories have, can enable us to be more adept storytellers in an organisational context.

How do I go about it?

If you are not the naturally born storyteller, there is a procedure to build your story:

Method for working in pairs

1. Close your eyes for a moment and think of a moment in response to a particular question that may be set for you, or which you may set for yourself, e.g. the moment at which you felt proud to be part of a community, the moment at which you had to take a difficult decision, a moment when you were stuck in a project and did not know where to turn. Make prompt notes on a postcard, thinking: "what do other people need to know about my story?"
2. Find a partner and introduce yourselves.
3. Take it in turns to tell your story, describing the events before, during and after that moment of change. Do your best to transport your partner to that time and place by creating strong visual images linked in a clear sequence. Write nothing down.
4. Conducted as a conversation, the partner acts as scribe and interviewer, ask any question that helps you both achieve a deeper understanding. The partner digs deeper; probing for more detail around each part to ensure the story builds to a strong satisfying conclusion. Please note: Every story is about a change from one status quo to another. Be clear by the time you finish what the change implicit in each story is, or at least the change you most want to communicate.
5. End by naming the story and writing the names of the co-authors.
6. When the ingredients have been assembled in this way, spend time rehearsing the new teller, so that they can tell the story from the heart.
7. As the final test, the teller can give permission for their partner to tell their story to a broader group. This helps ensure that the story is memorable to someone else and that the essential meaning has been retained. Alternatively, the story facilitator could name the story and introduce the teller so that the partnership is maintained and acknowledged in a different way.

Variation for working as an individual

An individual wanting to deepen recollection of a particular episode can use this way of doing. Try finding someone to tell your story to. Rehearsing a written story by telling it out loud often illuminates imperfections and helps you write more fluidly.



In 2003 we launched a story contest on the topic “Sustainability” among SDC partner organizations. 56 organisations presented a story; 15 have been pre-selected for a final ranking of the best nine stories, to which certificates and awards have been distributed. The first award handed over to a Nepali organization has been invested in a community reading room and books. The best stories have been published by SDC.

One instructive element is the written stories with the views about sustainability seen by local people/organizations. The contest also induced a certain boost for story telling within SDC. The East Asian section organized a similar contest about more concrete topics with a big success.

Peter Meier, Senior Advisor, NGO Section

Variations for working in larger groups

Pairs can share their stories, and then pairs join up to make a group of four and all four stories are told again. One of these four stories is then selected to work on in more detail, and the template is introduced at this point. Instructions from the facilitator can invite a “truthful” retelling, or invite people to feel free to develop a more fictional version of the story. Using this structure to create a group story around a flipchart for example – factual or fictional e.g. allegorical – can be an energising process, unleashing creativity and encouraging lively conversation. When introducing the chosen story back to the other groups, the teller should briefly recount the subjects of the other stories shared privately in the group. If capitalization of experience is important, you may wish to record the key points of the first four stories on postcards before choosing one story to work on in more detail with the template. If a story is sensitive you might construct ‘factional’ stories. Combining facts with fictional embellishments creates “Faction”. It can be particularly useful when you are seeking to either write a story that carries group resonance (for example a ‘who we are’ story, articulating organisational culture) or to communicate difficult truths to your audience, for example when communicating the detail of an experience where lessons were learned the hard way and hence certain details have to be modified to protect the identities of those concerned.

Different story techniques

A) Objects and displays – triggering memories and finding hidden histories

Objects and displays can create a very physical experience, a way for warm or surprising personal memories to be collected and passed on. When telling a story you can use objects to trigger memories of specific experiences. Objects – unlike printed words on a page – have the power to both evoke and contain stories, conveying symbolic qualities. As symbols for an idea or experience they are easy for the memory to recall and can make deeper conversation possible. As tangible things it is possible to make collections, exhibits and displays from them. Making patterns visible arouses people’s interest in the subject matter they relate to.

B) Postcards – gathering a wide range of ideas and insights

A way of collecting and recording insights and condensed stories this method uses the common postcard as a metaphor, a way to keep connection between the picture evoked by the story and the messages addressed to others which come from it.

C) Jumpstart Stories – an interactive way to start an event and build connections

Providing a physical forum for fast exchange and selection this is a transformative way to begin any event or gathering. The process introduces each person to other participants in a meaningful way, establishing warm connections through a common experience.



D) Half a Story – looking forward from the present

Groups use an unfinished story to shape possible paths to the future, logging any risks and opportunities encountered along the way. This is a 'light' way to respond to possibly difficult challenges.

E) Future Story – forming a common vision and planning collective action

Shifting the date and looking back from the future – talking about the future as if it has already happened – supports groups constrained by unproductive or 'stuck' patterns and enables the psychological shifts necessary for change and positive action. It can create a benchmark to look back on when the actual date arrives.

F) A Story in a Word – Finding the meaning in words

Words from mission statements, charters, core project documents, can be used as a trigger for personal stories that illustrate those words in action. This creates a deepened shared understanding of the qualities of the words, and strengthens bonds.

Sources

- SDC, Story guide-Building bridges using narrative techniques, SDC, Berne, 2007.
German: <http://www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=345>
French: <http://www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=344>
Spanish: <http://www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=346>
English: <http://www.km4dev.org/index.php?module=uploads&func=download&fileId=347>
- http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/knowledge_management/km2/storytelling_toolkit.asp
- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Storytelling>

Reference / Link

<http://www.creatingthe21stcentury.org/>

SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)



What is a SWOT?

SWOT analysis is a strategic planning tool used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or in any other situation of an organization requiring a decision in pursuit of an objective. It involves monitoring the environment of the organization with the aim to identify the key internal and external factors that are important to achieving the objectives. It can be used to develop a plan that takes into consideration many different factors and maximizes the potential of the strengths and opportunities while minimizing the impact of the weaknesses and threats. A SWOT session is a means of obtaining information from participants. It enables participants to take a breath, make a judgment and share their visions on the four pillars mentioned above in order to enrich the collective perception of the way the objectives are pursued.



What are the benefits?

In practice, SWOT proves to be an adaptable and flexible method. The procedure allows different perceptions to be recorded and directs the attention of those involved towards joint action. This procedure is also a simple one and has the advantage of being comprehensible even in an intercultural setting. SWOT facilitates:

- ❑ The portrayal of the varying experiences made by different groups of actors. It enables those involved to express their experiences, disappointments, hopes and fears in view of future changes.
- ❑ Participatory evaluation and assessment of experiences and perceptions.
- ❑ Respect for the experiences, opinions and estimations of marginal groups. It reveals the diverse visions entertained by the various actors and makes them comprehensible to all.
- ❑ Finding a common language and step-by-step problem-solving. It facilitates the quest for common interest and values.
- ❑ The approach to self-evaluation and the elaboration of a built-in evaluation system which reinforces independent piloting by those involved.
- ❑ The linking of evaluation (review) with the adjustment of objectives and planning.

The application of the SWOT method is based on values which are the following:

- ❑ We build on what the actors in the project know and do and take up their ability to and their interest in guiding and evaluating their work themselves.
- ❑ We create possibilities which enable the actors to see the effects of their work on the achievement of the project's objectives.
- ❑ We let them ascertain whether the energy expenditure and the material investment is effective and cost-effective.
- ❑ We give the actors the opportunity to see the project in the broader context of space and time and to look beyond the pressing immediate objectives.
- ❑ We develop and strengthen the awareness of joint responsibility.

In short, SWOT converts the persons affected into partners and promotes responsible conduct. What more could be desired of a method of participatory self-evaluation?

In our controlling team, we use SWOT regularly for annual and mid-term planning. In regular team meetings, it is a helpful tool for a short analysis of any issue asking for new orientation. Due to its simple structure, it is of universal use; there is hardly a situation where people are not somehow familiar with this tool.

In our team we deal with diverse tasks. SWOT approach helps in bringing into the foreground what gained importance during the past period, even issues that have not been planned. It helps to find similarities, common assets and common problems. The most motivating aspect of this tool is the fact that finally you always focus on potentials and the future.

Regula Bähler, Head of Service E&C Department Bilateral Development Cooperation

I used SWOT many, many times, typically in a project, even in bigger ones, to make an intermediate assessment of an ongoing process. SWOT is also very helpful to start a planning process and thus to take stock of the experience from similar situations.

In the intercultural context I never experienced a problem with SWOT; everybody understands the method and is quite familiar with it. Facilitation is easy; SWOT is virtually a basic tool for all development workers. A SWOT process of 2 to 3 hours normally results in a lot of shared views, a solid common base for further steps.

Willi Graf, NRU Division, Senior Advisor



How do I go about it?

The SWOT method is based on our fundamental ability to repeatedly recall the past and to anticipate the future, and it assigns four universal questions to these two dimensions.

1. **Make sure that the objectives pursued by the project are clear to all participants**
If SWOT analysis does not start with defining a desired end state or objective, it runs the risk of being useless.
2. **Build the SWOT grid**
First and foremost, the SWOT grid invites the participants to illuminate a past experience or activity. It locates the experience on the time axis.
Both the look into the past (review) and the look ahead into the future (anticipation) are complemented by a simple evaluation criterion (positive/negative) creating the four-part SWOT grid.
3. **Fill in the SWOT grid respecting this order:**
 - a. Strengths: successes (qualitative and quantitative), aims achieved, strengths, pleasure, fun
 - b. Weaknesses: failures, difficulties, bottlenecks, anxiety, dejection
 - c. Opportunities: potentials, ideas, wishes, trends, unused abilities
 - d. Threats: obstacles, resistance, unfavorable frame-work conditions.
4. **Ensure that all experiences find space in SWOT and are taken seriously**
5. **Have the individual actors comment on their contributions and clarify comprehension questions**
6. **Record common aspects first (consensus) and discuss contradictory opinions (dissent) at a later stage.**

Sources

Schall Nikolaus, Becker Michael, Method Finder, Practitioner's guide: Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) GmbH, Bundesministerium für wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit und Entwicklung.

Wikipedia: SWOT analysis.

KEK/CDC Consultants, SDC, SWPO, Zürich, Bern.

References / Links

An example of SWOT analysis in the assessment of the gender dimension of development programmes:
<http://www.ifad.org/gender/tools/gender/swot.htm>

Website providing free SWOT analysis worksheet: http://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm

Examples of SWOT analysis, case studies out of the private sector (Wal-Mart, Starbucks, Nike):
http://marketingteacher.com/Lessons/lesson_swot.htm

Visualisation



In meetings, visualisation is a mean to make presentations and discussions, and thus sharing of information and knowledge more efficient and effective. The spoken word is supported by a visual representation (text, pictures, graphics, etc.). The most frequently used means of visualisation in meetings are beamer or transparencies for presentations, and charts or cards for recording discussions.

For presentations, the aim of visualisation is to emphasise the most important aspects and illustrate links and connections. The most suitable medium for the presentation depends on how and for what purpose the information is to be applied subsequently, either during or after the event.

In principle, the same media can be used to set down and to record the content of discussions (results of group work, plenary discussions etc.). Visualisation takes place in parallel with discussion. The facilitator can concentrate more effectively on the discussion process and participants if a recorder (secretary) is present to take notes.

Any doubts harboured with regard to the use of visualisation can usually be attributed to clumsy application of the tools or lack of expertise in the visualisation technique. There are compelling reasons in favour of the systematic use of visualisation in the facilitation process.

Visualisation ...

- ... **facilitates thoughtful engagement with and better assimilation of the subject matter.** We pay more heed if several sensory channels are simultaneously addressed (e.g. hearing and sight for visualised input).
- ... **improves focus on the point under discussion.** All participants can understand what the current discussion is about, and the facilitator can bring the group back to the topic if the discussion strays.
- ... **permits an overall view and makes the context, structures and processes more easily recognisable.** With visualisation we make use of all means to make the content easier to understand. Written text can be accompanied by diagrams, models and images.

- ... **makes the content easier to remember.** Whether presenting content or an argument, it is important to ensure that the audience absorbs it. Successful visualisation strengthens the listener's emotional identification with the topic. Visualisation forms the basis of a photographic record (photographs taken of the posters presented) which subsequently enables faster recall.
- ... **requires more thorough preparation.** Visualising content also means that the speaker must prepare the subject matter in depth. He or she must devote time to it, seek the best way of presenting it, and at this early stage already formulate the wording to be used during the presentation.
- ... **forces the speaker to use precise and concrete arguments.** Visualisation presents information in a verifiable form (and is more binding than the spoken word). It helps participants to return to the subject of the presentation at a later stage. In other words, the content must also stand up to scrutiny at some distance.
- ... **reduces emotional implications.** Visualised content is "externalised"; it is easier to discuss because it is perceived as physically detached from the speaker. Controversial discussions in particular benefit from visualisation since the content and opinions are manifest on a poster.
- ... **serves as documentation by recording statements, ideas, results and to-do lists.** Decisions which have been made and visualised at a meeting are in the public domain and are binding for all those involved. Participants can immediately object if they do not agree with the content.

Visualisation tools

For the purposes of facilitation four main visualisation tools are used: pin board, flip chart, overhead projectors and PCs with beamers. The blackboard and whiteboard are also useful tools, albeit more limited in their application.

The advantage of the pin board and flip chart is the fact that several visualisation surfaces can be in use simultaneously, with no time constraints. With the other visualisation tools, this is only possible subject to major technical effort.

Pin boards are the standard facilitator's tool. Many participants regard the presence of pin boards as a prerequisite for facilitation. Pin boards are best covered with beige or light brown poster sheets, which also provide an effective contrast to white cards. Pin boards allow information to be moved around: information is written on cards which can be positioned and repositioned anywhere on the board. Information on cards can be enhanced with graphic elements, the cards glued to the poster sheets, and the sheets removed from the pin board in order to make room for a new visualisation.

Pin board cards are available in a variety of forms and colours. Square cards can be cut from A4 paper at little cost (paper strength: 120 g/m²).

Felt-tip pens come in two standard sizes for heading and normal text. We recommend pens with a wedge tip in the four basic colours black, red, blue and green.

Flip charts are particularly suitable for personal presentation posters, assignments for group work, summarising arguments (use two flip charts for pros and cons), and workshop evaluation. Flip charts are written on directly; using adhesive glue sticks, they can also be used like pin boards to put up small cards or post-its.

Slide (transparency) projectors are suitable for inputs and for presentations of group work, but less recommendable for recording discussions.



PCs with beamers are a practical tool for presenting inputs. They are useful for recording work discussions but require a secretary to take notes on behalf of the facilitator. They are not suitable for creative identification of links and connections.

We will refrain from discussing **blackboards and whiteboards** in more detail since both tools are sufficiently well-known. Their disadvantage lies in the fact that they are stationary fixtures or, in the case of portable models, they are heavy and expensive to transport. Finally, whatever is wiped off the board is gone forever.

Objects such as stones, figures, wood, grains, etc. are powerful visualization tools in a discussion with non literate people.

Visualization is a standard in all my presentations and facilitated events, be it with PowerPoint, flipchart or pinboard. Key messages, key questions, steps in a process, and important contributions of discussions are clearer and get more weight with a good visualization. Visualized text (often arranged as simple Mindmap) is a basic feature; graphics with a logic use of colours is a second level; text composed to a metaphoric picture is kind of artists' level and highly memorable. Key points on a chart visualized in front of a group help to keep the discussion focused. A carefully prepared visualization supports in getting the message across; there is less confusion and a better acceptance. A chart with visualized results is a perfect reminder at the start of the next meeting.

And – maybe the most valuable side effect while preparing a visualized input – the message I want to transfer is getting even clearer to me!

Reto Wieser, Senior Advisor, Social Development Division

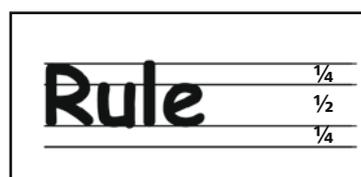
Rules of visualisation

The rules of visualisation are laid down in detail in all manuals on presentation and facilitation. Hence here a few essential aspects and a few tips for practitioners.

Legibility

For cards and posters, legibility depends on five criteria.

Font size: A text can be read by a person with normal sight at a distance of 5 to 8 meters if the letters (including upper and lower extremes) measure at least 3 cm. The central area (height of letters c, e, r) must be at least half the letter height; the upper and lower parts should be one quarter of the total letter height.



Density: Density is optimally achieved using the broad side rather than the tip of a felt-tip pen with wedge tip. (Position the tip of the pen towards you and angle the pen slightly for a smooth transition between the broad and narrow parts of letters).

Contrast: The best contrast is obtained by using black lettering on a light background (pastel-coloured cards and dark-colour felt-tip pens). As a rule we use black felt-tip pens for writing text; red, blue and green are used to emphasise individual text elements and for the poster layout.

Lettering: Block lettering using capitals and small letters is easiest to read. The more closely characters resemble handwriting, the more difficult it is to read. CAPITALS alone take longer to read than normal mixed lettering.

Distance: The letters in a single word must be closely grouped; they may lightly touch each other; clear distances between the individual words, on the other hand, enhance legibility. The reason is that we normally perceive “familiar” word-shapes when reading, rather than deciphering individual letters.

Forms and colours

Board card colours:

Board cards are available on the market in a wide range of formats and colours. Pastel-coloured cards provide a better text contrast than glaring colours.

A limited selection of colours and shapes achieves greater clarity than an abundant variety of colours and shapes.

Colour of lettering:

The four basic colours – black, red, blue and green – are sufficient for the written word. If you prefer something more colourful, you can use additional colours for decorative purposes. Wax crayons are also suitable for decorative purposes, but here too simplicity improves clarity; using too many colours creates confusion.

Tips for personal writing style

| Tip 1: Correct ✓ | Tip 2: What to avoid ✗ |
|--|--|
| ✓ Bold lettering: Use felt-tip pens with sufficient ink | ✗ Felt-tip pens that are running dry |
| ✓ Block writing rather than handwriting | ✗ <i>Over-personalised handwriting</i> |
| ✓ Large lettering (covering three lines on a card 10 cm high) | ✗ Small lettering (four to eight lines on a 10cm high card is too much text which is virtually impossible for participants to read). |
| ✓ Keep the ascender and descender small | ✗ Excessively large ascenders and descenders |
| ✓ Go for contrast (black lettering on a coloured card provides the best contrast) | ✗ Red on pink, blue on light blue, green on light green |
| ✓ Use upper and lower case lettering | ✗ CAPITALS THROUGHOUT |

Tips on designing posters

Posters should speak for themselves, even if they are commented on during the presentation. The following tips are based on feedback from participants at our training courses:

- Every poster needs a **title**, positioned either at the top or centred, in order to cater to reading habits (from left top to right bottom or, as with a mind map, from the centre outwards).
- The **structure** of the poster should guide the eye. Subtitles, blocks, boxes, separation lines, arrow bullets and (above all) spacing facilitate reading. Here as well, it is important to take into account the reading direction.
- Use **simple language**; do not use abbreviations.
- Adhere consistently to **writing rules** (legibility)!
- Use **colours, shapes and decorative elements** sparingly and purposefully as an eye-catcher, to liven up and convey structure.
- Bear in mind the **impact from near and far**: The title or overall structure of the poster should be legible from a distance (10 meters); all details should be easy to read close up (5 meters). When designing a poster, continually look at it from a distance and check the general impression of the poster.



I have a strong and positive experience with visualization of team discussions in Pakistan. We used the MindManager software on the computer with a beamer. Thus, it is a handy tool for keeping minutes of any teamwork, brainstorming, checklists, parts of planning processes, etc. One person assures facilitation, another is visualizing the discussion and thus keeping the minutes.

At the beginning, this tool was quite unusual for most of my Pakistani colleagues; but after some time, all could use it actively and recognised the advantage.

The convincing features of this kind of visualization are:

- *All ideas can be captured immediately and verified by the participants of the meeting*
- *Corrections and changes can directly be made*
- *The visualization is easy to read (no handwriting)*
- *The information can easily be grouped and regrouped (as you can do with cards on a pinboard)*
- *At the end of the meeting, the end product is available and owned by all participants*
- *It is quite easy to transform the mind map into other electronic forms like PowerPoint and Word.*

Karl Schuler, Natural Sector Advisor, Mongolia

Mind Mapping

Mind Mapping is a special form of visualisation worth being mentioned. Mind Mapping is a visualizing technique primarily for structuring and codifying knowledge. With the aid of Mind Mapping ideas are graphically collected, structured respectively organized, and valued.

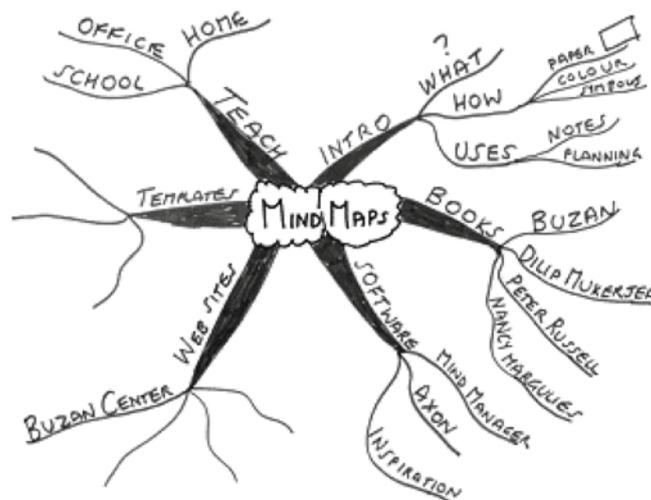
This tool aims at collecting ideas in a team within a problem domain or topic. Simultaneously the ideas structured in main and sub-ideas are ordered and graphed. The learning process of a group or team is supported by the visual representation of the ideas in the form of branches as well as by the structured and step-by-step generation and documentation of the ideas. Mind Maps stimulate the imagination and facilitate remembering the ideas.

Mind mapping starts with a central word or concept. Around the central word you draw the 5 to 10 main ideas that relate to that word. You then take each of those child words and again draw the 5 to 10 main ideas that relate to each of those words.

A visual representation of the ideas emerges step by step. If additional ideas come up some time later, it is easy to insert them without getting the mind map looking ugly.

If there is a relationship between two different ideas one may connect them by means of arrows.

There is PC software (e.g. Mind-Manager) supporting a team process and making it easy to convert the Mindmap with one mouse click into any other form of structured layout.



Sources

Main text: Facilitation – the art of making your meetings and workshops purposeful and time-efficient. AGRIDEA, Lindau, Switzerland. 2007. ISBN 978-3-906776-12-5.

Mind Mapping: <http://www.artm-friends.at/am/km/tools/mind-mapping-e.html>

World Café



Café Guidelines

Conducting an exciting Café Conversation is not hard – it's limited only by your imagination! The Café format is flexible and adapts to many different circumstances. When these guidelines are used in combination, they foster collaborative dialogue, active engagement and constructive possibilities for action.

Clarify the Purpose

Pay attention early to the reason why you are bringing people together. Knowing the purpose of your meeting enables you to consider which participants need to be there and what parameters are important to achieve your purpose.

Create a Hospitable Space

Café hosts around the world emphasize the power and importance of creating a hospitable space – one that feels safe and inviting. When people feel comfortable to be themselves, they do their most creative thinking, speaking, and listening. In particular, consider how your invitation and your physical set-up contribute to creating a welcoming atmosphere.

Explore Questions that Matter

Finding and framing questions that matter to those who are participating in your Café is an area where thought and attention can produce profound results. Your Café may only explore a single question, or several questions may be developed to support a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue. In many cases, Café conversations are as much about discovering and exploring powerful questions as they are about finding effective solutions.

Encourage Everyone's Contribution

As leaders we are increasingly aware of the importance of participation, but most people don't only want to participate, they want to actively contribute to making a difference. It is important to encourage everyone in your meeting to contribute their ideas and perspectives, while also allowing anyone who wants to participate by simply listening to do so.

Connect Diverse Perspectives

The opportunity to move between tables, meet new people, actively contribute your thinking, and link the essence of your discoveries to ever-widening circles of thought is one of the distinguishing characteristics of the Café. As participants carry key ideas or themes to new tables, they exchange perspectives, greatly enriching the possibility for surprising new insights.

Listen for Insights and Share Discoveries

Through practicing shared listening and paying attention to themes, patterns and insights, we begin to sense a connection to the larger whole. After several rounds of conversation, it is helpful to engage in a plenary conversation. This offers the entire group an opportunity to connect the overall themes or questions that are now present.

Café Conversations at a Glance

- ❑ Seat **four or five people at small Café-style tables** or in conversation clusters.
- ❑ Set up **progressive (usually three) rounds of conversation** of approximately 20-30 minutes each.
- ❑ **Questions or issues that genuinely matter** to your life, work or community are engaged while other small groups explore similar questions at nearby tables.
- ❑ Encourage both table hosts and members to **write, doodle and draw key ideas** on their tablecloths or to note key ideas on large index cards or placemats in the center of the group.
- ❑ Upon completing the initial round of conversation, ask one person to remain at the table as the **“host” while the others serve as travelers or “ambassadors of meaning.”** The travelers carry key ideas, themes and questions into their new conversations.
- ❑ Ask the table host to welcome the new guests and briefly share the main ideas, themes and questions of the initial conversation. Encourage guests to **link and connect ideas** coming from their previous table conversations – listening carefully and building on each other’s contributions.
- ❑ By providing opportunities for people to move in several rounds of conversation, **ideas, questions, and themes begin to link and connect.** At the end of the second round, all of the tables or conversation clusters in the room will be cross-pollinated with insights from prior conversations.
- ❑ In the third round of conversation, people can return to their home (original) tables to synthesize their discoveries, or they may continue traveling to new tables, leaving the same or a new host at the table. Sometimes a new question that helps **deepen the exploration** is asked for the third round of conversation.
- ❑ After several rounds of conversation, initiate a period of sharing discoveries and insights in a **whole group conversation.** It is in these town meeting-style conversations that patterns can be identified, collective knowledge grows, and possibilities for action emerge.

Once you know what you want to achieve and the amount of time you have to work with, you can decide the appropriate number and length of conversation rounds, the most effective use of questions and the most interesting ways to connect and cross-pollinate ideas.



I will also add that I am using World Café both as a central method and also combined with other things. For example, using a cafe to kick off strategic planning, as a way to start an Appreciative Inquiry process or as a way to “make meaning” of a keynote.

It is a very scaleable tool from 8 to hundreds of people. The two bits of the practice that I have found most important are:

- 1. Think very carefully about the question you use to convene the cafe conversations. Like many interaction methods, the question is at the heart of the interaction. It has to be clear and it has to MATTER to the participants, because World Café is about “conversations that matter.” If it isn’t important, don’t do it.*
- 2. Don’t let anybody talk you into using large tables and groups over 6 people. Cafes thrive in conversation sizes of 4-6. When you go beyond that, you move back to speech making and less chance for everyone to speak and be heard. So if a facility only has large round or rectangular tables, skip the tables and just huddle up chairs and put the flip chart paper and pens on the floor in the middle. Or if it is culturally acceptable and physically comfortable, people can sit on the floor. But the intimacy of a small group is critical.*

Nancy White, Full Circle Associates

The Importance of the Café Question(s)

The question(s) you choose or that participants discover during a Café conversation are critical to its success. Your Café may explore a single question or several questions may be developed to support a logical progression of discovery throughout several rounds of dialogue.

Keep in mind that...

- Well-crafted questions attract energy and focus our attention to what really counts. Experienced Café hosts recommend posing open-ended questions – the kind that don’t have yes or no answers.
- Good questions need not imply immediate action steps or problem solving. They should invite inquiry and discovery vs. advocacy and advantage.
- You’ll know you have a good question when it continues to surface new ideas and possibilities.
- Bounce possible questions off of key people who will be participating to see if they sustain interest and energy.

How to Create a Café Ambiance

Whether you are convening several dozen or several hundred people, it is essential to create an environment that evokes a feeling of both informality and intimacy. When your guests arrive they should know immediately that this is no ordinary meeting.

- If possible, select a space with natural light and an outdoor view to create a more welcoming atmosphere.
- Make the space look like an actual Café, with small tables that seat four or five people. Less than four at a table may not provide enough diversity of perspectives, more than five limits the amount of personal interaction.
- Arrange the Cafe tables in a staggered, random fashion rather than in neat rows. Tables in a sidewalk café after it has been open for a few hours look relaxed and inviting.



- Use colorful tablecloths and a small vase of flowers on each table. If the venue allows it add a candle to each table. Place plants or greenery around the room.
- Place at least two large sheets of paper over each tablecloth along with a mug or wineglass filled with colorful markers. Paper and pens encourage scribbling, drawing, and connecting ideas. In this way people will jot down ideas as they emerge.
- Put one additional Café table in the front of the room for the Host's and any presenter's material
- Consider displaying art or adding posters to the walls (as simple as flip chart sheets with quotes), and play music as people arrive and you welcome them.
- To honor the tradition of community and hospitality provide beverages and snacks. A Café isn't complete without food and refreshments!

I'm the Café Host, what do I do?

The job of the Café Host is to see that the six guidelines for dialogue and engagement are put into action. It is not the specific form, but living the spirit of the guidelines that counts. Hosting a Café requires thoughtfulness, artistry and care. The Café Host can make the difference between an interesting conversation and no conversation at all.

- Work with the planning team to determine the purpose of the Café and decide who should be invited to the gathering.
- Name your Café in a way appropriate to its purpose, for example: Leadership Café; Knowledge Café; Strategy Café; Discovery Café, etc.
- Help frame the invitation.
- Work with others to create a comfortable Café environment.
- Welcome the participants as they enter.
- Explain the purpose of the gathering.
- Pose the question or themes for rounds of conversation and make sure that the question is visible to everyone on an overhead, flip chart or on cards at each table.
- Explain the Café guidelines and Café Etiquette and post them on an overhead, an easel sheet or on cards at each table.
- Explain how the logistics of the Café will work, including the role of the Table Host (the person who will volunteer to remain at the end of the first round and welcome newcomers to their table).
- During the conversation, move among the tables.
- Encourage everyone to participate.
- Remind people to note key ideas, doodle and draw.
- Let people know in a gentle way when it's time to move and begin a new round of conversation.
- Make sure key insights are recorded visually or are gathered and posted if possible.
- Be creative in adapting the six Café guidelines to meet the unique needs of your situation.

It is a fantastic tool for making conversations and group discussions focused and productive. Most recently I have used it with a network of Asian disaster response and disaster reduction NGOs as part of their strategic planning processes.

Ben Ramalingam, Head of Research and Development, ALNAP (www.alnap.org)



From my experience, in a hierarchal organization World Café manages to break the hierarchy by putting colleagues from different ranks around the same table discussing the same issue. Suddenly for 30 minutes or whatever the duration of each visit may be, everyone becomes peers and no one a 'superior'. It is a great way for colleagues to share personal and work-related insights and experience – and that is when the walls crumble. Last but not least, it also gives an opportunity for colleagues to unleash their creativity which is not something that they may necessarily have the space and room to do on a daily basis. Keep the groups small, I would also suggest that you do try to mix your groups so that you do not end up having people who normally work together sitting at the same table. Try to diversify as much as possible. If it is the first time you are doing it, try and brief your table hosts so that they know what is expected from them.

Roxanna Samii, IFAD

I'm a Table Host, what do I do?

- Remind people at your table to jot down key connections, ideas, discoveries, and deeper questions as they emerge.
- Remain at the table when others leave and welcome travellers from other tables.
- Briefly share key insights from the prior conversation so others can link and build using ideas from their respective tables.

Stay in Touch! Like the Café process itself, this Guide is evolving. As you experiment with hosting your own Café conversations, we'd love to hear from you, both about your Café experiences and the ways we can make this Guide more useful. Contact info@theworldcafe.com with ideas and feedback. And for further detailed background information, including Café stories, additional hosting tips, supporting articles, and links to related Café and dialogue initiatives, please visit <http://www.theworldcafe.com>

What are Café Conversations?

Café Conversations are an easy-to-use method for creating a living network of collaborative dialogue around questions that matter in service of the real work. Cafés in business have been named in many ways to meet specific goals, including Creative Cafés, Knowledge Cafés, Strategy Cafés, Leadership Cafés, Marketing Cafés, and Product Development Cafés. Most Café conversations are based on the principles and format developed by The World Café (see www.theworldcafe.com), a growing global movement to support conversations that matter in corporate, government and community settings around the world.

Café Conversations are also a provocative metaphor enabling us to see new ways to make a difference in our lives and work. The power of conversation is so invisible and natural that we usually overlook it. For example, consider all the learning and action choices that occur as people move from one conversation to another both inside the organization and outside, with suppliers, customers and others in the larger community. What if we considered all of these conversations as one big dynamic Café, with each of the job functions as a table in a larger network of living conversations, which is the core process for sharing our collective knowledge and shaping our future? Once we become aware of the power of conversation as a key business process, we can use it more effectively for our mutual benefit.

The Café is built on the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. Given the appropriate context and focus, it is possible to access and use this deeper knowledge about what's important.



Final remarks

We have outlined a series of guidelines for putting conversation to work through dialogue and engagement. If you use these guidelines when planning your meetings, you'll be surprised at the improved quality of the outcomes you get. When hosting a Café Conversation applying all these guidelines simultaneously you'll find you are able to create a unique Café environment where surprising and useful outcomes are likely to occur.

Source

© 2008 The World Café. Free to copy and distribute with acknowledgement & a link to: <http://www.theworldcafe.com>

Links

There is also an online community for World Cafe practitioners and it is a great place to ask for ideas and advice. <http://www.theworldcafecommunity.net/>

The original of this document: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/articles/cafetogo.pdf>

World Cafe materials in different languages: <http://www.theworldcafe.com/translations.htm>



Yellow Pages



What are yellow pages?

An organisational “yellow pages” is a tool to help people find others in their organisation who have the knowledge and expertise they need for a particular task or project. It is like a staff directory, but rather than simply listing people’s names, job titles, departments and contact details, it includes details about their knowledge, skills, experience and interests.

The “yellow pages” is electronic rather than paper-based, so that users can search it in a variety of ways, just like they might perform a search on the internet.

“Yellow pages” are often also known as experts’ directories, expertise directories, skills directories or capabilities catalogue.

What are the benefits?

A “yellow pages” is particularly beneficial in organisations that exceed a certain size or whose staff are scattered in different locations, and so people don’t have the opportunity to get to know each other well. Specific benefits include:

- “Yellow pages” are technologically quite simple to create
- They can be extremely effective in helping organisations to ‘know what they know’
- They allow people to find the tacit knowledge they need, by easily finding the people who have it
- They can underpin all of the organisation’s various initiatives to connect people with people, and to learn from others
- A “yellow pages” is not necessarily aimed at those embarking on a major project or piece of work; often the greatest value comes from a multitude of simple ten-minute conversations in which people ask each other for a quick word of advice or a steer in the right direction.

By way of an example, can you find an asthma expert who has considerable experience in a specific treatment, has successfully used that treatment with children under five, and is currently in or around the Birmingham area, all in under a minute? A good “yellow pages” could enable you to do that (assuming of course that such a person exists!).

How do I go about it?

Be clear about your aims

First, be clear about your aims. Using a “yellow pages” to find people is a means to an end, not an end in itself. How do you intend for people to use it? For what purposes do you envisage them using the system to find people? How will they approach and use the system? It is vital to be clear on this before you begin designing any system. Talk to people in your organisation to find out about their needs and views. Talk to people in other organisations who have already implemented a “yellow pages” to find out what you can learn from their experiences.

Ownership advantages

Opinions vary about whether to make individuals’ inclusion a “yellow pages” compulsory or voluntary, and similarly whether to create and manage entries centrally or provide a template for individuals to create and update their own entries. Organisations such as BP-Amoco and Texaco who have implemented successful “yellow pages” strongly favour the voluntary approach in which individuals create their own entries if they so choose. Their experience would seem to show that ownership needs to be with the people contributing to, and using, the system.

This has a number of advantages. First, it creates a sense of personal responsibility for the system which in turn fosters support; second, it allows people to present their entries in a way that reflects how they want to be known rather than how the organisation sees them; and hence third, it helps to create a ‘living’ system that reflects real personalities and therefore encourages personal relationships.

Balance formal with informal information

While the purpose of a “yellow pages” is to help people find others with relevant knowledge and expertise, the chances of them actually acting on that information and calling that person will be greatly increased if they feel they ‘know’ them. This sense of ‘knowing’ or familiarity can be created to some extent by including some personal information and a photograph in people’s entries. Allow people to be creative in how they present themselves. For example, at BP people are encouraged to upload photographs of themselves at home or at play – perhaps with their children or enjoying their favourite sport – rather than using a more sterile passport-style photograph.

Experience within SDC on Yellow Pages

“The Yellow Pages assist us in making better use of the SDC’s wealth of assorted knowledge.”

The competence profiles on SDC’s IntraWeb indicate those person(s) at SDC capable of providing information on a subject or a key experience. The domains of competence indicated represent those in which the person is ready to provide a relay, i.e., guide one to the appropriate source of information if unable to reply immediately. The individual staff member is the sole person enabled – at any given moment – to alter his profile. In the course of the annual individual performance talks, it is being discussed whether any modifications should be made.

A major lesson: As with any working tool, be it even the Internet: Yellow Pages require an invitation to participate, an introduction, some sort of assistance to enter.

Experiences from others: Yellow Pages only deliver value when they are in wide and frequent use. That only happens if people find them attractive, easy to use both when putting data in and when getting it out – and above all rewarding. That in turn means they need to be a rich and up-to-date source of contacts, and support the social aspects of conversation as well as provide factual information.

Manuel Flury, Head Knowledge Management Service



BP Amoco set up their Yellow Pages in 1997. After four years, a third of BP Amoco's 100'000 staff had created personal pages. The company has come to regard the system as a major business asset. The primacy given to the users' point of view, the care over details of design and implementation, the emphasis on personal ownership, voluntariness and trust, and the encouragement to include personal information – both to facilitate professional communications and to offer other social rewards ("are there any other dinghy sailors around here?") – have been crucial in persuading people to populate the database in the first place and making it a tool of continuing value.

The experience of BP Amoco

What to include

Common fields found in a "yellow pages" include:

- Name
- Job title
- Department or team
- A brief job description and/or description of what is currently being worked on and what has been worked on in the past
- Relevant professional qualifications
- An updated CV
- Areas of knowledge and expertise (selected from a pre-defined list of subjects/terms; people might also rank their knowledge, for example from 'extensive' to 'working knowledge' to 'basic')
- Main areas of interest
- Key contacts – both internal and external
- Membership of communities of practice or other knowledge networks
- Personal profile
- Photograph
- Contact information.

Organising entries for ease of loading and retrieval

In order to encourage people to create entries, you will need to make it easy for them. Most organisations use a simple template into which users enter their information. In creating a template, think not only about ease of entry, but also about how users will search the system to retrieve information. You will need a common language or taxonomy to describe information in the essential fields, in particular those relating to knowledge, expertise, areas of work and interests. You might like to create fixed terms and options for these fields that users can select from a menu or a selection of tick-boxes. This could also be supplemented with a box for users to enter free text, perhaps with some suggested terms alongside it to guide their use of language.

In contrast, personal information can of course be relatively unstructured – leave scope for more creativity and free expression here!

Keeping it current

A "yellow pages" must be maintained and kept up-to-date. People are constantly moving locations, changing jobs, and adding to their knowledge and skills. If your "yellow pages" is linked with your human resources system, then job details and contact information can be automatically updated. Alternatively if individuals have sole responsibility for their own entries, then you might build a reminder process into your system, whereby an e-mail is sent automatically to

remind users who haven't updated their entries since a certain time period, such as three to six months. Similarly, be sure to build information about the "yellow pages" into processes for new joiners and leavers, so that new joiners know about the system and are encouraged to add their entry, and leavers remember to either delete their entry or delegate it to someone else to 'own' (assuming they are happy for people to still contact them after they have left).

Encouraging use

You will need to actively market your "yellow pages". Don't assume that if you create it, people will automatically use it. Your marketing efforts will need to encourage both participation and use; the two are inextricably linked as you need a certain amount of submissions for people to see the "yellow pages" as being worth using. Possible ideas might include posters, presence at events such as learning fairs, nominating champions to promote the "yellow pages" in various parts of the organisation, or competitions that give prizes to the first departments in which everyone is uploaded, or for those with the best success stories of how using the "yellow pages" has helped them in their job. Be sure to focus on the benefits in your marketing efforts – people will want to know 'what's in it for me?'

Are there any other points I should be aware of?

- A "yellow pages" need not just include individuals – for example you might like to include formal communities of practice, project teams, etc.
- Similarly, a "yellow pages" need not just cover internal people; you can also have a similar system, or a section, for suppliers of various types (e.g. IT outsourcing, consultancy services, recruitment agencies, etc.), and for other organisations with which you work or collaborate, both within and outside your organisation.
- You can add further value to your "yellow pages" by linking it with other knowledge management tools, such as those available on an intranet. For example you might have collaborative working tools or best practice databases that list relevant contacts – these contact listings can be linked directly into the "yellow pages" – and vice versa.
- Be careful when using the term 'expert' – it can be quite a 'political' one and may create hierarchies; if some people are considered as experts, this might make others feel that their knowledge is less valuable so it may discourage their contribution.
- Be aware of issues relating to data protection – check with your legal department to ensure that your "yellow pages" will comply with relevant requirements, and to create a policy on its correct use.

Source

NHL: <http://www.library.nhs.uk/knowledgemanagement/ViewResource.aspx?resID=94140&tabID=290>

References / Links

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Yellow Pages and Blue Pages A short description of the yellow page / blue page methodology <http://www.artm-friends.at/am/km/tools/gelbe-blaue-seiten-e.html>



Methods for Knowledge Management and their Specific Suitability

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|
| After Action Review | | T | | | | | R |
| Balanced Scorecard | | | O | | | A | |
| Brainstorming | | T | | | P | A | R |
| Briefing and Debriefing | I | | | | P | A | R |
| Collegial Coaching | I | T | | | P | | |
| Community of Practice (CoP) | | T | O | | | A | |
| Exit Interviews | I | T | O | | | | R |
| Experience Capitalization | | | O | | | | R |
| Facilitation | | T | | | | A | |
| Good Practice | | T | O | | | A | R |
| Knowledge Fair | | | O | | P | A | |
| Knowledge Map | I | T | O | | P | A | |
| Knowledge Network | I | T | O | | P | A | |
| Lesson Learnt | I | T | O | | | | R |
| Mentoring | I | | O | | P | A | |
| Open Space | | T | O | | P | A | |
| Peer Assist / Peer Review | | T | O | | P | A | R |
| Storytelling | | T | O | | | A | R |
| SWOT | | T | | | P | A | R |
| Visualisation | | T | | | P | A | |
| World Café | | | O | | P | A | |
| Yellow Page | I | T | O | | P | A | R |

I = Individual

T = Team

O = Organisation

P = Preparation

A = Action

R = Reflection

