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Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible

Guest Editors: Peter van Rooij, Rohit Ramaswamy, Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme, with Lucie Lamoureux

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Editorial
Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible

Peter van Rooij, Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme and Rohit Ramaswamy with Lucie Lamoureux

The KM4D Journal - www.km4dev.org/journal - is the Knowledge Management for Development's peer-reviewed, open access e-journal in the field of knowledge sharing for development. This third issue deals with 'Understanding the role of culture in knowledge sharing: making the invisible visible'.

> *The first mortals lived on earth in a state of perfect innocence and bliss. The air was pure and balmy; the sun shone brightly all the year; the earth brought forth delicious fruit in abundance; and beautiful, fragrant flowers bloomed everywhere. Man was content. Extreme cold, hunger, sickness, and death were unknown.* (Guerber 1907)

The focus of this issue of the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* is culture. More than 200 definitions exist of the word culture. From Wikipedia, we learn that many of these definitions characterise culture being:

- Civilisation;
- Worldview;
- Value, norms and artefacts;
- Patterns of products and activities;
- Symbols; and
- As a stabilising mechanism.

It is therefore a challenge to address the cultural dimension of sharing knowledge for development. Indeed, what do we mean by the cultural dimension of knowledge sharing for development?

A related word, acculturation is defined as 'all the knowledge and values shared by a society' (Source: www.cogsci.princeton.edu/cgi-bin/webwn2.1). If different cultures offer diverse knowledge and values, exchanges between cultures offer opportunities to find and use appropriate knowledge for (further) development. This is an example of culture as a source of knowledge. In a related sense, culture can be a facilitator for sharing knowledge.

> *By engaging cultural processes at all levels, development practitioners can encourage local initiative and better understand social change.* (Vincent 2005).

Key points identified by Rob Vincent comprise:

- It is vital to address cultural processes in development policy, planning and practice.
- Power relationships are central to cultural practices and beliefs.
- Local cultures and communication methods are not just vehicles for delivering messages.
- Culture shapes the institutions and practices of international development.
- Social and cultural change depend on complex factors beyond the control of development agencies.

> *Left alone with the mysterious casket, Pandora became more and more inquisitive.* (Guerber 1907)

The purpose of this issue is to present some recent experiences of knowledge sharing and culture by practitioners who have been involved in planning, introducing, and mainstreaming knowledge sharing approaches and processes in development organizations. This issue is strongly linked to the KM4Dev annual meeting on the same subject which took place at the ILO Headquarters in Geneva on 20-21 June 2005.

This issue contains **six articles**:

'Knowledge management and social learning: exploring the cognitive dimension of development' by Sebastião Darlan Mendonça Ferreira and Marcos Neto

'The culture of a knowledge fair: lessons from an international organization' by Barbara Collins, Rafael Diez de Medina and Anne Trebilcock

'Building knowledge from the practice of local communities' by Ceasar McDowell, Andrea Nagel, Susana Williams and Claudia Canepa

'Elective affinities? Reflections on the enduring appeal of knowledge management for the development sector' by Giulio Quaggiotto

'Bridging the gap between research and practice' by Julie E. Ferguson

'The culture of management or the management of culture: a case study of the Rural Women's Association, South Africa' by Chris Burman

One case study
'The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange – a journey of change' by Petrarca Karetji

One story
'Culture, learning and surviving a PhD: a journey in search of my own path' by Camilo Villa

In addition to Katty Marmenout's *Interview* with Professor Clive Holtham on 'Knowledge and culture: learning from the past', the *Community Notes* by Urs Karl Egger gives a glimpse into the workings of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

Renewal Project. Finally, Sibrenne Wagenaar has provided a *Review* of Steve Denning's latest book on story telling.

This edition of the Journal reflects some of the challenge of looking at culture and reconfirms the richness of this theme. The importance and vastness of the cultural dimension of sharing knowledge for development also underlines the considerable work yet ahead. Let us open the box of Pandora for a third time, to go beyond hope, and further enhance our understanding of the role of culture, as an input, output and a factor to effectively and efficiently share knowledge for quality and quantitative development.

> *…but Hope followed closely in its footsteps, to aid struggling humanity, and point to a happier future.* (Grueber 1907)

We hope you enjoy this issue.

Peter van Rooij (ILO), Catherine Vaillancourt-Laflamme (Centre international de solidarité ouvrière) and Rohit Ramaswamy (Service Design Solutions), with Lucie Lamoureux (Bellanet)
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Knowledge management and social learning: exploring the cognitive dimension of development

Sebastião Darlan Mendonça Ferreira and Marcos Neto

The emergence of the discipline, knowledge management, is a new phenomenon. In the field of management, it arose in the beginning of the 1990s and in the development field, its application is even more recent. Its potential in development is not sufficiently well understood but the number of organizations that are giving it great importance is growing every day. It is realistic to expect that in the near future it will be much more important than it is now. Knowledge management has its origin in the evolution of information and communication technologies (ICT), the increased importance of knowledge as a source of value for companies, institutions and societies, and the advancement in cognitive theory. Although these are the most known trends, the contribution of new approaches in the field of development should not be underestimated.

Knowledge management began to influence the development community, namely the group of institutions (public and private, national and international) whose mission is promoting development of impoverished countries, in the second half of the 1990s, with the initiatives of the World Bank, the United Nations, the Global Knowledge Partnership, and some other international institutions (King and McGrath 2004). Knowledge management currently is mainstreamed in a great number of development institutions in Northern countries and it is likely that soon it will be important also in Southern development institutions.

Most of the concepts and tools developed by knowledge management academics, consultants and think-tanks, currently in use, are still heavily influenced by knowledge management's origin in the realm of private corporations and institutions of developed countries. In development, knowledge management has different challenges. In development, it is important to cross social frontiers, create opportunities in socially open spaces, work in conditions of scarcity of resources and manage knowledge as a public good. These particularities of development challenges should influence the future of knowledge management for the development community.

Knowledge management and development

As discussed above, the concept of knowledge management is spreading rapidly in the community of development agencies. This use of knowledge in development has two main aspects:

- How development agencies can learn faster and use their knowledge for doing a better job. In this case, learners are development professionals in developed countries and in countries in which agencies work.

- How to improve social learning and knowledge as a dimension of development, and how to use learning and knowledge as factors for achieving development objectives. In this case, the learners are the social actors and development practitioners, mostly in poor countries.

Both aspects are very important. In this article, we are focusing more on the second aspect, namely knowledge as a dimension of development processes. Development itself should be understood as a social learning process in the sense that: each country and community needs to find its own way to achieve development; the responsibility for the future needs to be assumed mainly by local/national actors; and future successes need to be based in lessons from past experiences, both successes and failures.

It is generally accepted that sustainable economic growth is related to technological innovation (Lewis 2004). New approaches to development are considering that sustainable development might also be considered as a learning process, creating local knowledge and/or assimilating and adapting external/global knowledge (Stiglitz 1999). Analyzing 'development as freedom', Sen (1999) threw light on various aspects of the nature of development processes and greatly enriched our understanding of development and the challenges of less developed countries.

It is also important to discover the cognitive dimension of development. One way to explore the cognitive dimension of development is thinking of development as a social learning process that contributes to people taking explicit control of their own development experiences, using those experiences autonomously to solve their problems and develop their own future. The freedom of people to assume their development as learning should be understood as a constituent part of development, as a right and, at same time, as an instrument for promoting development. Development as learning should be understood as a process in which people have the opportunity to reflect on their practice and draw lessons from their achievements and failures, and as a way of taking control of their experience and life. Development as learning should be understood as an opportunity of mobilizing people's intelligence as a valuable resource (for overcoming scarcity and for achieving development in a sustainable way); and also as a way to mobilize knowledge local resources for reducing external dependence and improving sustainability.

Characteristics of knowledge in society

The recent evolution of knowledge management, mostly in business and in Northern institutions, suggests that it is possible to reach new levels of using learning and knowledge in development. To understand how to manage knowledge in relation to the development processes, it is necessary to consider the characteristics of knowledge in society.

1. Knowledge in society 'leaks'. When an individual, organization or a social group innovates successfully, the knowledge on which that progress is based becomes visible, at least partially, in the immediate neighbourhood. As time goes on, such progress is understood and copied. Examples from the garment industries in

Bangladesh and Peru, and from many other clusters of micro-enterprises around the world, show how knowledge leaks from innovators (individuals, companies and institutions) to a bigger spectrum of society (Easterly 2002).

2. Most knowledge is a public good. Once knowledge spreads in society, it has no private owner. In society, knowledge is like air, and every one is free to use it. In society there is thus no reason for hoarding knowledge and there are many reasons for sharing it as widely as possible. Sharing knowledge, in society, is an effective way of multiplying its value with very low costs. This has important implications for the way knowledge creates value in the economic framework of the 21st Century.
3. Although knowledge is a public good and leaks to its immediate neighbourhood, there are important linguistic, social and cognitive barriers for knowledge diffusion across different social groups. These barriers can impede knowledge from being transferred to whoever may need this knowledge. Because of the great complexity and diversity of society, these social barriers are much more difficult to overcome than those that exist in the inner spaces of companies and institutions. Additionally these barriers are often invisible to most people, including policy makers and development programme designers.
4. Organizations are playing fields, like chess boards, with clearly defined actors, rules and structures. In society, the frontiers, actors and rules for knowledge management are not well defined. The scope, frontiers and rules for knowledge management are 'ever changing' variables and, in many cases, are unknown, requiring solutions much more flexible and robust to adapt to such fuzzy and changing conditions.
5. Unlike in organizations, in society, culture is a given. In organizations, management policies and leadership can shape culture, or influence it greatly. In society, culture cannot be easily changed.
6. In developed countries, most organizations do not suffer from resource scarcity, but in poor countries and in most social sectors, scarcity of resources (money, professionals, facilities, technology, etc.) is the norm. It is impossible to achieve sustainability without being realistic about scarcity of resources in poor countries. However, most development programmes do not recognize local bottlenecks and undervalue the importance of resource scarcity.

Fostering knowledge management at the local level

Implementation of knowledge management for development, taking these six characteristics into account and with the active involvement of local actors, requires fostering of knowledge management at the local level.

Local knowledge, in the sense we are using here, is mostly a modern creation. Local knowledge is the sum of (tacit and explicit) knowledge that living generations are using and recreating in the effort to solve their problems and achieve their aspirations. It is the sum of 'theories-in-use' and 'espoused-theories' (Schön 1983), practical experiences, assumptions, information, and demons (Pinker 1997), together with rules of thumb, beliefs, etc., that people use in their private, social, economic and professional activities.

Most local knowledge has a spatially limited validity. Experiences, from which most knowledge emerges, have local particularities like context, actors and processes. Local knowledge itself has a symbiotic relationship with the particularities of local conditions. In most cases, those particularities are unique and limit the way in which local knowledge can be generalized and applied in different spaces. This explains the well known limitations of best practices replication in development.

Local knowledge is mostly tacit and embedded in the brains of local actors. Normally people are not aware of what they know or of the relevance of that knowledge. They also have great difficulties in identifying, retrieving and expressing what they know. For this reason, it is difficult to achieve effectiveness and productivity in tacit knowledge sharing.

Most local knowledge mixes the facts of experience with myths, old paradigms, cultural idiosyncrasies, linguistic expressions and tacit theories-in-use. This fusion makes understanding and analysis very difficult for outsiders and limits the acceptance of local knowledge by most external actors. Most outsiders have differing cultural traditions, conceptual frameworks and intellectual parameters, restricting real understanding and diffusion of local knowledge. In some cases, prejudices of professionals and institutions of developed countries also operate against the recognition of local knowledge.

Valuable local knowledge is often not locally known nor socially recognized. Local experiences that could inspire others to find ways of getting out of poverty are neither recognized nor valued by local leaders, decision makers or development programme designers. This indistinctness of local knowledge is a problem because the capacity of knowledge for spreading socially depends on its recognition.

Most of the macro conditions (economic, legal, institutional, environmental, etc.) that determine the failure or success of local initiatives are invisible to local actors. They know their places, their problems and nearby neighbourhood better than outsiders, but as the scale increases, their perception of the world becomes fuzzier. For example, small producers in the highlands of Ayacucho, 400 miles from Lima, do not know the market rules and conditions in Lima, based on supermarkets and international commercial markets, which determine the prices and competitiveness of their products.

However local knowledge has some remarkable characteristics:

- It works and is locally validated;
- It is sustainable, economically and socially;
- It is culturally friendly to its neighbours;
- It is an abundant resource in any country; and
- Its deployment and mobilization are not expensive.

In many cases, local knowledge is generated under conditions where to fail is so costly that it is inadmissible. In such situations, people deploy an exceptional creativeness, generating solutions absolutely unexpected in developed countries. All outsiders who have experimented in applying general knowledge to local conditions discover that ‘the devil is in the (local) details’, and the decisive importance of local

knowledge for being successful in a world with high diversity. Additionally, leverage of local knowledge empowers local actors, creates a diversity of partners worldwide and generates better conditions for making development a more horizontal and democratic process.

One implication of viewing development as a social learning process is the necessity of strengthening local/national partners for managing (appropriating, adapting and/or recreating) the knowledge they need for their development, reinforcing their self-confidence in their own intelligence and cognitive skills. If we want to promote an active role of local actors in creating their own solutions, it will be necessary to give priority to improving their capacity for managing knowledge; to learning from their experience; to sharing with others; and to acquiring knowledge from the outside world.

However, limitations of local actors and the rules that currently govern development aid reinforce the disequilibrium of power between donors and receivers. It is very difficult to be critical to 'solutions' that come with financial resources attached to them (whether donated or lent), especially in a condition of poverty and scarcity of resources. The result is a culture of intellectual dependence of most local actors. That dependence makes local actors orient and reduce their intelligence to understanding and applying the solutions generated in developed countries, not to combining global knowledge and local experience in a way that preserves their intellectual autonomy and reinforces their own responsibility.

Dependence also shrinks the capacity of people to be adaptive and assertive in applying others' solutions, and also limits their capacity to learn from experience, particularly when they do not feel directly responsible for the solutions. And finally, this intellectual dependence does not recognize the creativity of poor people who are able to survive in difficult and vulnerable conditions. Intellectual dependence is related to the ineffectiveness and poor results of a significant part of the current development aid, the persistence of poverty and acute social problems in most parts of the world, and the annual waste of billions of dollars.

The main conclusion is that, in the future, local knowledge and local actors should have a greater role in development strategies and policies. The challenge is to find ways of redefining the relationship between development agencies, local governments and local actors for organizing development as a learning process.

The potential of the social learning approach

The way social learning is to be promoted will depend on the objectives pursued, the conditions of the community who is learning and its context. The three elements of knowledge management (use, creation and sharing) will always be present although the form in which they are combined will vary greatly. Some ways in which social learning is being promoted are provided below with, where possible, inspirational examples:

1. Tacit knowledge can be harvesting and/or transformed into explicit expressions for diffusion and future use in development. For example, the experience of capturing tacit knowledge for improving natural resources management (Rambaldi and Callosa-Tarr 2002).

2. Knowledge sharing can be promoted between knowledgeable people and people who need that knowledge in local communities. For example, the experience of the Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) in matching demand and supply of knowledge for fighting HIV/AIDS in communities. UNAIDS applied (and expanded) a set of practical and simple tools created by British Petroleum (Collison and Parcell 2001).

3. Mobilizing local resources by the use of local knowledge as resource for development, increasing the cost/benefit ration and the sustainability of development programmes.

4. Enriching the local knowledge environment with strategic knowledge. Strategic planning at local level can be used to give people the opportunity to rethink and validate their beliefs about their particular context and development strategies being applied.

5. Rethinking of strategies, theories-in-use, beliefs, old paradigms and of innovative processes. Reflective Practice, an approach for learning before, during and after action, created by Schön 20 years ago, is being increasingly applied by health professional, educators, academics, armed forces, institutions and companies in developed countries. It can be also applied in less developed countries.

6. The identification and diffusion of knowledge can be promoted by innovative social experiences. Knowledge fairs can be good mechanisms for identifying innovative experiences in development institutions.

7. Knowledge creation can be used to escape poverty traps and to foster development processes. With the support of cognitive methods, people's fragmented knowledge can be gathered and processed by local actors for creating viable solutions and effective policy propositions (Chambers 2002).

8. Processes of knowledge sharing can be organized among diverse organizations and people. In most cases, small producers and local institutions are not competitors. The broadening of the channels for knowledge sharing can be an effective way to spread innovations and to democratize competitiveness among local producers.

9. Capacity building can support local knowledge management and social learning. Development professionals and experts in knowledge management can help local institutions and professional to adapt cognitive tools to their specific needs and to put in place tailored mechanisms of knowledge creation and sharing

The experience of CARE in Latin America and the Caribbean

Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc (CARE), is one of the world's largest private humanitarian organizations. With its headquarters in Atlanta, USA, it is part of an international confederation of 11 member organizations committed to helping communities in the developing world achieve lasting victories over poverty. CARE's efforts to apply knowledge management for development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has involved a process that has taken place over the past four years and is not yet concluded.

The process began with the elaboration of a conceptual framework for knowledge management in a development organization (2001), the development of a methodology for assessing the knowledge processes and its application in three country offices (2002) and the designing of a strategy proposal for implementing knowledge management in the LAC region (2003). After three years of hard work, the institutional reality and practice remained unchanged, requiring a change in the strategy.

The strategy selected by the LAC Regional Management Unity (RMU) was to go to the practical experience of the front line of the organization, aiming to motivate people to experiment with knowledge management in the context of their practice. Based on this, the Latin America and Caribbean Region Management Unit (LACRMU) carried out an experiment to promote social learning in seven countries of the region.

LACRMU's strategy

The main premise of LACRMU's strategy was that social learning is an emergent phenomenon that could not be designed beforehand but that could be nurtured. This implied giving CARE professionals in the frontline the opportunity to discover the forms of generating and sharing knowledge in their particular contexts. The Bob Dylan conception that 'the answer is blowing in the wind', inspired LACRMU's strategy.

The strategy aimed to support local actors in leading initiatives of social learning in order to demonstrate a great diversity of experiences. These experiences would provide evidence and give key clues about potential strategies and policies for making knowledge and social learning a central element of development approaches.
The driver of this experiment was the promotion of knowledge communities with the purpose of designing and executing knowledge projects. The concept of a knowledge community (von Krogh et al. 2000) is very similar to that of the community of practice (Wenger 2002). It was conceived that knowledge projects should be based on an innovative social experience and should conceive a way of leveraging knowledge through a process of social learning with other social agents. At the same time, LACRMU expected that the experiment would contribute to improving the value of tacit knowledge, promoting reflective practice among participants, and encouraging the migration from teaching to facilitation among development workers.

The main change agents involved were the knowledge promoters with the role of identifying innovative social experiences, facilitating the processes with knowledge

communities in their organization, and taking part in knowledge project design. Knowledge promoters were field level practitioners motivated with the idea of using knowledge management for development. As they had almost no experience of using the concepts and tools to be employed, they were prepared briefly with an introduction to knowledge management, particularly social learning, and to the methodology involved in the design of knowledge projects.

The First Knowledge Fair

The venue for conceiving knowledge projects was the First Knowledge Fair, held in Atlanta during 22-24 September 2004. Participants were invited to present potential knowledge projects, competing for awards to support their implementation. These projects had to reinforce the importance of knowledge as a factor for development. The awards offered by the Fair were: first place: USD25, 000, second place: USD10, 000, and third, fourth and fifth places: USD5000. In addition to these prizes, technical assistance and support was to be provided in locating financial resources for the implementation of the ten best projects selected.

A number of conditions for proposing knowledge projects were set in advance. The knowledge communities should organize themselves voluntarily and they should be based on groups that had previous innovative experiences. Members had to be either individuals in their own capacities or persons belonging to institutions, and should not include only CARE staff. They had to express the intention to improve local development by creating and/or sharing knowledge. Naturally, lessons from past experience were an important basis for the projects but their purpose needed to go beyond that of a 'knowledge museum', intending to generate a real and concrete future impact.

A small group of knowledge promoters, all of them CARE staff, were trained to help identify initiatives, constitute knowledge communities and design knowledge projects. Technical (cognitive) assistance was organized for helping knowledge promoters to support knowledge communities.

At the outset, the organizers believed that virtual tools would be very important in helping knowledge promoters carry out their task of promoting the fair and assisting communities to conceive their projects. A webpage and a virtual forum were created and offered to the knowledge promoters. However, a short time (two months) was enough to show the insufficiency of those tools. The process for organizing the Fair was redesigned, and the technical assistance was focused on workshops and face-to-face dialogues with knowledge promoters and knowledge communities and on direct presence in field work with communities.

The knowledge promoters, responsible for leading the process at the field level, were CARE professionals who had other operative responsibilities. Supporting the communities in preparing the projects and participating in the Fair represented an additional workload for them. This, in some cases, limited their ability to fully take up their role as knowledge promoters.

Designing knowledge projects

The main tool for designing knowledge projects was a very brief methodology. The methodology stated that, for conceiving a knowledge project, it was necessary to establish:

1. Which knowledge is to be created and/or shared;
2. Who should use that knowledge;
3. What receptacle should contains that knowledge;
4. For what purpose, or what use in development;
5. How future users should make use of that knowledge;
6. Who will participate in the experience of knowledge creation/sharing;
7. Which activities will make it possible to create and to share that knowledge, namely the social learning process; and
8. The resources required for implementing those activities.

Methodological steps proposed were:

1. *The identification of socially innovative experiences*
   Identification of socially innovative experiences was based on a brief reconstruction of the experience of the group involved. These reconstructions were also used to make tacit knowledge explicit. Each group was supported by a facilitator.

2. *The conception of knowledge projects (preliminary version)*
   For conceiving knowledge projects, it was necessary to have found, during the reconstruction above, that the group was generating knowledge that should be useful to other groups. It was necessary to identify other groups who could use their knowledge, representing potential partners in developing that knowledge. Once the potential partners were identified, the next step was to imagine a process of social learning with them.

3. *The making of a short experiment*
   Once the project was conceived, a short experiment was required that should indicate of the feasibility of the project. This experiment should focus on the core activities of the social learning process imagined. It should be brief, based in local capacities and not expensive.

4. *The final design of the knowledge project*
   Based on the lessons from the short experiment, the projects were improved in their final version for presenting at the First Knowledge Fair.

Results

The process demonstrated that there was an abundance of experiences of autonomous and innovative development at the field level. The possibility of implementing high quality knowledge projects was substantial. Despite this, the concept of a knowledge project for stimulating social learning and leveraging the role of knowledge in development proved elusive for knowledge promoters and for others involved. Traditional assumptions about the roles of development organizations operated as a strong barrier to facilitating processes in which people were developing their own ideas.

In the process of project design, the members of knowledge communities were very clear when presenting their ideas for the project but, at the same time; they had great difficulty writing these ideas in the format of a project proposal. In itself, design of knowledge projects by the communities was a process of transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. In all cases, the development of the project required a brief reconstruction and reinterpretation of the experience in which the project was based. The main role of the promoters was helping the knowledge community members reconstruct their experience, and express their ideas about the project. The dialogue, and not the writing of project proposals, was the driver of the processes of project design.

The First Knowledge Fair had very satisfactory results:

- The projects presented by the knowledge communities were ideas with great potential for promoting social learning and for making knowledge a key factor for overcoming poverty.
- The participants, local members of the knowledge communities, were very proud of presenting their ideas at a prestigious event.
- The commitment of the members of knowledge communities was remarkable.
- The presentations on knowledge management were found to be illuminating and motivating: the knowledge management experiences of the World Bank and of the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and presentations concerning storytelling for promoting organizational changes, paradigm shift for promoting social learning, etc.

However, the Fair had some limitations in its organization and logistics, but they were not significant for its success. Its impact in motivating and inspiring the participants was found to be remarkable.

The Knowledge Fair and the promotion of social learning were carried out in an institutional context where many professionals were not familiar with knowledge management. By some participants, the emphasis in social learning was interpreted as a reflection on the need to improve organizational learning and, by others, it was perceived that focusing on social learning meant relegating organizational learning to a lower priority. From this, it appears that understanding of the relationship between social and organizational learning still requires attention.

Follow-up to the First Knowledge Fair

At the present time four activities are being carried out:

- A team from the Centre for Reflective Community Practice at the Massachusetts Institute for Technology (MIT), USA, is finishing an evaluation of the experience of promoting knowledge communities through the Knowledge Fair.
- CARE, the UNDP, Fundação Municipal Albano Schmidt (FUNDAMAS) and the Salvadoran Government are organizing a new Knowledge Fair in El Salvador for 2006, combining the approaches developed by CARE and UNDP.
- CARE is organizing a Second Knowledge Fair for the LAC region for next year, 2006.
- Knowledge projects are being implemented, and knowledge communities and knowledge promoters are facing the challenge of making their ideas reality.

Conclusions and lessons

CARE's experience with knowledge communities, knowledge promoters and knowledge projects is still in its early stages. However, some lessons and conclusions can already be drawn from that experience.

1. In poor countries, there are a great number of innovators, knowledgeable people, innovative institutions, experiences and valuable knowledge that can be leveraged for empowering people and local institutions; and for increasing the pool of resources available for development.

2. Unidirectional programmes, and most public policies in poor countries, are ineffective for identifying and mobilizing local knowledge and knowledgeable local people and institutions, and for using them to achieve sustainability in development programmes.

3. When introducing knowledge management in development, it is necessary to develop a great variety of methods. Such methods should include tools for mapping locally knowledge resources and knowledgeable people; for mapping the spread of knowledge through social networks; and for identifying social, linguistic and cultural barriers for knowledge sharing at local level, and how to overcome these barriers. It is also necessary to identify, recognize and improve the role of local knowledge and innovation in successful development programmes, and to improve cognitive capabilities of development practitioners and local actors, etc.

4. Most of the most valuable knowledge is tacit. For retrieving and sharing this knowledge, conversations, dramatizations and storytelling are much more effective than writing. It is necessary to develop cognitive methods and tools for enabling knowledge sharing among local institutions, without much abstraction, without much systematization.

5. Development programmes and development professionals should rethink and relearn their approaches and methods for establishing a more horizontal relationship with local actors and with development practitioners, overcoming their conventional role as the source of (global, mostly technical) knowledge and sharing the responsibility for co-creating knowledge in a world with a high level of diversity.

6. As knowledge management is an emergent phenomenon, development professionals need to develop their sensitivity to identifying emerging patterns at local and global level, fostering those patterns with higher potential and achieving greater effectiveness for making knowledge a key factor of development.

7. Knowledge Projects require paradigm shifts for development professionals:
   - To go beyond the frontiers of the development institutions and their projects for finding innovations that social groups are carrying out.
   - To go beyond the past experience to the future process of social learning, from the concept of knowledge as a lifeless object to conceive knowledge as a living process.

- To go beyond knowledge systematization as a precondition for sharing knowledge to systematization/abstraction as a process simultaneous to, and some times a result of, sharing experiences.
- Rethinking the role of the development professionals from the main change agent who systematize people's knowledge to the facilitator who helps local groups express and systematize their own experience.
- To go beyond the replication of (standardized) best practices to the creative use of the knowledge of successful (and not so successful) experiences for inspiring other people and for shortening their learning curves.

8. The initial experience post-knowledge fair suggests that development organizations, like CARE, must find ways to mainstream knowledge projects in the more generic development work if such projects are to be viable, receive institutional support, and leverage.

9. It is necessary to do a better job of making sure that development organizations, like CARE, clearly link their organizational learning with social learning, as a way to start leveraging resources for social learning and vice-versa, as well as capturing the attention of all of an organization and not just part of it.

10. It is necessary to train knowledge promoters, development practitioners and local experts in knowledge management: in methods of eliciting and expressing tacit knowledge, as well as in reflective practice, knowledge community promotion, knowledge project design, social networking, etc.

11. For being sustainable, knowledge creation and sharing must be based in local institutions and actors. It is necessary to develop strategies and methods for capacity building for knowledge management (people and institutions) at local level in less developed countries.

12. To be sustainable, social learning requires institutional support in cognitive, social, logistic, and economic resources. Development organizations need to learn how to promote that institutional support for making social learning a new component of development processes.

If we are capable of developing the potential of knowledge management for leveraging local knowledge, and for empowering people and fostering local institutions, the effectiveness and efficiency of development aid will greatly increase, making the objective of overcoming poverty achievable.

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Abstract
The article considers the importance of improving social learning and knowledge as a dimension of development, and how to use learning and knowledge as factors for achieving development objectives. Implementation of knowledge management for development, taking the six characteristics of knowledge in society into account and with the active involvement of local actors, requires fostering of knowledge management at the local level. Local knowledge and local actors should have a greater role in development strategies and policies. The challenge is to find ways of redefining the relationship between development agencies, local governments and local actors for organizing development as a learning process. CARE's efforts to apply knowledge management for development in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has involved a process that has taken place over the past four years and is not yet concluded. The example of the First Knowledge Fair held in Atlanta during 22-24 September 2004, and the related development of knowledge projects and knowledge communities, is examined.

About the authors

Sebastião Darlan Mendonça Ferreira is an independent consultant in knowledge development and strategic planning, mostly in Southern countries. He has worked for more of 15 years, facilitating processes with people and organizations to generate knowledge for creating new futures. He is the author of five books on themes of development. He

has had the responsibility of developing the approach on knowledge management and of organizing the First Knowledge Fair for CARE LAC in 2004. E-mail: sebastiaomf@hotmail.com

Marcos Neto is a lawyer by training with a LLM in Law and Development from the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, UK. Marcos was the organizer and first CEO of CARE Brazil and currently he is a Deputy Director for the LAC region, among his current responsibilities is to spearhead the implementation of the CARE LAC KM strategy.

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The culture of a knowledge fair: lessons from an international organization

Barbara Collins, Rafael Diez de Medina and Anne Trebilcock

This article provides a case study on organizing a knowledge fair in an intercultural environment and the challenges that it presented. These challenges included issues ranging from languages to organizational structure and culture. In addition to these aspects, which are described below, there is the additional complexity of the multifaceted nature of the topic chosen for the fair: the informal economy. The informal economy comprises 'all economic activities by workers and economic units that are – in law or in practice – not covered or insufficiently covered by formal arrangements' (ILO 2002, p. 1). It takes a variety of forms around the world. Different countries have varying perceptions of the informal economy, depending on their national context.

In addressing the specific problems that countries confront, staff of the International Labour Organization (ILO) is involved in different networks linked to various professions and organizational structures. How can ILO staff be brought into contact with each other? And how to do this within the cultural constraints of the tripartite nature of the organization, the organizational culture, language needs, and cultural expectations and sensitivities?

To address these challenges, the ILO organized a Knowledge Fair on Decent Work and the Informal Economy[1] from 8-15 June 2005 in Geneva, as part of a project on knowledge sharing around the informal economy and poverty reduction. The Fair was a major side event to the 92nd session of the annual International Labour Conference, a gathering that brings around 3800 delegates and staff together over three weeks each June.

As the first of its kind in the ILO, the Knowledge Fair offered many lessons, some of which resulted from its intercultural nature. In several respects, the Fair experience illustrated cultural issues that can affect knowledge sharing in the development context.

The focus of the Knowledge Fair: decent work and the informal economy

In the context of poverty reduction and decent work, the ILO has been increasingly engaged in work on the informal economy. However, like other organizations, the ILO displays some of the obstacles to learning related to structure, working culture

[1] A virtual version of the knowledge fair can be seen at: http://www.ilo.org/public/english/knowledgefair/index.htm

and barriers identified more generally (Carlsson and Wohlegemuth 2000). ILO staff around the globe tackle issues relating to informality from quite different entry points and perspectives, without necessarily making the connections between them to support the most coherent approaches possible. Practical ILO initiatives or research may be labelled 'job creation in microenterprises', 'expanding representation for workers', 'building community-based health care systems' or yet something else, while in fact they are addressing similar issues that pivot around informal arrangements.

Moreover, although the ILO is widely recognized as having dealt with the informal sector/informal economy since identifying it in 1972, today its expertise on the matter does not always have a high profile among academia and the development community. Thus there is a need for greater dissemination of its accumulated knowledge to the external world, and for building stronger alliances and partnerships within and outside the institution (ILO, 2005a).

What did the Knowledge Fair entail?

An eye-catching full-colour poster advertised the Fair, which was also promoted on the ILO website and in the daily Conference bulletin. The Fair's main feature was a large, double-sized panel exhibition that presented examples of good practice in relation to the informal economy from a wide variety of projects. Projects were grouped onto four panels under these headings: the policy environment, expanding markets and jobs, extending representation, and improving working conditions. These themes were echoed in large posters that featured other examples from projects addressing the informal economy. The graphics, which received universal acclaim, came from the ILO's photo bank – itself a knowledge sharing resource. A print guide in English, French and Spanish contained detailed explanations and contact information for each project included in the exhibit.

Additional examples of work on the informal economy were reported in three issues of a newspaper that was published during the week of the Fair in three languages. Its simple format, on two sides of an A3 sheet, fit well with the Fair's theme. A multi-media presentation and pull-up banners explained the 'model of change' for the informal economy.[2] Tutorials on using the ILO Informal Economy Resource Database, which captures over 500 publicly available studies, tools and other reference material, occurred at fixed times throughout the Fair.[3] In a video corner, visitors could watch videos coming from various projects.

A book fair showcased ILO publications most relevant to the topic, which bore special Knowledge Fair bookmarks. Three lunchtime discussion panels involved ILO constituents, staff and academics. There was a small display of handicrafts and other objects produced in the context of two of the projects on the informal economy in

[2] For a description of this model, see:
http://www.ilo.org/dyn/infoecon/iebrowse.page?p_lang=en&p_ieresource_id=796
[3] The database can be accessed at: http://www.ilo.org/dyn/infoecon/iebrowse.home

Africa and Asia. And, in exchange for responding to a feedback questionnaire on the Fair, participants were promised a CD ROM featuring its highlights.

The Knowledge Fair was essentially a broad-based information-sharing exercise. Once information has been gathered, it can be analysed and evaluated. The captured knowledge from the Fair became what UN Population Fund (UNFPA) has called a 'knowledge asset', namely a living repository of collective know-how, as well as a means of publicizing the Informal Economy Resource Database. This knowledge asset reflected the breadth of ILO action on the informal economy and is physically represented by the two large, two-sided S-shaped panels that formed the main exhibit of the Fair. Designed to be portable, the exhibit is being sent to development events where the informal economy is a focus of interest, thus permitting the ILO to amortize its investment in the Fair. The Knowledge Fair exhibit has already travelled to the Dominican Republic as part of a meeting of directors of training centres and Ministries of labour and education from Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as to Germany for a meeting on globalization, the workplace and health.

Why was this format chosen?

Why was a knowledge fair chosen? Earlier attempts at knowledge sharing among staff involved in work relating to the informal economy had produced modest results. Other events had taken place, but had involved a rather limited number of people. A virtual forum was in place, but was facing the typical challenges of such media (see, for example, Hardon 2005). ILO constituents' awareness of ILO work on the topic was variable. And although the Resource Database was coming up first on a Google search on 'informal economy', few ILO staff or constituents seemed to be aware of it. As the ILO tends to be 'event-focused', it was thought that an event of this size, involving such a large audience, could provide the right environment.

Since the annual International Labour Conference follows a standard formula that leaves delegates relatively little free time, we needed something novel that would attract their attention. As the first of its kind, the Knowledge Fair succeeded in doing this, and a web presence and CD-ROM have permitted others to be reached after the event. We built a feedback mechanism into the Fair, thus permitting some measurement of impact that could inform future action and be reported on for managerial purposes. Funding for the Knowledge Fair came from the UK Department for International Development with contribution, chiefly in staff time, from the regular budget of the ILO.

In the exhibit itself, we decided to focus only on positive examples. While much can be learned from mistakes, people – especially self-styled experts - are reluctant to admit them. Thus the focus on showcasing good practice was an incentive to draw them into the process. There was also hope of a frank exchange of remaining challenges, which is simply a less threatening way to describe unsolved problems or failures. However, aside from our engaging a person to document the process and conducting an internal after-action review, this did not occur. All the same, our idea of including a more self-critical element in such an event may be useful to others.

Box 1: A few lessons from a Knowledge Fair

Clarify *why* you are staging a Knowledge Fair and *what messages* should be transmitted;
Identify the *target audience*(s) and tailor the knowledge fair to it/them;
Market the event appropriately to the target audience;
Get commitment from key stakeholders and involve them in appropriate ways at the planning stage and in execution;
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);
Decide if you want a multilingual event; if so, address budgetary implications, and allow extra preparation time and schedule parallel events;
Publicize the event before, during and after (using high impact graphics);
Do not underestimate the *time and resources* required;
Provide a *feedback* mechanism for fair participants;
Identify in advance *how to measure impact* in relation to the audience(s) identified; and
Capture the process – its ups and downs could help others later.

The culture of the tripartite setting

While the ILO is a Specialized Agency that is part of the United Nations family, it has a unique feature: tripartism. This means that representatives of employers and of workers are involved, alongside government, in the governance of the institution – in its annual conference, in its Governing Body, and in implementing a wide range of activities. The different perspectives of the representatives of governments from diverse countries, of employers and of workers are accommodated through what the ILO calls social dialogue, a form of consensus-oriented participation.

In practical terms, an initiative that is opposed by any of these three groups is unlikely to go far. The involvement of non-State actors in the ILO's work means that this work can reverberate through employers' and workers' organizations (primarily trade unions) to reach wide audiences within the ILO's 178 member States. It also implies that initiatives taken by the Secretariat must remain relevant to the expressed needs of all three groups.

In June 2002, following consultations and lengthy debate, the tripartite delegates to the International Labour Conference adopted conclusions on Decent Work and the Informal Economy. These conclusions represented an official consensus on a set of issues on which the perspectives of the three groups vary to a lesser or a greater extent. They concurred easily in calling for the ILO to have a highly visible programme, linked to other relevant areas of its work, to address the needs of those in the informal economy, to collect and disseminate information and to deepen

understanding. In short, the conclusions were an invitation to engage in greater knowledge sharing on the informal economy and its relationship to decent work.

Thus, plans were made to have the Knowledge Fair become a 'side event' at the June 2005 session of the annual International Labour Conference. The Conference is a formal, multi-forum event which is held outside ILO headquarters, spread over a number of rooms in the Palais des Nations at the United Nations European Headquarters.

The officers of the Governing Body normally provide final clearance for side events less than two months before the opening of the Conference. This final validation step introduced a substantial element of risk. When the officers reviewed the proposed programme for the June Fair in mid-April, some nervousness was expressed about planned panel discussions that were intended to provide a framework for free-flowing debate. The inclusion of representatives of the employer and worker groups helped to allay their apprehensions. In the end, the panels involved lively, productive discussions that attracted audiences of respectable size. This was particularly gratifying because during the Conference there are many competing demands on delegates' time.

In organizing something completely new, the Secretariat was not sure of the reactions of all the tripartite partners in regard to various activities, and therefore self-censored some of the bolder ideas in order to avoid serious objections from ILO constituents. The choice of a tripartite forum for the Fair had both opened up channels of communication and presented some constraints. In relation to strengthening the interaction between academia and ILO constituents on informal economy issues in the context of poverty reduction, for instance, we consider the Fair as having launched what could be greater and more in-depth interaction in the future. The Fair in itself probably fell short of generating new knowledge. It did, however, go a long way to sharing existing knowledge.

The culture of the organization

Making the Fair happen within the institution proved easier said than done. While the ILO is aware of the importance of knowledge sharing, the organizational culture is not yet fully conducive to it. Overall, incentives or disincentives in relation to resource allocation or performance appraisal for knowledge sharing are still lacking. Competition between units for funding can lead to ignoring others' achievements and reinforcing a 'silo culture' in various parts of the organization. Familiarity with knowledge sharing techniques is uneven, and different professional backgrounds of officials from over 110 different nations can make communication difficult. In addition, officials who feel over-stretched in their jobs will not tend to make the effort to share information and lessons learned if they do not see an immediate benefit.

However, financial support received from the Government of the UK for work to encourage greater ILO involvement in poverty reduction provided a basis for creating the needed incentive in this case. Initial reactions to the idea of the Fair from the Officers of the Governing Body and staff worldwide was quite positive. Work

proceeded with an internal consultative group and a small number of core staff to organize the event.

We designed the knowledge sharing in a way that offered staff the chance to showcase their own work on the informal economy. The first opportunity was through inclusion of their work in the Informal Economy Resource Database. The second was as part of an integrated presentation in the travelling exhibition developed for the Knowledge Fair. Examples of work with ILO constituents were given special encouragement. At the time, we did not realize what a powerful incentive the Fair exhibit would be. The response to the call for submissions of good practice for inclusion in the Fair was three times greater than expected. We added the newspaper to be able to capture late submissions and work in progress that did not yet have results to report. This also provided us with another means of communication for the Fair itself.

The culture of multiple languages

The literature on knowledge sharing was originally dominated by English but has been gradually spreading to other languages. The International Labour Conference uses English, French and Spanish for all documents. Interpretation involves those three languages plus Arabic, Chinese, German and Russian. In practice, the day-to-day technical work of the ILO Secretariat in Geneva is primarily in English, followed by French and then Spanish. Conversations in the corridors at headquarters and offices in the field reflect many additional languages.

To get knowledge sharing out of its English-speaking ghetto, we considered it an absolute necessity to have all of ILO's three working languages included in the Fair. Yet multilingualism imposes major constraints for a knowledge fair of this type. First of all, the cost implications of translation and interpretation are huge. Second, reliance on live interpretation dictates the physical space in which events can take place. The rooms used for panel discussions are formal, with speakers on a dais at the front, opposite the audience, and fixed interpretation equipment. Communication through interpretation itself makes interaction slow and lacking in spontaneity. The open gallery that housed the Fair exhibit was used for some activities with portable microphones, however only one language could be used at a time. Third, staff serving as on-site exhibit guides was not necessarily fluent in all the languages in use at the Conference. To mitigate this limitation, extensive documentation for the exhibit was available to visitors in English, French and Spanish, and staff rotated.

The exhibit itself was prepared with text in the language that had been submitted by the sponsoring project; in most cases this was English, with a few in Spanish and only one in French. While this had the advantage of authenticity, it probably detracted somewhat from the coherence of the otherwise striking display. The option of having text in all three languages had been rejected because it would have meant reducing the font to an unreadable size and losing all graphic impact.

However, the dominance of English reinforced the message that this is the leading language for ILO business, with marginalization of the others. Several audience

feedback comments called for a similar exhibit to be mounted in Spanish. So while the exhibit was inclusive by bringing together a wide range of initiatives, the 'linguistic subtext' worked in the other direction, since speakers of French, Spanish and other languages could have felt marginalized by a display that was primarily in English.

Expectations, formality and cultural sensitivities

The ILO staff and constituents attending the event had had little or no experience with a knowledge fair. We heard later from some that using the term 'fair' had created expectations of an event featuring entertainers, food and product stalls, and balloons – in short, a festival atmosphere. In fact we had harboured some ideas like offering free refreshments, advertising events through skits, pantomime and jugglers, having artisans at work next to the exhibit, and the like. But the formal nature of the main event to which the fair was attached, the International Labour Conference, made us decide that these gestures would not have been well received. While a person wearing a 'sandwich board' and a colourful wig would have attracted participants' attention, we felt that this might be seen as trivializing the issues addressed by the Fair.

We also explored offering coffee and cookies, but encountered opposition from the catering service that ran the paying coffee bar at the Conference venue. The cost barrier had also eliminated the idea of flying in musicians and artisans from the informal economy who are linked to ILO field projects. However, these ideas were captured for sharing since they could be used on a local basis in other events of this nature.

Part of the exhibit featured a 'before' and 'after' display of urban waste (presented in a wheelbarrow) that had been transformed into useful and colourful items such as bags, hats and papier-mâché animal figurines. This display was linked to an exhibit panel that explained the project in which the transformation work is carried out. This 'live' exhibit provoked widely divergent reactions. Some saw it as testimony to human creativity and ingenuity. A 12 year old visitor to the Fair said that she finally understood what the ILO in fact does. Others, however, felt that it was demeaning to have a wheelbarrow full of crumpled newspapers, plastic bags and beverage cans included in an exhibit sponsored by an international organization. Interestingly, objection to dealing with waste had also been seen by the field-based project itself: the Tanzanian women who had taken up the actual trash collection work were uneasy about it until they saw it as a source of better incomes and improved lives for their families.

In preparing the large display that featured photographs as well as some text, care was taken to avoid images that delegates from more conservative cultural backgrounds could have found offensive. An initial proposal to use a photograph snapped in a clinic that showed a bare-breasted woman, for instance, was quickly discarded. On the other hand, the delegates took in stride a graphic demonstration of the toolkit used to sensitize operators and workers in the informal economy about condom use to prevent HIV/AIDS in the world of work.

Reflections on the experience

Our experience was different from other knowledge fairs that we had either visited or researched in preparation for our own fair. There were several main differences.

- Each institution has its own culture which was reflected in what it organized.

- Our fair was multilingual; others were conducted only in English.

- In the other knowledge fairs we looked at, those who participated were responsible for their own exhibit space or presentation. In our case, we put out a call for submissions of good practice and we produced all aspects of the Fair – the exhibition, presentations and all events. Of course this added complexity and made it much more resource-intensive at our end. However, we were able to decide what was presented and how it was presented, assuring that it fit in with the cultural sensitivities and concerns of the tripartite constituents (representatives of workers, employers, governments). It also permitted grouping exhibits around coherent themes that reflected the content of the 2002 Conference conclusions on decent work and the informal economy, and highlighting the gender dimension.

- An important difference involved the resources available. The fairs we had visited or reviewed could draw on much greater resources than our modest budget permitted. The need to find a cost-effective option forced us to make the most of what we had. We thus chose an exhibit design that would be as portable and easy to assemble as possible. From the beginning, we viewed the Fair as a short-term investment from which some returns would be expected (in our case, reaching a larger audience), and not as a mere expenditure for a one-shot activity. Its recent mobility has vindicated that decision.

Any organization opting for this kind of event will need to address the same cultural issues: language, cultural sensitivities and – most importantly - the values and objectives that the organization wishes to transmit through this medium. It is worth reflecting on these early in the process, as they can have important consequences for the organization of the event.

The organizational culture in a development organization like the ILO logically differs from a typical corporate context. While the outcomes in the latter could be easily translated into benefits or losses, the outcomes in a development agency tend to be more long-term and difficult to quantify with precision. At the corporate level, managers tend to make frequent use of knowledge sharing techniques because they are perfectly aware of their potential for ensuring success. Their capacity for knowledge sharing is a quality sought after in their recruitment.

In the case of a development agency like the ILO, awareness of the power of knowledge sharing is growing, but its practice is yet to become a reflex embedded in day-to-day practice. Several externally funded knowledge sharing projects are working together within the institution to spread the techniques and appreciation of

how knowledge sharing can support more effective technical work. The Knowledge Fair provided further sensitization of ILO staff and constituents to what knowledge sharing has to offer. The idea is being picked up by other departments within the organization. Since June 2005, a knowledge fair was organized in Vietnam, and another headquarters' department is planning to present one at next year's International Labour Conference, patterned after the Informal Economy Knowledge Fair. The more experience the organization gains with knowledge sharing, the more likely that it will eventually be reflected more deeply in its human resources policy and budgeting process.

It is thus encouraging that the Programme and Budget of the institution for 2006-2007 includes this statement:

> *The ILO will also undertake strategies to support knowledge management and knowledge sharing. The experience and knowledge held by the ILO are organizational assets which should be safeguarded and used to inform future activities and service constituents. …. [Knowledge sharing] will also promote closer partnerships within the ILO and, through knowledge networks, outside of the ILO.* (ILO 2005a, p. 99).

The experience gained with the Knowledge Fair on Decent Work and the Informal Economy could contribute to this crucial process of organizational change not just for the ILO, but for other intergovernmental organizations as well.

Box 2: Main conclusions

Activities were influenced by the *culture of the organization's constituents* as well as their *cultural sensitivities*; this resulted in advantages and constraints;
The *formality of the venue* had an impact on the activities that were included;
Using the fair as a knowledge sharing technique overcame the organizational 'silo culture';
The *multilingual nature* of the fair presented extra complexities, challenges and additional cost;
The use of the word 'fair' to describe the event created *expectations* about the nature of the event;
Different cultures *perceived* parts of the exhibit differently; and
The *values* of the organization and the *messages* it wished to transmit had an impact on how the event was organized.

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Abstract
This article provides a case study on organizing a knowledge fair in an intercultural environment and the challenges that this presented. The ILO organized a Knowledge Fair on Decent Work and the Informal Economy from 8-15 June 2005 in Geneva, as part of a project on knowledge sharing around the informal economy and poverty reduction. In addition to the multifaceted nature of the topic chosen for the fair, additional challenges included the political nature of the organization's constituents, the cultural sensitivities of constituents and staff, the organizational culture and the limited knowledge-sharing environment, the multilingual requirement, and values, expectations and perceptions. The article contains recommendations for anyone wishing to organize a similar type of knowledge-sharing event.

About the authors
Barbara Collins (M.Sc. Bristol University, UK) is responsible for management services of the Policy Integration Department of the International Labour Office in Geneva. E-mail: collins@ilo.org

Rafael Diez de Medina (M.Sc. in Economics, Universidad de la República, Montevideo, Uruguay) is a senor economist in the Policy Integration Department of the International Labour Office in Geneva. E-mail: diez@ilo.org

Anne Trebilcock (J.D., University of California, Berkeley) was recently appointed as Legal Adviser of the International Labour Organization. She worked on the informal economy knowledge sharing project while Deputy Director of the Policy Integration Department of the International Labour Office in Geneva. E mail: trebilcock@ilo.org

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Building knowledge from the practice of local communities

Ceasar L. McDowell, Andrea Nagel, Susana M. Williams and Claudia Canepa

Theory/Practice: an unnatural divide

Many scholars feel that there is an ongoing debate in trying to bridge the division between how researchers understand and frame the field of community building, and how those engaged in the work of community building understand and frame the field (Amulya and McDowell 2003). We would argue that such a division between theory builders and practitioners is, at best, false and at worst malicious. It is a division that privileges the knowledge of those involved in developing theory over that of people involved in practice. When abstract reasoning is offered as the primary means by which we can understand the world, knowledge that resides in practice and experience is often devalued. The voices, knowledge, and understanding that emerge from what Carol Gilligan and others refer to as 'other ways of knowing' (Gilligan 1993) is marginalized. The integration of the type of knowledge that arises from research that is 'formal' and taught in academic institutions, with the type of knowledge that resides in the work and minds of local practitioners, is critical for improving society because it brings together two complementary views of the world.

Of course, the world is not so easily divided between practitioners and theoreticians. Instead of a divide between theory and practice, one can instead see the world as consisting of work. Everyone works and through their work (or experience) everyone creates theories about how the world works. Some forms of work have highly developed methodologies for investigating, testing, and sharing the knowledge and theories that emerge from the work. This is the case of researchers, academics, etc. Others, particularly in the case of development practitioners, have limited time and resources for investigating and documenting the knowledge that they gain from their practice. This type of practice-based knowledge is more intuitive, pragmatic and tacit. For example, community residents with decades of experience working on prisoner re-entry often do not have access to the appropriate tools and methods for investigating, testing, uncovering and identifying the knowledge and theories that emerge from their work. Yet their knowledge is a way of understanding the world that is invaluable for re-imagining the possibilities for creating a fair, just and equitable society. They need tools for investigating and documenting their own knowledge so that they can use it to further advance their own work on the ground, inform policy-making, and share it with others working on similar causes.

What methodologies or processes can community practitioners use to uncover, identify and value the knowledge that they have gained from their work? At the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Center for Reflective Community Practice (CRCP), the primary approach to answering this question has been through what Ceasar McDowell, Director of CRCP, calls *disruptive design and facilitation*. The term disruptive refers to the creation of environments that upset those stereotypes and habits of mind that limit one's ability to be self-reflective, empathetic and open to

change. A disruptive environment helps people become aware of, and even question, their mental models and assumptions about the way the world works. Over the past four years CRCP has developed a reflection methodology, referred to as the Critical Moments Reflection process, which aims to create this type of disruptive environment to support practitioners in uncovering, building and valuing the knowledge that they have generated from their practice.

Philosophy behind the Critical Moments Reflection methodology

The principles of CRCP's Critical Moments methodology are grounded in the center's experience that practitioners will fully engage with a reflective learning process if the issues of ownership, authority and power over their knowledge are addressed in the design and execution of the process. For CRCP, this means that a knowledge building and learning from practice process has to be driven by the practitioners' own questions and analysis of the stories from their experience, and the results of this work have to be owned by the practitioners. A focus on learning supports effective cross-groups dialogue. These principles inform the design and implementation of all of the CRCP knowledge-building activities.

The objective in each of these activities and experiences is to create awareness in the practice of community development by enabling the practitioner to question and confront deep-rooted biases and assumptions about people or groups that influence outcomes for communities. This internalized awareness has helped community practitioners develop the ability to incorporate more nuanced information, community wisdom, knowledge and personal experiences in the course of community action. It strengthens the capacity to improvise and innovate during the process of community development itself, and enhances community practitioners' capacity to respond to complexity in deeply introspective ways, by discouraging impulsive or simplistic theory building. Engaging in focused reflection can be critical for expanding creative energy, exploring and shifting mindsets, and for producing meaningful learning and new insights about political dynamics, technology, economic development, and other areas of community empowerment.

How does the Critical Moments Reflection process work?

The Critical Moment Reflection process may be conducted in groups of 12 to 15 people from a variety of sectors of society or organizations who are working together to create positive change in a community or in particular types of communities. These people (also referred to as community practitioners), may be community residents, government officials, volunteers and/or NGO employees.

The Critical Moments Reflection process traditionally consists of four steps:

1. *Setting the frame and the inquiry question*

First, because it is vital for the participants to construct their own reflection processes, the participants set the frame (events and time period) and identify the inquiry questions that would guide their reflection. The inquiry question is posed as a

question to which if the answer were known, it would advance the participants' sense of efficacy in their work. For instance, a group of participants may frame the following as an inquiry question: "What opportunities do we have in our work to facilitate the transfer of leadership in our community?" These participants may have raised this question because they understood that without a means of bringing new people into leadership roles, the community would lose many of the institutions it had created.

2. *Naming of critical moment*

Second, participants name, from their own individual perspectives, their 'critical events' that occurred throughout the set time frame. These critical events or moments are experiences, both positive and/or negative, that have been important in advancing or setting back people's work. As shown in Figure 1 below, these critical moments are shared (and graphically mapped on a timeline) with the entire group.

3. *Selection of critical moments to be analyzed*

Third, the group then selects the critical moments that they believe would offer the most insight into the inquiry question(s).

4. *Lessons and Implications*

Lastly, the participants tell their in-depth stories of the selected critical moments, and then analyze these stories as a group in order to identify lessons learned, and implications for answering the inquiry questions and moving their work forward.

Figure 1: Critical Moments timeline

It generally takes a small group of ten participants, two and a half days to go through the entire process. If there are multiple small groups participating in a reflection, a half day is required at the beginning for the full group to come together, and then an additional full day at the end in order to create the space for the groups to share and reflect with each other on the knowledge that they uncovered during the individual group sessions.

To illustrate how this type of awareness and knowledge building happens, it is useful to provide a concrete example from our reflection work with communities in Latin America.

Applying the Critical Moments Reflection methodology in Latin America

CRCP has applied this methodology over the past four years in a variety of settings both in the USA and Latin America. Over the last 6 months, CRCP, in partnership with the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC), has been working with Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, Inc (CARE) on a project that aims to understand how to support knowledge building among groups in society working to improve quality of life in marginalized communities. The collaborative process that CARE is undertaking, with the assistance of CRCP/IISC, engages a range of stakeholders, including staff from CARE Atlanta headquarters and several Latin American country offices, as well as members from communities of practice in a reflection process to examine the assumptions guiding their practice and to articulate the learning and questions arising from significant events and shifts in their work.

As part of the work with CARE, a three-day reflection session was held in Comayagua, Honduras with seven communities of practice from Honduras, Nicaragua and Guatemala. These seven communities of practice consisted of community residents, government officials and NGO workers that have been working together on specific issues in geographically defined communities. Four of these communities focused on education, one on water and sanitation, one on participatory governance, and one on agriculture. Approximately 30 community members participated in this reflection.

There were two important moments in the reflection session:

1. *Individual Group Reflections: identification of Critical Moments, storytelling and lessons from critical moments (two and a half days)*
   Divided in small groups according to projects, the participants had the opportunity to individually reflect on their own experiences and share stories among each other about the different moments that they recognized as improving or hindering their roles in their community project. Visual aids are very important during this process. The stories and findings were recorded on large chart paper so that everyone could refer to them during and after the discussions. An interactive process with index cards and timelines kept the process dynamic and engaging.

   Figure 2: Individual Group Session

2. *Collective and Supportive Reflections: Presentations of the Critical Moment analysis and lessons from presentations (1 day)*

Following the individual group reflections, the different groups participating in the reflection had an opportunity to share what they learned about what they knew with the other groups. Retelling their critical moments, their stories and the lessons was important because it enabled the groups to see their stories from a different perspective. Peers engaged in listening and critiquing the outcomes of the individual reflections contributed to the further deepening of the presenters' reflection. There is a different type of rigor in the analysis of the information presented and a different set of skills that is needed for people to engage in this type of analysis. Both presenters and listeners engaged in a type of learning and sharing that helped them uncover a more collective knowledge and deepen the reflection of their own work. After the presentations and discussions, the smaller groups reconvened to discuss what they had learned not only about the presentations, but also about the reflection process as a whole.

Figure 3: Collective Reflection

The story from one Community

In the case of one community of practice, the participants identified a period of inactivity in their project (starting a month after the announcement of an international award and ended three months later with the summoning of all project leaders) as a critical moment. Although everybody in the group agreed that this event was significant since it had slowed down their work considerably, there was no clear consensus as to why this had happened. With the support and probing of facilitators, the group was able to examine its own group dynamics, members' individual and collective expectations, and the ways in which outsiders interact with the community of practice and influence its work. They were able to better understand how they work together, and the ways in which they support each other (or not). This reflection enabled the group to identify various factors that caused the period of inactivity in the project. One such factor was the main leader's loss of motivation. Through a series of guided inquiries based on the *exhaustion of the whys*[1] approach, the participants came to realize the high degree of dependency that they had on their main leader. They recognized that they lacked a sense of shared ownership in the project. This increased awareness about their lack of shared ownership in the project led them to an even deeper level of inquiry, in which they explored why they were unable to take control of the project and organize activities during the period in which their leader lost motivation. The deeper understanding of the period of inactivity

[1] The *exhaustion of the whys* approach is a technique that facilitators use to encourage people to identify, and at times even question, the mental models that influence their actions or interpretations of situations. Through a series of questions focused on uncovering why people do what they do, facilitators lead people to explain the reasoning behind their decisions, opinions or perceptions, and thus obtain a deeper understanding of the experiences or situations being discussed.

around their leader's loss of motivation allowed them to derive lessons that would help them move their work forward. Some of the lessons that they uncovered are:

- Incorporate periodic meetings to review progress and program activities to ensure accountability and continuity in the work, regardless of the level of involvement of the leaders. These meetings will prevent dispersion of the group, community disjointing and project delay.
- Each member of the community has to assume his/her own responsibility, which should be clearly defined to promote shared leadership, a factor that is imperative for the project to be sustainable.
- The project should be an opportunity to prepare future leaders, which means that the present leader has to learn how to delegate responsibilities.

It is worth mentioning that the project community described above was divided into two smaller groups for the Critical Moments Reflection process due to the large number of community members who participated in the event. Initially, project members were apprehensive about being divided into two reflection groups and feared that different outcomes from each group could divide them.

After going through the individual group reflection process and presentations, they came together, presented their respective work to one another and grouped their critical moments onto one timeline. One group had focused on the early stages of the project while the other group had analyzed recent events. Seeing all the different critical moments together in one timeline and upon reflecting on the similarities and differences in their groups' work, they came to appreciate that they had learned so much more about their work by acknowledging different perspectives on the project. The main leader, who had been a participant in one of the groups, acknowledged his own attitude with regards to the project (including his loss of motivation) and by sharing his feelings and emotions with the larger project group, a much deeper understanding of their work took place.

It is important to note that the critical moments Reflection in Comayagua helped uncover a type of community-based knowledge that went beyond the community's technical knowledge. For example, in the case of the aforementioned community, which has traditionally been recognized in the past for its school management and pedagogical strategies, the community uncovered a new type of knowledge during the reflection in Comayagua. This new type of knowledge related to the community's political maneuvering to gain municipal support, parents' engagement strategies, as well as leadership needs.

Challenges of the Critical Moments methodology

Although the Critical Moments Reflection process is a very open and flexible process it has some challenges. Perhaps the most important challenge is the time required to conduct the reflection process. As mentioned previously, a full critical moments reflection session requires a minimum of two and a half days for one group, and three and half days for multiple groups. CRCP has learned through previous experiences that anything less can severely compromise the process. In today's fast paced world,

however, time for reflecting, rather than doing, is extremely scarce. It is very difficult for people to set aside sufficient time from their busy schedules to reflect on their work.

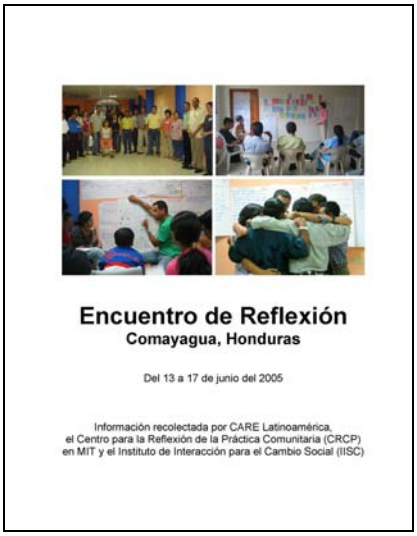
A second important challenge is the skill set that is necessary to facilitate these types of reflection processes. To help people gain new perspectives on themselves and their work, it is necessary for the facilitators to engender an environment of trust; one in which people are able to share their stories openly and be receptive to deep inquiry into their analyses. Facilitators must also have the capacity to make meaning out of people's stories in ways that are not limited by their own mental models. To do this, facilitators place close attention to not only what people say, but also the way they say it. People's word choices, as well as their non-verbal ways of communicating, are vital inputs to the meaning making process that the facilitator is responsible for leading. Often, it is through these more subtle communication mechanisms that the assumptions that lead people to do what they do can be uncovered. Facilitators need to learn to probe in ways that disrupt the stereotypes and habits of mind that limit people's ability to be self-reflective and open to change. Yet this type of disruptive probing cannot be too extreme since people shut down if they are pushed too far beyond their comfort zones. Creating the right balance in this probing process is difficult and requires substantial practice. To build some of the skills required, facilitators need to experience the process themselves, observe it and engage in coaching techniques that help improve their listening skills.

The third challenge relates to the power dynamics that inevitably arise from status (leader/non-leader), gender, class, age, education, race/ethnicity differentials in any group of diverse individuals. True knowledge building can only happen if everyone in a group is willing and able to share and make meaning of their experiences. If some people in a group are not able or willing to share, opportunities for learning during a reflection are limited. Some recommendations to work around power dynamic challenges include prior meetings with group leaders to encourage them to talk about their own experiences. Leaders should be able to open up to the group and become vulnerable. CRCP has learned that, once leaders take this first step, other participants are more likely to follow.

A fourth challenge is documentation. Because the knowledge that is generated is owned by the group engaged in reflection, it is important to document the stories, critical moments and lessons that emerge throughout the process so that it can be given back to the group for their own future use. The documentation of such large quantities of information requires a tremendous amount of management skills and information processing. The facilitators have to be able to document the information in a way that the community can refer back to it. One particular challenge of this documentation process is its reliance on the written word since many communities have strong oral traditions and/or low literacy rates. Alternative ways to document the process are though video, sound files, drawings, diagrams, pictures, etc. One person minimum should be dedicated to documenting the process through charts and a second one should be in charge of taking pictures and recording video. Other ways to document the process while interacting with participants are: timelines with index cards, forms, diaries, and other supporting materials that also capture emotions and thoughts, etc. A binder with pictures of all the charts produced during the event was presented to each community, country office and management representative that

participated in the reflection process (see figure 4). It also included session materials and summaries per group. In addition, a collection of DVDs with videos and sound files were also presented.

Figure 4: Title page of Reflection Event binder



Cultural Issues

Finally, the work of CRCP and IISC in Latin America has shown that cultural issues present important challenges to knowledge building processes in the development context.

Culture can significantly impact the process of helping communities uncover what they know through reflection. Subtle differences between facilitator and communities and even among community members can delay a process that is meant to be dynamic and interactive. One factor that enhances those differences is language. The following example from our work in Latin America illustrates this particular point. CRCP and IISC facilitation team was in charge of coordinating the reflection process and training CARE staff to help carry it out. However, not everybody in the main facilitation team had full proficiency in Spanish. Although efforts were made to provide for full translation services for the whole event, it was soon discovered that there was a critical communication gap that hindered the ability of the main facilitators to quickly respond to stories and comments made by the participants. While simultaneous translation was capturing sentences and words, it was not capturing the true meaning behind the stories, which was embedded in the people's choice of words, their emphasis on particular words, their pauses and inflections, and other elements that carry the emotions of participants. Without these subtle messages, it became difficult for the facilitator to guide the process.

Conclusion

The critical moments reflection process provides practitioners with the opportunity to reflect on their experiences identify and value what they know. It is a methodology that generates a high degree of trust among practitioners and this is useful in helping them capture some of the knowledge that they hold. To create the conditions in which practitioners can allow themselves to reflect requires the disruption of the structural and psycho/social barriers that operate a priori for each group. Everyone who participates in this process, including the facilitators, need to remain open to being changed by the process itself. All involved in the reflection process will have their mental models changed, expanded, shifted and opened.

The Latin American case shows that the methodology helps strengthen the capacity of practitioners to improvise and innovate during the process of community development itself, and enhance community practitioners' capacity to respond to complexity in deeply introspective ways, by discouraging impulsive or simplistic theory building. Engaging in focused reflection is critical for expanding creative energy, exploring and shifting mindsets, and for producing meaningful learning and new insights about political dynamics, technology, economic development, and other areas of community development.

We began this article with a claim that there is an unnatural division between theory and practice, and that the knowledge held by practitioners is often ignored and discounted. The critical moments reflection process presented in this article provides one powerful mechanism for (1) helping practitioners learn and uncover what they know through their practice, and (2), contributing to integrate knowledge from theory with knowledge that resides in practice. Without this knowledge from practice, we are all ill equipped to meet the challenges of building a just and fair world.

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Abstract
This article begins with a theoretical view of why and how knowledge from poor communities and disenfranchised people is not only valid but also, perhaps, unique. The authors propose that there is a particular form of knowledge that resides in communities through their practice and that local knowledge, if tapped into, constitutes an important asset for development. The article discusses the origins of the Critical Moments Reflection methodology developed by MIT's Center for Reflective Community Practice (CRCP). Using one case from CRCP's work with the Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) in Latin America, the article discusses not only how this methodology has been used to support the identification, generation and valuing of local knowledge but also what challenges it faces. Finally, the article presents some of the challenges and cultural issues that need to be tended to when trying to support the generation of local knowledge in a development context.

About the authors

Ceasar L. McDowell is Professor of the Practice of Community Development at MIT and founding Director of the CRCP at MIT. His interests include the generation and protection of local knowledge, the use of mass media in promoting democracy, the education of urban students, the organizing of urban communities, civil rights history, peacemaking and conflict resolution, and testing and test policy. Dr McDowell has extensive experience in the areas of public engagement, and the design meeting environments for supporting creativity and innovation among diverse peoples and the creation of civic conversations that create opportunities for individuals from minority and poor communities to be included in a cross-generational and cross-racial public discourse. He serves on the board The Algebra Project, the Leadership Learning Community and the Editorial Board of Non-Profit Quarterly. He has co-founded several organizations including Civil Rights Forum, and served an advisor to several national foundations.
E-mail: ceasar@mit.edu

Andrea Nagel is a Senior Associate at the Interaction Institute for Social Change and partners with organizations and communities in delivering training, consulting, and facilitation services, in the United States as well as internationally. A native of Chile, Andrea has a passion for social justice and has worked extensively in community organizing, community development, leadership development, capacity building and organizational development. Andrea's interests lie in building processes that amplify the 'unusual' voices, level the power dynamics and support true collaboration so that communities and organizations can actually co-create their present and future. Andrea has co-designed and co-implemented comprehensive participatory community planning processes in the United States, Nicaragua and Cuba. Andrea has also co-

created leadership programs for grassroots leaders. Andrea holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Tufts University and a Masters in City Planning from the MIT.

Susana M. Williams is a Project Fellow at the CRCP at the MIT from which she recently graduated with a dual masters. As a Project Fellow, she is currently working on a collaborative evaluation of CARE's Knowledge Management System in the Latin American and Caribbean region. She has specialized in community development in an international context and the application of appropriate technologies especially in housing provision and water and sanitation. She has also worked closely with the Special Interest Group on Urban Settlement (SIGUS) at MIT. With SIGUS, she has coordinated and organized workshops and seminars on participatory rapid approach, physical planning and communication strategies for community development in Laos, El Salvador and Peru. She has conducted field research and community work in Egypt, Chile and the Dominican Republic and is a founding partner of the Global Open Learning Forum on Risk Education (GOLFRE). She helped establish an international network to foster open dialogue and information exchange between professionals, field workers and academia using local knowledge and practical wisdom as a principal training and education resource. Susana M. Williams is originally from Lima, Peru. E-mail: susanamw@mit.edu

Claudia Canepa is a Project Fellow at the Center for Reflective Community Practice (CRCP) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Currently, Claudia's research focuses on social learning and knowledge management processes, and the strategies that development organizations and practitioners can use to promote such processes in the context of poverty eradication work. Claudia has worked for government, non-profit organizations, research institutions, and the private sector in the USA, India and Peru. Her work has centered on community development, participatory planning of services delivery, community-based information technologies and policy reform implementation. Claudia holds a Bachelor's degree in Economics from Trinity College and a Master's in City Planning from MIT. E-mail: ccanepa@mit.edu

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Elective affinities? Reflections on the enduring appeal of knowledge management for the development sector

Giulio Quaggiotto

Introduction

Interestingly, whilst the knowledge management fad seems to have passed its peak in the private sector, within the context of international development organisations, the appeal of the discipline seems to endure. The fifth anniversary of the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4 Dev) online community and the recent launch of the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal* bear witness to the persisting interest in development circles for knowledge management issues and strategies. What are the reasons behind this? Are there cultural factors that can explain the difference between the private sector's and development organisations' reception of the knowledge management paradigm? Although the question might seem academic, there is some value, I would argue, in reflecting on these issues because they might provide an insight into fairly practical cultural challenges that knowledge management practitioners face in their daily work, such as, for example, winning internal buy-in for knowledge sharing initiatives (see the second part of this article). As Vincent (2005) pointed out:

> *Cultural assumptions shape the public and explicit planning mechanisms of international development, but also play a part in the private professional concerns and enthusiasms of powerful individuals and groups within organisations.*

I should also confess – let me throw this as provocation – that at the back of my mind there is a lingering question which I was asked on a number of occasions, namely: since proving return on investment on knowledge management initiatives is notoriously hard, has the fact that the development sector insists in embracing the discipline, whilst the private sector has largely shunned away from it, something to say about the culture of non-for-profit enterprises?

In this article, I attempt to provide some initial personal reflections on the above mentioned issues, based on my experience as a knowledge management practitioner in three development organisations. As such, this is more of a 'think piece' aimed at encouraging debate with other KM colleagues than a rigorous attempt, as it were, to provide a phenomenology of knowledge management in development organisations.

Knowledge management and development organisations: the reasons behind a continuing love affair

Perhaps the main factor that accounts for the enduring appeal of knowledge management in development organisations is the stronger motivation for development practitioners – when compared with their counterparts in private companies – to analyse and eventually overcome barriers to knowledge sharing across organisations, communities or even governments in order to maximise their impact on the ground. The urgent need to tackle humanitarian and environmental crises, such as the Asian tsunami, the human immune virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome (HIV/AIDS) epidemic, or the rescue of refugees in Sudan – to name but a few examples – puts organisations under pressure to share knowhow quickly and effectively, so that the latest scientific research findings as well as lessons derived from previous projects are readily available. It is not a coincidence – as was also noted in the KM4Dev list recently - that the 2005 World Disasters Report (http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/wdr2005) from the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies focused on the role of information in disasters.

Another element that may explain the continued interest in knowledge management in the development context – this time externally driven – is the increased call for transparency and accountability within this sector. Rightly, development organisations face increasing demands from donors and the general public to provide detailed information on how effectively they spend their funds and what mechanism they put in place to avoid repeating mistakes that can often have a high cost not only in financial but also in humanitarian terms. For this reason, in the development context, the practice of capturing and disseminating lessons learned and best practices is often connected to monitoring and evaluation and/or fundraising purposes.

Knowledge management challenges in private and not-for-profit enterprises: a quick comparison

The private sector and international development organisations face many similar dilemmas when it comes to implementing knowledge management strategies, such as, for instance, how to encourage information flow between headquarters and regional offices, how to develop metrics to evaluate the impact of knowledge management activities, how to engage with time-stripped experts on the ground to persuade them to share their tacit knowledge with their
colleagues. And there has undoubtedly been a significant level of cross-fertilisation between the private sector and international development organisations, as exemplified by the work of Geoff Parcell, a senior knowledge management professional from British Petroleum (BP) and co-author of the influential book *Learning to fly* on the AIDS Competency Model for the Joint United Nations Programe on HIV/AIDS/United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNAIDS/UNITAR).

Despite these similarities, there are challenges in the area of knowledge management that are probably quite specific to the domain of non-for-profit organisations. I am listing below a few based on my experience without any claim to exhaustiveness:

1. Definition of boundaries

What are the boundaries of a knowledge management initiative in the context of a development organisation? Can the scope be confined to employees, as would often be the case in the private sector? But what would be the purpose of accumulating expertise internally on, say, poverty reduction, if that knowhow is not ultimately shared with the communities it is meant to affect? This tension often pushes development practitioners to question organisational silos in a rather radical way (see, for example, the work on organisational learning at ActionAid as documented in David and Mancini 2004).

2. Staff engagement

Typically, employees in development organisations are driven by a strong commitment to the mission. This can turn out to be a double-edged sword when it comes to engaging them in knowledge management initiatives. On the one hand, if it can be proved that adopting best practices enhances the impact on the ground, then best practices are likely to be embraced with a passion that would perhaps be difficult to encounter in a private sector context. On the other hand, staff is unlikely to buy into a knowledge sharing initiative thanks to incentives based on material rewards alone, as may be the case in a for-profit enterprise. Furthermore, the internal culture is such that every single penny that is not spent in concrete projects is often perceived as a waste of money. Therefore, somewhat arcanely worded initiatives such as 'capturing tacit knowledge' would often be perceived as having a remote connection with the development mission. It is thus unlikely to find a favourable reception and take off the ground.

3. Dealing with oral knowledge and the cultural dimension

It is already challenging enough to talk about knowledge capturing and dissemination, or, say, storytelling, in a context when everybody is an office worker. But what about the challenge of getting isolated communities of mostly illiterate *campesinos* or peasants in Paraguay to share their techniques for growing manioca (as in the case study presented in the Swiss Development Cooperation's (SDC's) *Guide to using story and narrative tools in development co-operation*? Or persuading park rangers, poachers and local communities to engage in a constructive dialogue on how to preserve wildlife while at the same time improving their living conditions? What techniques can be used in this context, and what ethical dilemmas do they raise? To quote Vincent (2005) again:

> *It is important… to ask how the understanding of different cultures is being used. Is it to strengthen communities' understandings and expression of their priorities and values? Or to effectively 'translate' messages derived in the North?'*

4. North to South, South to North knowledge flows

Traditionally, aid has flown from developed countries in the North to developing economies in the South. The flow of financial resources has often been accompanied by the presumption that knowledge about the best recipe for development resides in donor economies. The recognition that local stakeholders hold crucial knowledge that can inform the policy and strategic decisions taken in the North has prompted organisations to question whether they are equipped to support South-to-North and, increasingly, South-to-South knowledge flows.

A debate worth having?

Can the factors mentioned above account for the enduring intensity of the debate on knowledge management in development organisations? Or should we be looking elsewhere to justify the cultural affinity between knowledge management and the development sector? How can we persuasively answer the challenge that the knowledge management bubble has not exploded yet in the development world just because we are not sufficiently focused on tangible financial results?

I am looking forward to exchanging views and further considerations on this topic with the readers of the *Knowledge Management for Development Journal*.

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Note

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Abstract

Whilst the knowledge management fad seems to have passed its peak in the private sector, within international development organisations, the appeal of the discipline seems to endure. What are the reasons behind this? Are there cultural factors that can explain the difference between the reception of the knowledge management paradigm in the private sector and development organisations? Reflecting on this issue can potentially equip knowledge management practitioners with some useful insights to tackle the specific cultural challenges they face in the context of development organisations.

About the author

Giulio Quaggiotto is the Programme Officer for Knowledge and Innovation at the International Finance Corporation (IFC), a member of the World Bank Group, based in Washington DC, USA. His interest in knowledge management for development stems from his work as Knowledge Manager for WWF International, Switzerland, and subsequently as online dissemination co-ordinator for the United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Studies in Yokohama, Japan.
E-mail: gquaggiotto@ifc.org

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Bridging the gap between research and practice

Julie E. Ferguson

> *Ideas serve often enough to furnish our actions with justifying motives… What is called rationalisation at this level is called ideology at the level of collective action.*
>
> Habermas (1968)

Enhancing development understanding

Over the past decade many international development agencies have broadened their activity portfolios beyond financial support of development projects or programmes, focusing increasingly on capacity development and knowledge sharing. This development is a response to the need for enhancing development understanding, expressed both within these agencies as well as amongst their constituents and/or partners. Reflecting a complementary development, academic institutes are responding to this need by expanding their scope beyond the research community, and are progressively including stakeholders such as policy makers and practitioners in the process of knowledge generation, even sometimes providing consultancy to decision-makers and agencies committed to development. Despite this convergence of focus between development research and practice, a wide gap still exists: knowledge transfer between the two is limited, collaboration is limited and there is still a dearth of relevant knowledge reaching Southern stakeholders. Many efforts to bridge this gap have been initiated; almost as many have failed.

The challenge of bringing together research and practice towards the achievement of mutual development objectives is fascinating. It is a field much explored, but an adequate response is rare. Initially motivated by diminishing public extension services available to counterparts in the South, especially in the field of agriculture and health, and augmented by the ongoing demands of the 'Information Society' in which access to information has become an increasingly important condition for personal development, the logical step forward for knowledge sharing practitioners would be to call on the experts in the field of 'knowledge development', namely researchers and academic institutes. Oddly enough, this is not (yet) a common practice. There is a lack of literature exploring why this is. What are the challenges? What are the opportunities? What can be learnt from past efforts, successes or failures? Is it worth pursuing such partnerships? Or are the differences simply too overwhelming to be overcome?

This story provides a perspective, not a definitive answer, and draws from numerous examples and experiences in current development practice[1]. It explores the question why it is so difficult for research and practice to work together effectively in servicing mutual stakeholders and bridging the 'knowledge gap'. Why? Because there is so

[1] This story draws from experiences shared formally and informally from various institutes including Hivos, IICD, Ford Foundation, the Institute for Social Studies, and the University of Dar es Salaam.

much fertile ground for more in-depth knowledge sharing amongst both research institutes and development agencies – and it seems too good an opportunity for us all to forgo.

Overcoming cultural barriers in a knowledge partnership

Many development agencies over the past five to ten years have developed new strategies in response to the demand for more in-depth knowledge and the need to make more effective use of financial means and experiences. Subsequently, knowledge sharing strategies have flourished.

Nonetheless, many organisations find themselves pressed by the urgency of day-to-day operations, maintaining a focus on the here and now and future directions, with less time to reflect on previous efforts; and whilst significant time and financial resources are increasingly spent on monitoring and evaluation, motivated both by internal drivers for organisational learning as well as external drivers such as donor requirements, this is not always enough to truly grasp fundamental change drivers or causes for failure or success. However, the need to enhance organisational learning internally and amongst counterparts continues to grow, but pragmatic contingencies imposed by direct stakeholders (counterparts and donors) are likely in the future to restrict even further the opportunities for in-depth reflection and learning. As such, a response might be to find a strategic partner with the time and skills to address this need for more thorough knowledge – and a partnership between development agencies and development-oriented research institutes seems to be an obvious solution. Even so, not many such strategic partnerships exist. Experience shows that fundamental character differences contribute to the apparent gap: the pragmatic approach harnessed by most development agencies versus the thorough manner by which research institutes seek to move scientific knowledge (see also Barrett e.a. 2005).

Overcoming differences

Developing initial interest for a research-practice partnership, and subsequently overcoming pragmatic obstacles such as finding the time and financial resources as well as establishing management support are challenging in any partnership; nonetheless, with perseverance and patience, these are easier to overcome than cultural differences.

Three cultural factors

The main factors standing in the way of effective partnership between research and practice might be roughly categorised as *institutional*, *communicative* and *philosophical* differences.

Institutional differences

Significant institutional differences exist, first, in the manner by which the two type of institutes work towards achieving their goals, and second, in terms of the intended beneficiaries which these efforts target.

For instance, development agencies generally mainly focus on activities such as funding, networking, lobby, capacity development and knowledge sharing, and counterparts consist predominantly of Southern-based NGOs. Academic institutes have educational goals, targeting primarily the international research community. In other words, whilst on the long term there is a mutual objective, such as sustainable development, there are significant differences in the manner by which this is achieved. For instance, a measure of success for a development agency might be a vast network of development NGOs achieving their institutional objectives, whereby its main output is financial and political support for civil organisations and initiatives that share its policy priorities. For an academic institute, a measure of success is more likely to be a flourishing research community, whereby critical analysis of practice and development of formal knowledge are the most important means by which this is achieved.

In a research-practice partnership, institutional differences manifest themselves particularly in the manner by which the agencies attempt to move forward. This means first, a difference in pace: whereas a development agency tends to move (relatively) fast and pragmatically, in response to the continuing and urgent demands of its counterparts, a research agency prefers a thorough, analytical approach, maybe even taking a step back once in a while, to ensure everything is comprehensively explored and academically valid.

As a result, determining the terms and scope for a partnership on mutual grounds is likely to lead to many discussions in an attempt to come to a common understanding and define the main issues at stake. Whilst extremely important, interesting and relevant, it can be a challenge to find a satisfactory balance for both parties in terms of not just content, but also the process and form by which the partnership is to be substantiated.

Obviously, it will take some time to find a productive balance between content and process, between the need to ensure that outputs of the knowledge network are thoroughly analysed, befitting of an institute with an academic reputation to defend, versus the desire to move forward quickly and pragmatically.

Communicative differences

The field of development is no different than any other expertise, in that it has a very particular vocabulary. This ‘jargon’ is largely shared in academic circles and practice-oriented development, but the way in which a message is articulated and communicated does vary significantly. This has to do primarily with the differences in the targeted audience and readership.

The need for and pressure on researchers to publish in academic journals to gain academic credit makes it less attractive for them to spend their time and energy (re-) articulating their ideas for practitioners or for people in developing countries who may be able to take advantage of research findings to improve their personal situation. Development agencies consider precisely these people the ultimate beneficiaries of their efforts and will make an effort to ensure outputs are produced which are relevant and appropriate for this audience. Amongst development practitioners, the level of formal education is widely divergent, they often have a native language other than English, they are not necessarily accustomed to academic discourse, and all in all,

they do not have the time or priority for long and complex analyses even if the subject matter is pertinent to them. Generally speaking, amongst practitioners there is primarily a need for easily accessible, to the point and pragmatic knowledge on how to get a job done more effectively, and in terms of formal literature, it is primarily case- and action-based research that is appreciated. Moreover, development agencies often cannot afford to invest in long-term, in-depth research: the financial and time-commitments are simply too strenuous, both in terms of supporting its production as well as its 'consumption'. Staff is often overwhelmed by the urgency of their day-to-day activities, so that there is insufficient opportunity to stay up to date on research findings; these are simply often too long and complex, too theoretical and far-removed from development practice. This would lead to the clear conclusion of the need for bridging between researchers and practitioners, for example by distilling and making user-friendlier what practitioners need to know from researchers. In other words, it is not only about the knowledge itself but also about its accessibility.

At the same time, the concept of knowledge *sharing* differs between the two: development practice (as the name suggests), relies primarily on empirical evidence to show whether policy and strategic assumptions are correct or not, often tested by sharing amongst peers. However, in academia, knowledge is acceptable after comprehensive analysis, thorough documentation, cross-examination and peer review has proven it valid, and deems it worthy of the researcher to set his or her name under it. Further, whilst knowledge amongst development practitioners can be shared fairly openly and informally through a vast array of methods and tools including storytelling, informal publications and the Internet, academic knowledge is often proprietary because of the credit to be gained by the researcher, and is only acceptable after publication in an academic journal. Anything besides that is considered 'grey literature' and doesn't really count.

Particularly for knowledge sharing practitioners in development agencies, a priority is getting the best information out on how to get a job done well, and determining the most effective way to communicate this. In other words, besides the message itself, finding an appropriate mode of communication is very important, and this might include, besides conventional forms such as books, articles, etc., more creative formats such as cartoons, posters, the Internet, etc.

This might mean, for instance, ensuring the availability of good, up-to-date websites, taking advantage of readily available material within both institutes. For research agencies, this less of a priority because the development of *new* content through research initiatives is more important. Fostering commitment from both sides for two equally important activities can as such prove challenging. Nonetheless, this is concurrently an opportunity to be creative in harnessing each others' strengths: a website is an excellent source to make accessible the high-quality content generated by academics such as grey and formal literature, student and staff research outputs, etc., and can disclose cases, programme evaluations, etc. from development practice to be used for academic purposes. This is an opportunity for researchers to better familiarise themselves with practitioner motivations and needs, and gain access to case material, whilst for development practitioners, this means access to in-depth knowledge allowing them to enhance their development efforts.

Philosophical differences

The third cultural factor affecting collaboration between research and practice, is the different *epistemological* views i.e. the theory of knowledge. This relates to the difference in the interpretation of the question '*what is knowledge*'. This complex question will remain unanswered here, but it is inevitable to briefly explore the parameters of the discussion to understand the fundamental differences in approach between academics and practitioners.

The quest for an'absolute body of knowledge' was pursued from Aristotle to Kant, but has been deconstructed from thereon forward. Nonetheless, the pursuit of knowledge *as objectively as possible* still lies at the heart of all science. Habermas (1972) captures this problem by identifying the subjectivity which *idealism* brings to scientific pursuit, and the impossibility of human interest to be divorced from knowledge. Barrett et al (2005) developed a view that knowledge is differentiated by the capacity of individuals to exercise judgment and is closely connected to action. This affects the capacity of individuals to 'capture' and transfer knowledge – it is indeed always subjectively affected. This is inherent to the human capacity to know, implying the relativism of knowledge.

> *Science can only be comprehended… as one category of possible knowledge, as long as knowledge is not equated effusively with the absolute knowledge of a great philosophy or blindly with the self-understanding of the actual business of research.* [Habermas 1972]

Habermas identifies different processes of inquiry, of which the approach of critically oriented sciences incorporate *emancipatory cognitive interest*. In other words, the facts relevant to the empirical (practice-based) sciences are first constituted through an a priori understanding of our own experiences, viewed in the perspective of doing for a purpose: by understanding the motivation underlying our actions, we are able to identify the stake (*human interest*) we have in the activity and develop our scientific knowledge on the topic – furthering it beyond this stake. Habermas' critical reading of empirical knowledge is such that our actions are coated with subjective beliefs, serving to furnish us with justifying motives; at the level of science this is called rationalisation, at the level of collective action it is ideology (Habermas 1978). Obviously, such a train of thought implies a serious pitfall for scientific research that aims to develop 'objective knowledge', in that knowledge represents an innate human interest that cannot be divorced from the topic at hand. And this is of course especially the case within a field that is so suffused with ideological motives, as social sciences and development in particular.

The rather banal conclusion we can draw from this is that science and practice need to understand what each constitutes as 'knowledge', acknowledging the different stake each has. We might state that on the one hand science's stake in knowledge is the pursuit of pure theory stripped as much as possible of ideology, and on the other hand practice-oriented pursuit of knowledge is an understanding and justification of human interest: a verification of methodological approaches – or rather, simply understanding *what works for whom*.

This abstract analysis of the stake in knowledge (or the motivation for its pursuit) between research and practice-oriented institutes is nonetheless highly illustrative of the

fundamental differences that they have to understand in order to establish a successful partnership, especially in a field as ideologically driven as development. It is precisely the pursuit of ideological interest that drives development practice, and precisely the intention of science to remove this very ideology, releasing knowledge from interest.

However fundamental the difference, in the need to achieve a realistic balance – in the development of relevant research, and in the meta-analysis of development practice – a joint space can be identified. Effectiveness of knowledge depends on whether it in fact addresses a human interest or ideology and whether the methodology it describes is appropriate for scientific purposes. In other words, the process of knowledge generation entails the development of a theory arising from an ideology; it entails testing the theory whilst identifying and acknowledging the particular human interest which by the nature of science and human scientific pursuit obstructs the achievement of 'pure theory'; and last but not least it seeks the evidence that supports this theory. Translated to (knowledge for) development practice, this means developing critical empirical evidence to support – by proving or disproving – a theory, identifying whether the premises upon which a development approach is motivated are justified, and through this analysis, moving knowledge forward. (Popper 1963/1959)

Paradoxically, whilst underscoring the fundamentally different approaches to knowledge generation and understanding, development knowledge – inherently driven by ideological motivations – can not exist without being firmly rooted in scientific pursuit. Namely, philosophical analysis of practitioner and academic knowledge illustrates the need to work together in collecting empirical data, analysing its meaning and identifying/deconstructing ideological justifications, to create a new realm of evidence as to whether the assumptions that motivate our strategies are valid, or need to be adjusted.

Bridging the gap between research and practice

Sharing knowledge between research and practice in a structural manner is highly challenging but can be rewarding, inspiring and fun for all parties involved and their constituents. It contains the potential to enhance development understanding, capitalising on the particular strengths of researchers and practitioners to mutual benefit. Experience shows that it is often cultural barriers that stand in the way of effective collaboration. However, these can be overcome and valuable knowledge sharing partnerships can be fostered if built upon a number of basic building blocks.

10 building blocks

1. Get to know each other

Articulate, acknowledge and try to understand each others' differences at all levels (institutional, communicative and philosophical). Start with a few small initiatives to experiment what works and what doesn't rather than going for a 'big bang'. In getting to know each other, social networking can be highly effective!

2. Be patient

It takes time to understand each others' interests, differences and priorities; but invest the time now, it will avoid a lot of frustrations and misunderstandings in the long run. Different types of institutes have different working paces due to their approach and

objectives, and finding a balance in these can be challenging: forcing things forward if they appear to stagnate can be counterproductive, but beware of losing momentum.

3. Be respectful

Researchers and practitioners have a different understanding of knowledge, divergent approaches to developing it and alternative justifications for action. Develop a common understanding of these differences, acknowledge each others' insights – and respect them. Be prepared to look beyond your own years of development experience or an academic title, and rather listen to each other and learn from viewpoints shared from a different perspective.

4. Embrace diversity

Both scientific knowledge and practitioner knowledge are highly context specific in terms of their relevance and applicability. However, don't be afraid to step out beyond the usual boundaries: a research-practice partnership can provide an opportunity for both partners to venture beyond the conventional frame of reference, which can provide energy, innovation and new insights.

5. Scientific knowledge is nothing without practical knowledge – and vice-versa

As illustrated above, progress in knowledge is an interaction between formal, scientific analysis and empirical, practitioner evidence – without the one, the other is weakened. Harness the potential to move your knowledge 'out of the box'.

6. Foster a clear, mutual frame of reference

Develop a set of concrete parameters for the partnership which both partners feel comfortable with. This doesn't have to be 'set in stone' but can be adapted as the partnership develops. A strong common goal with a number of clear mutual objectives will provide direction and focus to work towards, but be realistic in what is feasible, especially in the beginning.

7. Build the partnership incrementally

Better to let many small buds develop into a blossoming tree than to go for one big bang: whilst there is potentially more to win in terms of visibility, it can cost too much energy to maintain momentum after the big bang; and in case of failure the whole partnership is likely to flop. Small initiatives are easier for people to get involved in and broad ownership of research-practice partnership is the key to success.

8. Ensure broad institutional buy-in

The most valuable knowledge lies within the heads of people, so the more people get involved, the more knowledge can be mobilised. Partnerships between research and practice-oriented institutes will succeed on the long term if there is broad institutional buy-in: this is necessary to guarantee priority can be given to the initiative and time and resources can be invested. Without institutional commitment, such initiatives remain the 'hobby' of individuals – and when their energy falters or their time becomes scarce, that's the end of it. Specifically in research-practice partnerships, institutional buy-in ranges from management, faculty/staff, to students and of course institutional counterparts – the ultimate intended beneficiaries of such initiatives.

9. Equal commitment to the partnership

In terms of investments in the partnership, this needs to be roughly equal; whether this involves in-kind contributions, financial resources or other, partners need to feel as if their counterpart is matching their investment.

10. Allow for mistakes
Due to the significant cultural differences between practise-based and academic institutes, a partnership between the two is a challenge, no matter what. The investments are significant – but so are the potential rewards. It can be highly motivating for development practitioners to step back from their daily practise and reflect in more depth upon the meaning and effect of their work; likewise, more interaction with development practitioners can provide new perspectives for researchers in terms of extending their intellectual pursuits beyond the academic community and into the field of those people most thirsty for relevant knowledge. However, it will take time for staff of both institutes to truly harness the potential of such initiatives. There is no clear-cut formula for success, and therefore identifying the most effective manner for fruitful interaction can be found only by trying. It is inevitable that some initiatives will fail but be prepared to learn from these together and move forward.

Critical success factors
The development of a joint knowledge partnership is by no means easy, but it can prove stimulating for both parties involved – and beyond.

Critical success factors include:
- The involvement of stakeholders– of researchers and students, as well as of development practitioners and counterparts.
- Harnessing momentum, to enhance active commitment beyond the core group of a partnership.
- Show results to stakeholders of the partnership.

It appears that cultural differences might pose the biggest threat to a successful research-practice partnership. But with time and patience success can be achieved. Once partners have come to know each other more profoundly, understanding each others' priorities and needs, they can start learning from each other, truly reaping the benefits of a research and practice partnership. New professional dimensions can be unearthed through small wins – a student research here, a practitioner lecture there – baby steps which can help to overcome the most urgent differences.

Whilst a definitive bridging of the gap between research and practice is still far down the road, only time will tell whether we are able to jump over our own shadows and move knowledge – both scientific and practice-based – forward.

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Abstract
This article provides a perspective on the cultural differences which can be encountered between academic institutes and development agencies in pursuit of knowledge sharing partnerships. It identifies a number of the major obstacles to be overcome and provides ten building blocks which can contribute to bridging the gap between research and practice, enabling knowledge to be shared effectively within the development community – from research institute, to development agency, to the ultimate beneficiaries: development practitioners in the South.

About the author

Julie Ferguson is Project Leader Knowledge Sharing for a Dutch development agency. She was previously responsible for the thematic networking programme in IICD's knowledge sharing team, preceded by several years as ICT consultant. Julie has completed Masters Degrees in Philosophy and Comparative Literature at the University of Amsterdam and the University of California, Los Angeles and in 2006 she will commence her doctoral research at the University of London, focusing on result measurement of ICT-enabled knowledge sharing strategies in development. Julie is co-chief editor of KM4D Journal and Board Member of Computers for Development Foundation.
Email: juulferg@yahoo.com

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The culture of management or the management of culture?

A case study of the Rural Women's Association, South Africa

Chris Burman

Introduction to the RWA

In 1992, 43 women who considered themselves to be the 'poorest of the poor' began working together to grow food for themselves and their families, in a remote rural village called Apel (Limpopo Province, South Africa). By 2003, the original 43 had grown to a group of almost 3,500 women working together under a nationally registered, not-for-profit organisation known as the Rural Women's Association (RWA). This article explores the origins and development of the RWA as an organisation that now fosters a broad portfolio of activities, offering a sustainable livelihood to the women involved.

The Sekhukhune area in which Apel is located suffered particular hardship during the past decades, because it was a politically active rural area, opposing the Apartheid regime. 1992 statistics show, for instance, one of the highest child mortality rates in South Africa (192/1000), associated primarily with TB, malnutrition, infectious diseases and diarrhoea (Pardeller et al 1999). Despite the democratic changes in 1994, the area continues to be dogged by challenges.

> *Sekhukhuneland has suffered years of neglect, inadequate investment, maldevelopment, mismanagement, corruption and apartheid policy. The area is characterised by extreme poverty with the highest unemployment rate in the country (estimated at around 70%). It has a migrant labour force (a remnant from the apartheid era) with the majority of men absent from the village but remitting paltry wages back to their families. The area has the highest infant mortality rate in SA and is a drought area. The task of improving the quality of life falls mainly on the shoulders of the women who remain resident in the Apel area.* (Rhodes 2000*)*

It is in this incontestably harsh socio-environmental landscape that the RWA has flourished. One concrete success indicator is that members now celebrate that they are 'no longer burying babies' (Pardeller et al 1999): through improved livelihoods, women have better access to adequate nutrition; knowledge sharing amongst RWA members has increased awareness of health risks – and subsequently, the infant mortality rate has dropped

In the early days of the RWA, the women were a closely-knit group with a strong sense of identity, sharing a common vision and common goals.[1] The group developed

[1] The RWA membership's sense of identity was particularly strong because Apel is just outside of the boundary for the Arabie-Olifants irrigation scheme. Discussions with the women indicate that they felt

into an active Community of Practice (CoP) soon after the arrival of Sister Lydia Pardeller in 1992, a Franciscan nun bound by a mandate to assist rural women in development programs. She came with 30 years of experience working with grassroots organisations in Africa.

Setting up the organisation: first harvests

Upon her arrival in Apel, Sister Lydia was soon introduced to 43 women who had carefully started exploring how to escape their dismal predicament. Under the guidance of Sister Lydia, these women became the first members of the RWA, welcoming an opportunity to work, instead of 'just sitting at home doing nothing, and without enough to eat' (RWA member, cited in Burman 2004). Alongside her organisational skills, Sister Lydia brought further capabilities with her: some agricultural insights, a small amount of financial support for agricultural inputs and a conviction that positive change was within reach for these women. With this in mind, she approached the local Catholic mission and persuaded them to lend her a piece of land, divided it into 43 plots and the women began to prepare the soil for agricultural development. Much to the surprise of the community, within the first year, the land procured a substantial harvest. News of these first harvests prompted requests from other women, sometimes from distant villages, to join with the RWA. At this time, the RWA focused primarily on improving their household diet through autonomous, self-sufficient gardening schemes.

As the organisation developed, so did its ambitions. Today the gardens are more sophisticated and the livelihood activities extend across a broad portfolio of cottage industries. The RWA has supported this expansion by encouraging its members to participate in a broad array of capacity building schemes, knowledge sharing amongst peers and by securing its financial sustainability through strong relationships with both domestic and international donors (Burman 2004, Rhodes 2000). This expansion was supported by the expanding RWA network, but a strong work ethic and sense of ownership over the projects was the glue that held the internal relations of the organisation together.

The RWA Ethos

The essence of the early RWA's vision was clusters of semi-autonomous gardening groups, managed by women who were ambitious as individuals, but simultaneously responsible – in conjunction with their peers – for the longer-term viability of the organisation. For this vision to become a sustainable reality, the women were encouraged to develop a culture of joint ownership of the scheme and shoulder the lion's share of the responsibility for their gardens.

> *Everyone has something to contribute and poverty is no excuse for helplessness. The contribution is both financial and in terms of sweat equity (time and effort). Members pay a substantial amount (in their terms) towards the initial capital costs and they pay all the operational and maintenance costs. Thus, every project initiated by women of the RWA is owned and managed by the women.*

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a strong sense of injustice at being excluded from the scheme – which simultaneously served to mark their identity against those included in the scheme (Burman, 2004: 408).

> *The RWA stimulates members to be creative and productive and to take their own decisions. They create the success themselves and own it. The women of the RWA organise, manage, and run their organisation.* (Pardeller et al 1999)

Managing the RWA

As its membership increased, the RWA developed a management structure consisting of a Central Coordinating Body (CCB). The CCB comprised eight, democratically elected women, responsible for brokering relationships with external stakeholders (such as donors) and assisting with intra-gardening group crises, yet allowing each gardening group significant autonomy to manage their day to day activities. The CCB is also largely responsible for securing capacity building opportunities for RWA members; this includes maintenance of the enabling environment or *creative space* for members to manage their own projects. The CCB meets on a quarterly basis with project group committees comprising representatives from each gardening group; and further, the CCB can be called upon by the membership at any time for specific extraordinary reasons. In this sense, the CCB acts as a conduit between extra-local linkages and the membership, while simultaneously protecting the institutional culture that they believe will best sustain the women's attempts to make change for themselves and their families.

For many years this approach reflected a 'legitimate peripheral participation' model of communities of practitioners. In this model, sharing of knowledge and skills enabled 'newcomers to move toward full participation in the socio-cultural practice of the community' (Lave and Wenger 1991). In this case, the centre ground was well defined by the CCB and the peripheral learners comprised the gardening groups.

However, as the RWA expanded, the reasonably tight-knit identity was challenged. As is often the case in situations of incremental growth, maintaining a clear organisational culture amongst all members can be difficult, especially when external influencesbegin to be articulated within the organisation and the distance between 'centre' and 'periphery' widens. As such, internal pressures accumulated, seriously threatening the cohesion of the RWA with the situation coming to a climax in the period 2002-2003. Although the contradictions encountered between management, external stakeholders and members were conceptual, their combined force very nearly resulted in the total collapse of the RWA. What were these issues and how did they come to that jeopardise the gains made over the previous 10 years?

Knowledge and the RWA

Sister Lydia was determined that the women solve their own problems, rather than expecting her to think and do things on their behalf (Pardeller et al 1999). This approach required a facilitative rather than a prescriptive environment, enabling home-grown creativity within the RWA vision from which the women would have the opportunity to learn how to administer themselves and their projects. In the early days, there was no shortageof expertise from within the RWA corpus about how to grow vegetables; however, most of the RWA gardening groups did experience difficulties managing themselves in their new context of intensive horticultural production.

In order to counter this lack of management skills, Sister Lydia argued her case with the membership that autonomous problem solving, combined with an environment that facilitated knowledge sharing, was the essential combination that would to enable home-grown management capabilities to emerge; in turn making the RWA a sustainable entity. The women gradually acceded to this argument and a process of experiential learning began to gain momentum.

> *The possibility that something was actually changing … was more than we had thought would ever be possible. It was only after – when we had to overcome problems - that we began to think about what we were doing.*
> RWA member's comment (Burman 2004)

What this 'experiential learning' meant in practice for the RWA members is illustrated by the following examples.

In the early days, one large gardening group of about 80 women found that some members were not meeting their obligation to participate in collective efforts of garden maintenance, such as general weeding, fence repairs, irrigation system maintenance, etc. In response, under guidance of the project group committee the women imported a pre-existing, local cultural norm used to police funeral contributions and adapted it slightly as a method of imposing a penalty system whereby anyone who shirked their responsibilities would be liable to pay a fine, with non-payment resulting in expulsion from the gardening group (although this rarely happens). The rule is not applied dogmatically; for example, a member with responsibilities for a young family is not expected to contribute as much 'sweat equity' as somebody with more time on their hands. Nevertheless the agreement reflects a clear message to members that group benefits can be reaped if problematic issues are approached democratically and creatively.

Another group, having secured funding for hosepipes to reduce the burden of irrigating with buckets, found that the hosepipes were being used so intensively that the local water supply could not keep up with demand. This created a situation whereby some members tended to monopolise the taps for considerable periods of time, leading to imbalanced distribution and inefficient use of water resources, as well as being the source of many disputes. In this instance, after much debate, somebody proposed that the members reject the use of hosepipes in their gardens; this was accepted by the group, and the women returned to using buckets for their irrigation needs. The critical point here being that technology never falls into a neutral context, yet – in this instance – the context was one that was able to facilitate, and be responsive to, democratic demands – rather than tripping headlong down an avenue of trying to persuade the women that they ought to adapt to the technology.

As such, in the early days the RWA management scheme facilitated creative, democratic, intra-gardening group decision making by members. These examples serve to illustrate that it is not so much the specific chunk of knowledge that emerges, but rather that a democratic, facilitative environment increases the potential for people to tackle their problems without recourse to some outside 'expert' body. Such a notion of participatory, autonomous problem solving represents a cornerstone of the RWA's development; as one member commented: 'our voices are heard' (Burman 2004).

The RWA management approach initiated a process that encouraged independent problem solving, in turn facilitating much needed confidence building and a sense of ownership over the project by the membership. Furthermore, the RWA encouraged different gardening groups to share their ideas, so that gradually a very substantial web of knowledge, with a cross-disciplinary spectrum of expertise, was consolidated. This multi-layered web of knowledge is used to this day by the RWA membership as an informal ideas repository for future problem solving. This ideas repository is used both formally and informally by the RWA membership – running both vertically and horizontally throughout the organisation. Through this approach, the RWA facilitated the development of not just a farming organisation but also an energized Community of Practice that nurtured members' capabilities to produce and share ideas that allowed peers to improve their skill-sets by discussing discoveries or problems as they endeavoured to identify appropriate responses to these challenges.

Emergent contradictions within the RWA

> *The RWA has been very careful about the conditions under which they would accept donor funding. In some instances, funding was seen to interfere with the way women wanted to run their organisation and the women refused to accept the funding. … This means that the organisation has not been tempted to shift from its original objectives. … In fact, there have been some difficulties with individuals and even groups offering assistance to the RWA (whereby) their aim was to use the RWA's successes to generate income for their own purposes.*
>
> (Pardeller et al 1999)

One of the principal problems the CCB had to confront is how to mediate between the need for outside assistance without jeopardising the CCB's vision of the most appropriate enabling environment for the membership. This issue of how to protect the organisation from external institutional biases was a pragmatic dilemma. On the one hand, the group had made incredible steps in improving the diets of thousands of people in the area, but on the other hand, funding was required – and the conditions attached to this sometimes presented challenges that jeopardised the organisation's original mission.

Initially, Sister Lydia was able to fund the organisation through her own network in Italy which donated money without attaching restrictive conditions. However, as the organisation expanded she was forced to seek other sources of funding and she did so in ways that she believed would not impinge upon the CCB's preferred vision of the RWA, by filtering out donors whom she felt might introduce destabilising influences into the organisation.

Initially, this pragmatic response was a technical reaction by the management which was designed to foster a strong sense of ownership over the projects, as well as to try to and sustain their preferred type of enabling environment within which the members could develop home-grown capabilities. They felt this approach would ensure the long-term viability of both the women's attempts at change and the RWA's institutionalised ambitions for the future. It was, in this sense, an attempt to construct

and maintain a barrier between the organisation, filtering out what were perceived as potentially 'harmful' influences from the outside world, and allowing only 'useful' influences to seep through into the membership's consciousness (see Figure 1).

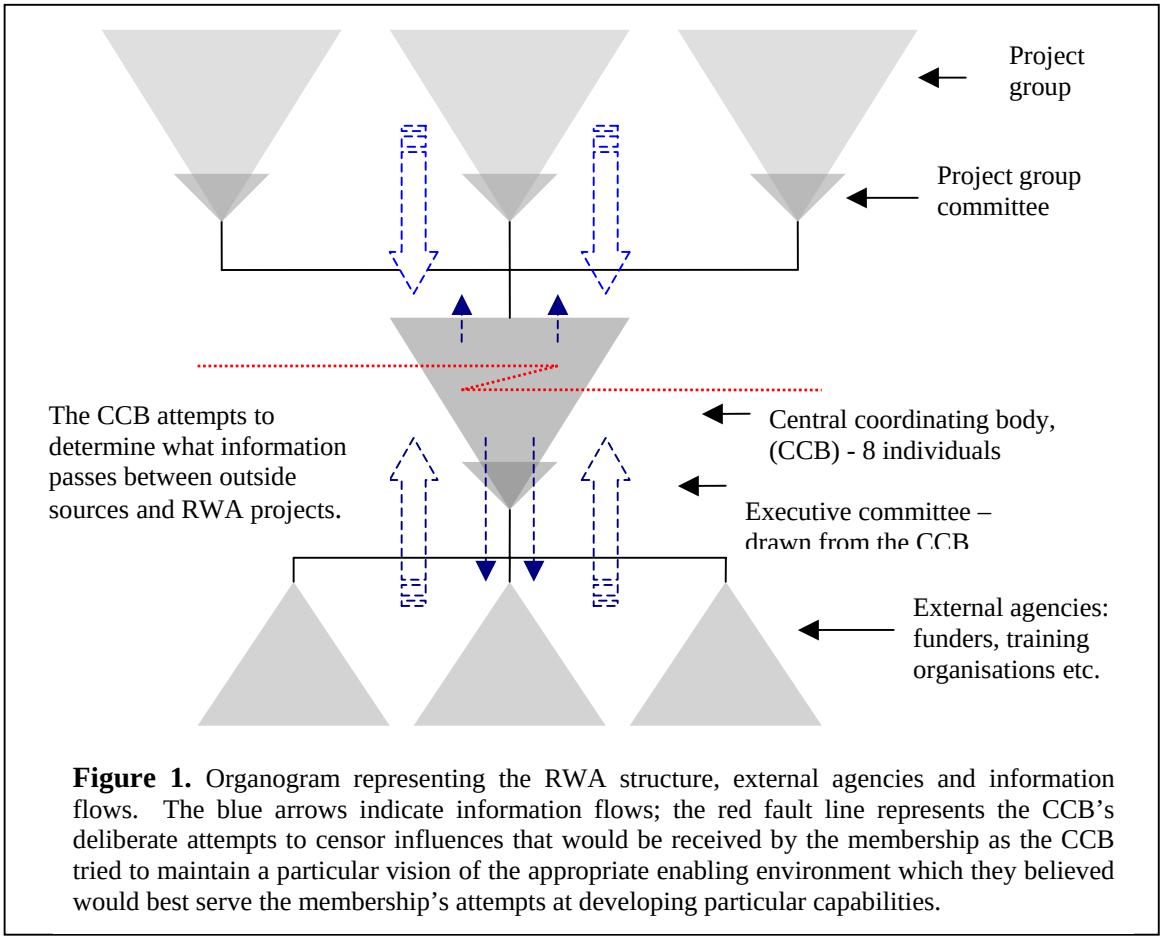

Figure 1. Organogram representing the RWA structure, external agencies and information flows. The blue arrows indicate information flows; the red fault line represents the CCB's deliberate attempts to censor influences that would be received by the membership as the CCB tried to maintain a particular vision of the appropriate enabling environment which they believed would best serve the membership's attempts at developing particular capabilities.

However, while encouraging an open and sharing environment amongst the membership, the CCB gradually became acculturated into a dogmatic, custodial management body, determining, in accordance with their vision of the RWA's future, which influence was deemed good and which bad for the members. In other words, the CCB began to focus its attentions on maintaining this particular enabling environment of its own, rather than responding to the empirical demands of the membership. This approach was largely based upon an implicit assumption that the membership would adapt to the CCB's plan, as it had when the organisation was smaller and more transparent. Nevertheless, such an environment had served the membership well for many years, enabling them to negotiate difficult challenges, but now this decision-making process was undemocratically imposed by the CCB, which was having the unintentional 'straightjacket' effect of constraining the very creativity that the original facilitative environment was designed to support. Thus, a threatening contradiction within the RWA corpus emerged.

Another internal problematic dimension in this attempt to sustain the RWA as an isolated Community of Practice was the success of the RWA itself. Initially, the women's binding motive was to become self-sufficient in vegetable production as a

means of improving their household diet. However, thanks to capacity building facilitated by the RWA, combined with the experiential learning activities that accompanied this process, the community's confidence grew, and, combined with surplus produce, this encouraged the women to start expanding their ambitions for the future. A number of the members moved away from the original idiom of self-sufficiency towards a market-based developmental strategy. This transition was a gradual process, gathering such momentum that by 2002 it represented a dominant consensus by the membership.[2]

> *…If there are a lot of jobs to do in the projects … it means that we are going to be job creators, because we can hire other people who are poor to come and assist us in our projects of sewing, catering and gardening … and we can also hire people to assist us in our homes.*
>
> RWA member's comment (Burman 2004)

In 2000, Sister Lydia felt it was time to leave the organisation and allow it to develop further independently. Despite the positive opportunities the organisation had generated for its members, the CCB had developed into a fairly rigid management group that, in terms of their vision for the organisation's future, was not prepared for this change from self-sufficiency to a market-based idiom.[3] The result of this was that the RWA corpus changed from being a well-aligned organisation – focusing on self-sufficiency and household diet – into a group of people with divergent ambitions for the future.

Subsequently, during the period 2002–2003 the RWA went through a critical and particularly destabilising period wherein the CCB representatives had to reorient themselves to this new reality. The CCB found this difficult because it involved a cultural readjustment of their vision, the referent of which was their belief concerning what was the most appropriate enabling environment for the membership. This was a qualitatively different belief to that of the membership. Unlearning this vision and contemplating an alternative was a very demanding, traumatic process for the CCB. Nevertheless, after much intense dialogue the CCB did begin to accommodate the pressure for change from the membership.

Without doubt, the departure of Sister Lydia did mark the moment when the challenge to the CCB's vision could be undertaken, because she represented a 'disciplinary symbol' within the organisation. In her absence this restraining force was lifted and, despite the facilitative environment she had succeeded in developing in the early days,

[2] The emergent market based strategies as the referent of development is a widely held consensus within South Africa – so it is fair to claim that the emergence of this grassroots idiom was generated by influences from within, as well as from without, the RWA membership.

[3] Further to this, a local Chief sided with the pro-market thinkers and nearly managed to expropriate the RWA achievements by promising his supporters that he would find new markets for their surplus, if they assisted him in taking control over the organisation's resources. The role of the Chief was perceived by the CCB as the source of the tension that had emerged within the organisation. It is likely that this emphasis was more symbolic than deserved, because the Chief could never have gained the power attributed to him by the CCB without the support (albeit tacit at times) from the membership. In fact, the support from the membership emerged through their preferred tendency to move the organisation towards a market-based strategy. In other words, the Chief's power came through the members' social consensus surrounding the market-based idiom of development, versus the CCB's belief that the Chief was the primary catalyst for change that underwrote the RWA split.

both management and members found it difficult to enter into dialogue in ways that enabled them to critically reappraise the direction in which the RWA was to be taken because not only was the emergent leadership without the disciplinary forces associated with Sister Lydia but so too was the RWA divided by competing visions of where the future lay – despite the management's attempts at isolating the membership from such influences. Sister Lydia's departure became the fissure from which a tense learning experience began.

> *Now [that Sister Lydia is gone] we just have to try and carry on with what she taught us, because we learned a lot from her and she also helped us financially.*
> CCB member's comment (Burman, 2004)

Almost paradoxically, the consistent belief promoted by Sister Lydia that confident, creative thinkers have a greater likelihood of successfully dealing with fresh challenges, appears to be the critical factor that held the RWA together at the moment of extreme stress.[4]

Conclusion

> *For the whole truth is known to none of us; we may have found out a new part of it, but we must not assume more.* (Julius K. Nyerere 1968)

Since the RWA's inception in 1992, Sekhukhuneland has almost continuously been in the grip of severe droughts, many jobs have been lost and state-sponsored development has been slow to deliver all that was promised in 1994. Despite these harsh realities, the RWA has achieved incredible accomplishments: the infant mortality rate has been reduced, women are confident that they can face their future independently and, perhaps most significantly, their home-grown learning strategies and knowledge sharing skills allow them the space to develop – and achieve – ambitions beyond the confines of their immediate realities. The RWA has managed to stand as a dynamic organisation, fostering learning, development and growth, both amongst its members as well as within the community.

One of the biggest stresses that the RWA management body has had to deal with was whether or not to stick to the original culture promoted within the organisation. The question of the most appropriate enabling environment for the membership emerged as a critical internal conflict within the RWA corpus. It heralded the difficult choice of whether to try and maintain the organisation as a controllable but rather closed community of practice, or whether to open its doors to outside influences. The former option was increasingly perceived by the members as management protectionism and dogmatic control, while the latter course held the risk of weakening the women's sense of identity and ownership over their projects as their ambitions diversified.

[4] During a return visit to Apel at the end of 2004, the ultimate resolution of the stress became evident. A small number of the CCB had split from the RWA corpus and have started a new organisation which will focus primarily on self-sufficiency, while the original RWA group will now move towards improving the livelihood capacities, mediated by the market-based idiom, of the broader membership.

Ironically, it was precisely for fear of their strong organisational culture being disrupted by external stakeholders that made the CCB so wary of outside influences, but at the same time these influences fuelled the hearts and minds of the membership, enabling them to invent new opportunities for development, framed within a changing broader national idiom of development.

It has been argued that this destabilising moment erupted because the CCB had gradually become acculturated into the habit of asking closed, single-loop 'how' questions. Despite the vision of a self-strengthening Community of Practice, the CCB drew responses only from within the community, which at the same time it tried to restrain and control. This restricted the possibility for innovative responses and insights, and served to maintain and reinforce the culture and vision that the CCB believed would best serve the membership. Simultaneously, the experiential learning skills that emerged through participating in the facilitative environments and capacity development schemes provided by the CCB contributed towards the membership gaining the confidence that enabled them to ask more open, double-loop questions about where they imagined themselves in the future. The CCB found itself at a loss in terms of how to deal with this change.

By 2003, the developmental idiom of progress mediated by market-based strategies represented a preferential consensus within the RWA corpus and the CCB was forced to enter into dialogue with its members in order to accommodate this groundswell. Whilst the CCB still implicitly adhered to a belief that the membership should adapt to its vision as it had done in the past, the membership had conceptually stepped beyond those parameters and was striving towards a qualitatively different ambition for the future, thereby undermining one cornerstone of the RWA's cultural foundations.

Despite the democratic, participatory foundations of the organisation, a moment of disarticulation surfaced between the membership and the CCB when a cultural divergence emerged in response to the question of '*where* are we going with the RWA?' Sister Lydia's departure from the RWA marked the moment whereby this reality had to be confronted. Overcoming this crisis almost destroyed the RWA and many of the socio-economical achievements they had developed over the previous decade. To the credit of the CCB, it did eventually respond to and accommodate the momentum for change that the membership demanded, but doing so was an unexpected, traumatic experience.

In this case study, the CCB – for a while – was frenetically focused on managing and sustaining a Community of Practice, inspired by the model imported by Sister Lydia. The CCB became overly focused on maintaining a particular vision of the *type* of community they felt was most likely to sustain the institution into the future, rather than dealing with the empirical demands of the membership and this internal contradiction temporarily jeopardised the gains made in the previous ten years.

Lave and Wenger's insights into Communities of Practice are useful in multiple ways but it is important to note that these insights were gleaned from master / apprentice relationships amongst a particular community, not necessarily replicable in other situations. The essential aspect of Lave and Wenger's data is that there was clear motivational alignment between the players with respect to the basis for their

relationship and reasons to reproduce that relationship. As the RWA story serves to illustrate, there is no certainty that such clear alignment will be reproduced in other communities and so to objectify the model over an empirical reality is a risky developmental strategy.

Maintaining a model in this manner over the empirical demands of people involves a management strategy of power and discipline not compatible with creativity and open development. In this study, disciplinary forces were exploited in an attempt to limit the membership's home-grown creativity to within their intra-gardening group activities. This ultimately led to an inflexible management structure – one that became preoccupied with maintaining an imported, culturally biased model for development that temporarily ceased responding to the demands of its membership until faced with an unexpected cultural counter-flow that had been internalised by the membership.

This case study acts as a reminder that other peoples' knowledge generation is interdependent with biased, cultural influences and as such is an open-ended, dynamic process that may be respectfully inquired into, but can rarely be fully captured or controlled. An enabling culture for knowledge development can be fostered by focusing on people, while using models as an aid to development, rather than the foundation of development.[5]

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[5] By way of a postscript: in 2003 the RWA was contracted by the University of the North's Development, Facilitation and Training Institute (DevFTI) to act as facilitators in a horizontal knowledge exchange scheme that was intended to generate development-related ideas for people in a community known as Mohlanatsi. The RWA responded to the challenge with extraordinary dexterity and professionalism. Considerable numbers of RWA personnel helped to facilitate a knowledge agitating experience that went beyond the expectations of the university. Rather than delve into this in any depth I would simply like to note that despite the trauma of the previous few years, the participating RWA-members were extremely dynamic facilitators and should be proud that they can now add the title of 'consultant' to their portfolio of livelihood activities.

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Abstract
In 1992, 43 women who considered themselves to be the 'poorest of the poor' began working together to grow food for themselves and their families, in a remote rural village called Apel (Limpopo Province, South Africa). By 2003, the original 43 had grown to a group of almost 3,500 women working together under a nationally registered, not-for-profit organisation known as the Rural Women's Association (RWA). The RWA now fosters a broad portfolio of activities, offering a sustainable livelihood to the women involved. This article presents a brief mapping of their journey, highlighting a moment of cultural change that jeopardised the gains made after a decade of community development, partially framed within a critical view of the Community of Practice model.

About the author

Chris Burman spent a number of years working in Africa in the tourist industry before attending the University of East Anglia to read Development Studies as a mature student. He recently completed a PhD with the Faculty of Management Sciences and Law at the University of the North, South Africa and is currently employed by the Development Training and Facilitation Institute (DevFTI) at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership, University of Limpopo, to coordinate their existing portfolio of community based outreach programs and to develop innovative grassroots programs for the future. DevFTI's primary geographical focus is Limpopo Province but the work of the department also extends into the broader SADC region.

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The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange – a journey of change

Petrarca Karetji

Introduction

A community development specialist in Papua chatted with a local fisherman who was napping on the beach under a coconut tree. [1] "Pak!", said the specialist;"Why are you napping here? You are wasting your time!! You should be fishing to increase your income, then you can save money, buy a nice house and sleep well on a comfortable bed!!" [2] Replied the fisherman, "Thank you for your advice - but I was already sleeping well!"

Different and much more complex versions of this simple story are retold by members of 'underdeveloped' communities around the world. Faced by well-meaning and seemingly more 'knowledgeable' individuals, communities are under pressure to develop without an overall understanding of what development is and where the changes will lead. A common understanding or definition of development is needed which makes immediate sense to both the fisherman and the specialist. Defining 'development' within the context of change is discussed in the first section of this paper.

On one hand, development interventions often do not take into account prior development activities or knowledge existing in local communities. On the other hand, many communities targeted for development do not have sufficient access to information on options available to them. How can knowledge be effectively transferred to local communities while taking into account local knowledge and wisdom? This is the challenge in Eastern Indonesia, where communities are faced with external and internal pressures to develop, yet lack access to information, data and knowledge sources. At the same time, local structures, knowledge and practices have for decades been ignored and replaced by centralized systems and structures. The second section of this paper looks at the Eastern Indonesian context and the process or journey of change it is undergoing.

This context is the setting in which the Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange, or in Indonesian, Bursa Pengetahuan Kawasan Timur Indonesia (BaKTI) has been established. This is part of a multidonor support facility for Eastern Indonesia. The final section of this paper focusses on BaKTI and its role in the region's development or journey of change[3]. BaKTI was not established as a new innovation, but rather as a

[1] Original story retold by Mr. Musa Sombuk, MA – Social Scientist of Papua State University. Papua: Republic of Indonesia portion of the island of New Guinea

[2] Pak: polite Indonesian salutation for men, means 'sir' or 'mister'

[3] Phrase originally used by Prof. Willi Toisuta, PhD in discussions on the strategic development of BaKTI

facility where accumulated experiences and ongoing learning in knowledge management for development (KM4Dev) can be consolidated and applied. BaKTI is thus very much a work in progress, and this paper is provided in the hope that BaKTI can be considered as an ongoing case study and joint facility for KM4Dev practitioners.

Defining 'development'

The word 'development' (*pembangunan* in Indonesian) is used continously. Most people, when asked, will say that they want *pembangunan* in Eastern Indonesia. Yet when individuals are asked to define what this means, there is often hesitation while the individual seeks a complex explanation of the word.

WordNet 2.0 by Princeton University (http://www.wordreference.com/) states that development is the 'act of improving by expanding or enlarging or refining'. It is difficult to translate, let alone argue the benefits of development based on this definition, especially in many of the local community contexts in Eastern Indonesia.

A village headman, when asked about the condition of *pembangunan* in his village, replied: "It's fine, but we we are still short two uniforms". He was referring to the light green uniforms, issued to the village neighbourhood security. To him, this was 'development', being the only tangible change that had affected his village.

In light of such confusion, it is appropriate to try and build a common understanding of what is meant by 'development'. For the purposes of this paper and in describing the Eastern Indonesian context and BaKTI's response, *development* is defined as 'a process of change which is managed to provide benefit for those undergoing this process of change'. Using this definition, one can state that development has occured if:
1. There is change;
2. The process is efficiently and effectively managed;
3. The beneficiaries of the change process are clear;
4. That the beneficiaries subscribe to the benefits of the process and support the process.

Conversely, there is no development if:
1. There is no change;
2. There has been change, but with no benefit for those undergoing the process of change;
3. The beneficiaries of the process are not clear;
4. The beneficiaries do not subscribe or support the process.

Proponents of development should first clarify whether those affected by the change brought about through a development program actually (1) want this change, (2) recognize the benefits the process of change will provide, and; (3) will ultimately enjoy or utilise these benefits. The need to define development in such a manner can be further clarified within the context of Eastern Indonesia.

Eastern Indonesia: the context

Eastern Indonesia (EI) is a region covering almost 800.000 km2, which is over 40% of Indonesia's total land mass. The area is spread out over four main island groups (Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua) and contains less than 15% of Indonesia's population (Indonesia's total population is over 242 million according to CIA's Factbook July estimate). Eastern Indonesia has diverse climate conditions ranging from tropical to alpine (snow covered peaks in Papua). Existing rainforests and eco-systems are sufficiently large to influence the world's environment. The region is immensely rich with natural resources, ranging from mineral resources such as gold and copper (Freeport McMoran), gas (BP Tangguh gas field is one of the world's largest LNG deposits) to marine and forestry resources.

Each of the island groups in Eastern Indonesia has distinctive and diverse indigenous cultures, climates and development conditions. Papua, which is the Indonesian portion of the island of New Guinea, is an extreme example with over 250 languages.

Eastern Indonesia is not a new target of international and national development initiatives; however, many of these projects or programs do not take into account prior development activities. For instance, a 1968 document by UNDP entitled *A design for development in West Irian* (United Nations, New York, 1968) provided many concrete examples of development priorities and approaches for Papua; yet even today, many of the development programs currently under implementation in the region are still trying to address the same issues in health, education and other sectors. Much time and effort as well as costs could be saved by referring to previous project designs and implementation reports. Even so, many local government units do not perceive the value in maintaining or referring to such documents. During a recent joint institutional capacity review of a BAPPEDA, the provincial development planning board in Eastern Indonesia[4], staff members were asked where documents from past projects were kept. The answer: documents were either tied in bundles and stored in a shed, or were burnt to make space for new project documents.

The approach to development in Eastern Indonesia has been top-down with limited options for participative planning processes. Since the 1960s through to 1997, Indonesia was governed through a very strong centralised system. This has meant that almost all development programs were designed centrally with a tendency to seek 'one-size-fits-all' approaches rather than dealing with the complexities of over 13,000 islands which comprise this archipelago[5]. Over the past 35 years under a centralised government system, there were many examples of projects which failed, as they were unable to deal with the specific conditions and issues faced in local communities. Also, there is limited recognition given to the fact that communities have been able to survive for centuries, often in extreme conditions, and in doing so have developed knowledge and skills which are still applicable today. The Marind tribe for instance, have had new technologies and

[4] Conducted in September 2005, the writer was part of a small team which included personnel from UNDP, UNICEF and WorldBank
[5] Approx. 6,000 are inhabited

skills imposed on them to cultivate rice.[6] Their traditional land, consisting mainly of swamps and mangrove forests, was drained to make way for paddy fields as part of a campaign to make Indonesia self-sufficient in rice. Sadly, the land is now under threat of seawater intrusion. Yet traditionally the Marind produced record size tuber plants (sweet potatos, etc.) in their swamp land, by practicing a method of hydrophonics, where seedlings are placed in hollow logs and provided sufficient nutrients in the form of humus and soil, to grow (without further attention) to immense sizes within a few months, ready for harvest.

A more positive development is an increasing number of programs in the region that are oriented towards Knowledge Management (KM) and Knowledge Sharing (KS). One such example is the program of the Gita Kasih Foundation, working in remote areas of West Timor where there recently have been many reported cases of malnutrition[7]. Their proposal was successful in the recent Indonesia Development Marketplace 'competition', which proposed the reintroduction of awareness to communities in remote regions of West Timor on the availability and nutritious value of plants growing wild in the forests. The term 'reintroduction' is used, because these plants traditionally were harvested by communities; however, with the introduction of rice, dietary habits of communities shifted, and customary practices were lost. Gita Kasih's emphasis on the value of traditional forest based crops also simultaneously supports reforestration, another issue in this region. This is a living form of knowledge sharing – where Gita Kasih develops plots of land with examples of plants with their different nutritious benefits for local communities to observe, cultivate and harvest.

Another example has been the drafting of long-term development plans, which previously was a government exercise with limited or no input from civil society. BaKTI provided the facilities for the South Sulawesi Provincial Development Planning Board to socialise the general structure of its long term (25 years) and medium term (5 years) development plan, with prominent experts in the province providing their input per sector. The discussions were broadcast live in South Sulawesi, where listeners could provide their input and responses by telephone or text message. Although one can question the effectiveness of this approach in reaching all segments of South Sulawesi society, it was a big step for provincial governments to seek broader input from its citizens. Important also is that for many listeners, this was the first time they had heard of the provincial government's medium and long term development approach, and their appreciation of not only learning about such plans but of having the opportunity to respond and provide input was reflected in the number of responses, calls and text messages received.

Since Eastern Indonsia is not a new target for development projects from international agencies, there is already much knowledge and lessons learnt from activities deployed in the region. However, donor agency project documents have been difficult to obtain after a project closes, since most of the documents have been archived outside of the region. The limited access to such documentation especially for local government and NGOs means that approaches and methodologies are continually being reinvented.

[6] An indigenous tribe living in the Merauke District, Papua Province. Refer also to 'Papua, the land of lessons unlearned' *Survey Report – SOfEI* (March 2004)
[7] Article published in the June-July 2005 edition of BaKTI News (http://www.bakti.org.baktinews.htm)

Moreover, most 'knowledge centers' in the region such as university research centers and NGOs, whilst present in each province, have at best limited connectivity to the Internet, and even within the institution, data and information stored cannot be easily accessed or shared. This ongoing lack of access to data and information has also brought about a 'knowledge fortress' mentality in many of institutions, which guard their references, data and information from outsiders, even when these knowledge assets are not utilised within the institution.[8]

Despite the knowledge fortress mentality in some institutions, there exist many local organisations and individuals in Eastern Indonesia who are open and willing to share their experiences and knowledge, but who lack the capacity to do so. This is due to a number of reasons, including the relatively high cost of ICT, lack of human resources to record experiences, and remoteness of the region where the work is conducted. Many of these organisations and individuals are better able to verbally describe their work; however, opportunities for interaction and knowledge exchange have been limited. In a capacity self-assessment program conducted in South Sulawesi supported by SOfEI[9], the most common weakness in all of the 47 participating NGOs was their '*Informasi-Dokumentasi*' capacity: their ability to document their programs and activities and in managing the information. The influence and role of strong central NGOs dealing with donor agencies has decreased the need for field-based NGOs to build overall documentation capacity.

The limited access to information and lack of willingness or ability to share available information and data, combined with the limited infrastructure and facilities to store, manage, exchange and analyse information and data, have created the general impression from outside of the region that there is limited capacity within the region. This is especially the case when local knowledge, practices and customs are not available in writing, and when consultants or other development specialists are unable to incorporate or even consider local practices and customs. Fortunately the existing wealth of knowledge is gradually becoming available from local sources and donors are also becoming better at and more open in sharing their experiences.

Journey of Change

To effectively implement development programs based on the definition of development as a process of change, one must comprehend the status of targeted communities or regions in this change process. Some communities have already undergone many changes, such as newly constructed facilities and infrastructure, and changes brought about through education. Such communities are able to assimilate more information and data and apply this knowledge in their work. Other communities have undergone limited changes, and have not had much access to external information and data. Still other communities may have experienced change, but have not benefited from the changes around them, such as the Marind tribe

[8] *Knowledge Sharing in Development Agencies: Knowledge Fortress or Knowledge Pool*? Geoff Barnard, Paper prepared for the EADI/IMWG Conference, Dublin, September 2003, http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/downloads/323

[9] SOfEI – Multidonor - Support Office for Eastern Indonesia, being the host unit under which BaKTI was established

mentioned previously. Some communities have the support of NGOs and research centers, while many do not. This condition is reflected in the Kecamatan Development Program (KDP) of the Government of Indonesia, funded by the World Bank. This is a huge community-driven development (CDD) program covering over 30,000 villages throughout the country. Although the program is often cited for its phenomenal success in providing communities with the power to determine their priorities, performance levels vary greatly between communities who have access to information and infrastructure and communities who have largely been untouched by government programs. Many of the latter are in areas of Eastern Indonesia, such as Maluku and Papua. On a national level, the seemingly slow progress of such communities becomes an issue, as it affects disbursement of funds and ties up human resources having to focus on 'non-performing' areas. Yet, by understandingthe change processes occuring within these areas, the benefits in strengthening and empowering communities in these areas may actually be immense.

Compilation of development profiles of each community or region can provide clarity on their status in terms of development. By consolidating community or regional profiles, one can see the extent to which different communities have developed or changed, and their current status. The different levels of change can provide a benchmark for future processes in each region and community.

The community or regional profiles then depict the entry point and current achievements of each community or region on a 'path' of development, leading to the level of change that the community or region ultimately seeks to attain. This allows policy makers and planners to design and measure the appropriateness of programs and projects to the needs of the particular community or region. Such profiles will also assist in clarifying the position of community members when expressing their priorities and needs. These profiles could be further developed to become knowledge management (KM) and knowledge exchange (KE) indexes (rather then human development indexes) to support the development needs of each area.

As an example, a community development consultant may be tasked by an international development organisation to work with a coastal community to find out what their development priorities are (without giving the community too high expectations, as funds needs to be processed and other institutional barriers need to be faced). The assignment is to be completed within a three-month timeframe, and consists of a certain number of focus group discussions within the community. The task is simple enough, with seemingly ample time. Yet the consultant will find that the community members will be away for certain periods of the month to catch fish and prawns. Then their catch needs to be sold, and money spent. This will usually leave a very tight window within each calendar month for the consultant to be able to conduct his/her consultations. The contracting organisation does not understand why the local community does not want to spend more time with the consultant, especially since the programme is for the benefit of the local community. The consultant is unaware that from prior experience, the local community is used to being assessed and to promises being made that are not kept, and so is unwilling to spend too much time in discussions which might not provide concrete results. The consultant is left with limited options, and may choose to undertake the consultation with whoever is available, no matter how unrepresentative.

Taking the above example further, suppose the consultant eventually finishes the assignment and submits the assessment conclusions with fairly representative input from community members. The development organisation, upon receiving the list of priorities, queries why small business and not health was seen as a priority, although the local statistics show that maternal and early childhood mortality rates are four times above the national average. Yet the community itself does not see this as an issue, as they have always experienced such high mortality rates and accept this as part of life. The development organisation then decides to be more decisive and builds a health post in the village. Initially, with funding support, the health post runs well, but once the program ends, the staff leave, and the building is not maintained. Essentially, no change or 'development' has occurred in this example. When asked about the health post, community members will admit that it was good when it was operational, but now that they have to pay for service and medication, they are unable to afford the costs. Some may argue that they never asked for the facility in the first place.

The above is a simple example, but is useful in describing how maintaining profiles of a region or communities could help the consultant and the funding organisation with information on numerous issues:

1. The availability of cultural practices, and how these can be used to bring the community together to discuss pertinent development issues;
2. The openness and willingness of the community towards external assistance/support, based on previous project experiences;
3. The key decision makers within the community who need to be considered for support, including knowledge of their opinions run vis a vis the general communities wishes;
4. Prior experiences which have left a positive or negative impact on the community, in order to determine alignment with or avoidance of previous approaches;
5. The community's level of exposure to technology and access to information, determining their awareness of options available to them (i.e. microhydro electricity rather then fuel based power generators), and
6. Applicable indigenous knowledge, (i.e. agricultural practices, traditional medicines, etc.).

Many development organisations commence work in any given area with an assessment of the targeted community or regions, however this assessment is usually utilised only for the purpose of the program. Therefore, many communities suffer from 'assessment fatigue', brought about by continuous assessments from different agencies and project teams.

Avoidance of assessment fatigue gives rise to the need for an organisation which focuses on maintaining regional profiles in the form of KM and KE indices and tracking changes brought about by development initiatives. Such a unit focusing on knowledge management and exchange allows for Eastern Indonesia's development to be mapped and the direction for 'journeys of change' for regions and communities to be appropriately charted/designed.

BaKTI's Role

BaKTI was originally conceived within the proposal for the multidonor Support Office for Eastern Indonesia (SOfEI), as a knowledge bank and public information resource of SOfEI. The need for this resource was based on the general assumption that although donor agencies, NGOs and other development players have implemented numerous programs within the region, the knowledge gained through individual programs has not been systematically captured and maintained for future access. Thus, new programs are continually being reinvented and lessons learnt have been lost. The word 'bakti' itself originates from Sanskrit, and loosely means 'serve' or 'commitment'. This was seen as an appropriate acronym for such a facility committed to serving the development knowledge needs of the region.

The original idea of a knowledge bank then developed further to the concept of a knowledge exchange. Apart from storing donor project knowledge and lessons learnt, the facility would also profile knowledge assets from the region, i.e. case studies, best practices and lessons learnt from NGOs, CBOs and local government bodies. In this way, agents of change and development, both local and international, can learn from each other. Instead of seeking to develop new innovations, BaKTI's development commenced with reference studies on past and ongoing KM and KE experiences. A number of key references are included in the bibliography.

Profiling of knowledge resources to challenge the general assumption that there is no, or limited, capacity in Eastern Indonesia was also seen to be important. Sharing and exchanging knowledge from the region would increase awareness of local capacity and could lead to more and better interaction and collaboration between stakeholders in Eastern Indonesia and national and international aid agencies.

Launched in September 2004, BaKTI's mission is 'to become a hub of constructive interaction between civil society organisations (CSOs), government and donors through the access and exchange of knowledge for sustainable development in Eastern Indonesia'. This mission statement is also based on the Eastern Indonesian context where there has been limited interaction between local, national and international stakeholders. BaKTI's approach to improve development processes in the region is to ensure that development interventions are designed based on constructive interaction between stakeholders. However, in order to ensure that interaction is constructive, both sides need to comprehend the perspective of the other.

To support development stakeholders *internal* to Eastern Indonesian, BaKTI's focus is to provide access to references that can broaden the knowledge base of Eastern Indonesians regarding international and national smart practices, theories, approaches and methodologies. BaKTI also provides access to strategic plans and priorities of international agencies.

To support development stakeholders *external* to the region, BaKTI collects and provides access to data and information on what changes have occurred in targeted communities and regions, and whether changes brought about by past and current programs and conditions have provided sufficient benefits. This includes:

1. The current status of development/underdevelopment in targeted regions for development interventions in Eastern Indonesia;
2. Changes taking place in different areas of Eastern Indonesia, and which of these have provided benefit to stakeholders;
3. Current knowledge management conditions in each area (existence of knowledge resource centers, libraries, local NGOs, access to information, internet, etc.) that can be supported/developed to ensure that Eastern Indonesians are aware of changes and contribute to the process, but also enabling them to determine the processes seen to be most appropriate to their conditions and environment.

These three points can be considered to be the key knowledge components required to track development in Eastern Indonesia. By maintaining such information and data, and tracking its utilisation, it will be possible to see whether BaKTI's existence and role has made a difference in the development of the region.

In terms of knowledge management for development, BaKTI provides an open opportunity for KM practitioners to utilise and participate in local knowledge. BaKTI's programs include internships and institutional linkages.

BaKTI's Current Activities

The BaKTI team is currently focussed on:

- Establishing a repository archive of development knowledge for donors, government and civil society organisations focusing on the development of Eastern Indonesia;
- Publishing and disseminating information relevant to development practitioners in Eastern Indonesia;
- Providing meeting facilities and organising events to support interaction between and among civil society organisations, donor bodies and government agencies;
- Establishing Communities of Practice or groups of people who hold similar interests and face common problems in Eastern Indonesia allowing them to share information, contacts, views and solutions.

Management of BaKTI

BaKTI's strategic direction is determined by BaKTI's seven-member Board of Advisors. The Board meets three times a year. Day-to-day management is the responsibility of the BaKTI Coordinator. BaKTI is funded by the British Department for International Development, the Government of the Netherlands, it is supported by the Australian Agency for International Development and administered by the World Bank.

BaKTI Facilities, Products and Services

BaKTI Library and Database: BaKTI's facilities are located in Makassar, South Sulawesi. Contained within this facility is a public library with ten workstations offering free access to the Internet and BaKTI's electronic document database. In addition, wireless connections are available. In December 2005, the BaKTI Database will be launched online at www.bakti.org. The library and database also provide opportunities for interns to develop information and data management skills.

BaKTI News: Many development stakeholders in Eastern Indonesia do not have Internet access. To reach them, BaKTI distributes a newsletter that profiles local organisations and publicises development programs and experiences. Readers are informed of new documents and data available in BaKTI, which can be requested by mail, fax or SMS. The newsletter also serves to initiate communication between local and international institutions, for instance in proposing new initiatives and soliciting support from others with similar requirements.

Other BaKTI Publications: In addition to BaKTI News, BaKTI will launch three other series between November 2005 and February 2006:

- *Lessons from Eastern Indonesia* promotes smart practices, case studies and shares experiences of what works in the region in an accessible format;
- *Eastern Indonesia Area Briefings* are collections of basic data for Eastern Indonesia. Initially there will be one issue for each region: Nusa Tenggara, Sulawesi, Maluku and Papua, and this will be expanded to one issue per province.
- *Eastern Indonesia Bibliographies* are simple lists of books and research papers available at BaKTI and are designed as a starting point for research on specific topics.

BaKTI Events: In collaboration with other institutions and organizations, BaKTI supports public events in Makassar and elsewhere in Eastern Indonesia to support knowledge sharing and exchange. Events include discussions, seminars, film reviews, book reviews, culture promotion and workshops. A regional forum is also held annually providing opportunities for development practitioners from government, private sector, NGOs, woman activists, academicians, religious and traditional leaders from all of the provinces in Eastern Indonesia to meet, share experiences and determine development priorities for the region.

BaKTI Office and Meeting Facilities: BaKTI provides four separate meeting and office spaces free of charge, provided they are available and their utilisation is development-related.

BaKTI Café: In collaboration with the South Sulawesi Chapter of the Indonesian Association of Hotels and Restaurants, BaKTI's small café serves as an informal location for people to meet or read, and provides an opportunity for Makassar-based hospitality students to develop their skills.

BaKTI Forums and Communities of Practice: BaKTI encourages the development of sector and regional forums for Eastern Indonesia, both physical and virtual, through facilitating interaction, including between local and international forums.

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Abstract
Eastern Indonesia is a region of over 40% of Indonesia's landmass, but comprises only 15% of Indonesia's population. The area includes 12 provinces, with distinctive and diverse indigenous cultures, climates and development conditions.

The Eastern Indonesia Knowledge Exchange (often refered to by its Indonesian acronym, BaKTI), was established with donor support to become a hub of constructive interaction between CSO, government and donors through the access and exchange of knowledge for sustainable development in Eastern Indonesia. To ensure that BaKTI's development strategy is aligned to this purpose within the broader context of Eastern Indonesia's development, the question is: what is BaKTI's approach to improve development processes in the region?

This paper seeks to outline this approach, starting with a simple definition of development within a context of change, where development is: a process of change that is managed to provide benefit for those undergoing this process of change. From this definition, the paper will then proceed to outline Eastern Indonesia's process of development as a 'Journey of Change' and the role of knowledge in this journey.

About the author

Petrarca Karetji was born and raised in the remote highlands of Papua. He studied English Language Education at Satya Wacana Christian University, Central Java, Indonesia, where he commenced his career as a project officer (1992). Since 1994, Petra worked in a number of development project management consultancy firms, implementing HRD projects including scholarships (AusAID), fellowships (ADB) and training programs (WB), nationally and internationally. Before joining the World Bank as a consultant assigned to SOfEI, Petra managed a small consultancy firm (1995 - May 2004) focusing on regional development projects. Petra commenced responsibilities as BaKTI Coordinator in December 2004. Petrarca Karetji, Bursa Pengetahuan Kawasan Timur Indonesia, Jl. Dr. Sutomo No. 26, Makassar – South Sulawesi, Indonesia. Email: pkaretji@bakti.org

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Culture, learning and surviving a PhD: a journey in search of my own path

Camilo Villa

Over the past years, I have been struggling with my Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) research. My goal is to describe and understand the relations between local culture and entrepreneurial learning practices in the Colombian city of Manizales. Such a research journey has led me to discover culture from different perspectives and to identify and even develop networks that facilitated my movement in the local entrepreneurial world. There have been inspiring days but also many difficult ones where the lack of clarity, methodological and theoretical gaps and personal struggles have made progress difficult. My story reflects on my journey with the aim of providing insights on the culture-learning relation and research tips to cope with the challenges emerging from the PhD process.

The PhD is an academic exercise that is at the same time an exploratory and learning process, and it moves along two tracks. On the one hand, it is a move in search of theories, models and, empirical data to explain or describe a phenomenon. On the other, it is a journey to find our own place within a particular field of knowledge and a community of practice.

The journey I started four years ago brought me to the borders of three different academic domains: culture, local economic development and learning. I already had strengths in the former two but was weak on the last one. My aim was then to acquire enough knowledge and practice on learning. Using the terminology of this field, I wanted to become a broker linking three different knowledge domains and associated academic communities: culture, learning and local economic development. Here the meaning of broker is taken from Wenger (2000) as an actor who connects different learning communities at their borders, rather than having a core position in each community.

Being a mid-career professional, I aim one day to reach the mastery stage described by Dreyfus (2001). This means to be proficient in my field of expertise with a large practical experience, with my own style. This is the story I share with you. As with many life stories, this one has not yet ended and is just a part of a process that goes on. Now the picture so far is clearer to me and I can put it here in a few pages but it took me many years and struggles to reach this clarity.

Approaching the city and the topic

At first sight, I was not sure if the city of Manizales was standing on the edge of a mountain or hanging from the clouds. At that time (1981) weather conditions were different and often the warm clouds from the lowlands used to invade the streets and

hide the cathedral and higher buildings. It was a permanent game of hide and seek between the moving clouds and the standing city.

During the following years, I visited the city for work purposes but my main link with academic research started in 1995. That year I was appointed to coordinate the Colombian team that was in charge of data collection for academic research carried by the Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands. This task was an excellent opportunity to approach the entrepreneurial world of Manzinales; a goal that was already in my agenda. I had opportunities to visit the region and to interview leaders, politicians, academics and, entrepreneurs. I inquired about the impact of recent economic reforms (neoliberal policies reducing the scope of State action and opening Colombian market to foreign goods) and the responses adopted by firms to face the new challenges that emerged from these changes.

I asked them about the reasons that would explain some decisions and practices that had been identified. Many entrepreneurs and leaders explained that this was part of the 'coffee culture'. As Manizales is located in the core coffee growing region of the country, I first wrongly thought that they meant the culture associated with such economic activity. When I asked about this coffee culture, I only received vague replies; it was a common phrase repeated by all but never explained. I decided then that my PhD would try to provide an answer to the core structural elements and practices of this coffee culture.

This investigation of the local culture was, in essence, part of a quest to develop my anthropological skills. I first assumed that it was a search for qualitative data. However, culture is a vague and broad concept which covers all sorts of social practices, objects and relations. It was therefore necessary to focus my approach. Considering my background, experience and training on local and regional development, it was clear that my areas of focus would be within these domains. I also considered my interest in the entrepreneurship and business domains.

Many development theories, policies and efforts have failed because of their strong emphasis on economic relations but lack a deeper understanding of sociological and cultural factors embedded in any economic or productive process. In other words, I have been trying to develop my academic career as an anthropologist in a field almost completely dominated by economics and economists. The scope of the project therefore would be to study the sociological and cultural factors affecting entrepreneurship and local and regional development in Manizales. Even this additional scope reduction was not yet enough. The key to find a more focused entry to culture within local economic processes came from my supervisor. He advised me to focus on learning. According to him, the key issues in the field of local and regional development were moving towards learning. As has happened very often in our relationship, I followed his suggestion without having a clear idea of its scope and content. My project was then oriented to study the relation between culture and learning practices among small firms in Manizales.

Distance and culture

In the past four years, I moved geographically four times. The first move was when I came to The Netherlands to start my PhD at the Institute of Social Studies, The Hague. Then, on three occasions, I visited Manizales: the first two visits took place in 2003 and the last one in spring of 2005. My fieldwork has been done on both sides of the Atlantic namely in Manizales but also in The Netherlands where the possibility to contrast Dutch and Colombian cultures has been a permanent source of data and inspiration.

The fact that I am a Colombian by nationality made it difficult to uncover the hidden patterns and relations that shape the local culture in Manizales. It is a city embedded in a particular regional culture with some specific characteristics while sharing many other features with the rest of the country. Moving to The Netherlands created enough distance to allow me to be objective about my own culture. In many respects, Colombian culture is rather homogeneous, even though there are regional variations. that the surface area of Colombia is more or less the same as Belgium, France, The Netherlands and Spain combined, although the population is only one third of the population of these four countries. While most of the Colombians are Catholic and speak Spanish, in the European countries mentioned above, Catholics, Protestants and Muslims all have an important presence and several languages are used. The possibilities of finding important cultural contrasts between these European countries are higher than in Colombia where less than five percent of the population belongs to different ethnic groups (Amerindian or African descendants).

However, regional variations do exist. For instance food, accent, music, and, clothing change from one region to another but there are no strong contradictions among these aspects. More important differences exist in terms of family structure or individualistic and collective trends. As in all countries, there is rivalry between regions. Very often, these rivalries are related to power struggles, economic imbalance or (de)centralisation issues.

By moving to another country it was possible to identify patterns that would distinguish Colombians from Western cultures. This proved to be important and useful when doing fieldwork. It allowed me to capture those patterns that would characterize Colombia in general and the region in particular. In such an exercise, my original objective to study the local (coffee) culture came to be questioned. To set borders to local culture became difficult, especially in the field of business. Limits became diffuse as many practices from the business field seem to belong to a more global domain. For some traditions, such as those related to food or celebrations, it might be easier to draw a line between local and global but this is not the case with the field of business.

Hunting theories by building traps

One of the most difficult parts of my PhD process has been to learn about learning to give me the competencies and skills required to interact fluently with this academic field. The search for theories relevant to my research has been an ongoing process.

The first thing I learned was that most of the articles written within the field of local development about learning do not combine theories and knowledge from the learning field. There are some references to classic thinkers on education, such as Piaget, rarely going beyond that. In other words, learning has become an issue within the local development community but it appears as an empty concept with no clear and strong linkages to the academic communities working under the umbrella of sociology of education and learning. I decided to explore this literature. I usually felt like a blind person hitting here and there with my cane. It was an exploration through a huge domain with many theories and models that were completely new to me. In such quest, I have regularly applied both instinct and common sense.

Scanning through these theories, I moved quickly along the constructivist and more social-oriented approaches rather than the cognitive and more behavioural one. I explored different alternatives without any results. Because my focus was on local culture, I did not want to focus on organisational learning and this was an important methodological constraint. Finally, I found two different approaches that helped me to anchor and ground my research project. The first one has been the key model to link internal and external learning processes proposed by Holmqvist (2003) which combines several learning concepts. Even though Holmqvist developed and used it to analyse firms, I use it to look at a set of firms. This model is my main connection between two academic fields; namely learning and local and regional development.

The second anchor has been situated learning connecting culture and learning academic fields. In the beginning it was a diffuse domain where the main concepts and tools were not clear enough. When I wrote my research design in 2002, I put my emphasis on this theory without having a strong knowledge of it. It was the limping leg of my theoretical tripod. Unfortunately no one noticed and my proposal was approved. It took me many months to really understand the scope of situated learning. This gap made me neglect some observations and data in the first round of fieldwork. Only later I could understand and manage what I was supposed to search and do in relation to learning. Finally, I managed to move forward but it was a hard and long process.

It is worth mentioning the role played by the supervisory team. Fortunately, I have two positive and fierce critics who have provided me useful feedback and have supported throughout. More than supervisors, I see them as team mates with different abilities. For example, they have an amazing ability to forecast gaps and opportunities and, fortunately, an enormous amount of patience.

Missing compass: back to basics

But these theoretical battles were not the most difficult; they are part of the game. I would say it is normal to go through such struggles. The tough part of my journey was that I had lost my intellectual compass, and I did not realise it until a short while ago. I was an anthropologist trying to be an economist and, somewhere on the way, I lost my ethnographic lenses.

After many years of working surrounded by economists, my defence system was overwhelmed and I did not notice it. Unconsciously, I appropriated some of their behavioural traits and approaches. Percentages, indicators and other related terms became part of my normal language. This led me into dangerous waters where I was not secure: I was playing a game whose rules and skills we not my own.

There was only one way out of this closed road: to go back to basics. First slowly, but then more and more enthusiastically, I started to move back towards an anthropological approach and more specifically an ethnographic one. This methodological regression required me to go once again to the city to do a third round of fieldwork. At the same time, I went back through all my archives, notes, transcriptions, diary, recorded interviews, e-mails and, other sources I had compiled in these years. This shift allowed me to identify new benchmarks; new patterns became visible and it was possible to identify and develop a fresh look into my research problem. I had been locked in, moving in circles, and this shift out of the frame allowed me to find a path forward.

What do I mean by moving back to anthropology? I would say it is simply a change in the lens I had been using to analyse data. I had been stressed trying to build up indicators to measure learning in one way or another. In such process I did not allow the data to talk to me as any ethnographer should do. The information has been there for long time ago. The hints, the relations, the patterns where there but I was focusing my effort in the wrong direction, trying to read from them another, alien story and not listening to them.

Beyond a characterisation of roles, actors and relations among the communities of practice, I established that different cultural factors explain and shape both the learning processes and the communities of practice. Due to historical factors, the city overlaps rural and urban identities. Practices from the former rural colonisers are still alive in the city and are mixed with modern, Western ones. For instance, using family structure, gender roles, and trust relations, it is possible to track such continuity and their combinations with new forms and practices. Coffee culture seems to be an reflection of this mix of rural and Western culture. This coffee culture was a characteristic of the rural areas and of the many small towns from the region. It was associated with several cultural artefacts and practices: music, dressing, food, celebrations. Coffee culture has two dimensions: one is positive and provides identity through goods, relations, practices, etc; while the second one is more negative and could be summarised as been paternalistic and highly dependent.

To be continued

None of the information on doing a PhD prepares you for the huge challenges you would face. They focus mainly on the academic part of the story. My experience taught me that this only half of it. What is clear to me now is that such an adventure relies on a combination of academic skills, intuition, hard effort and confidence, allowing you to stand independently in the academic community of which you have chosen to be part.

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Abstract

This story describes my current work on a PhD thesis examining the relations between culture and learning in small firms in a Colombian city. Doing a PhD implies a double quest. On the one hand, it is an academic exercise with theories and data in search for descriptions or explanations. On the other, it is a search for a personal path within the appropriate academic community. This story describes my steps, struggles and moves forward in such journey. It reflects on such a journey, aiming to provide both insights on the culture-learning relation and research tips to cope with the challenges emerging from the PhD process. By reflecting on the different phases and elements involved in this processes over the past four years, the story offers some tips on how to manage such a challenge.

About the author

Camilo Villa is a Colombian anthropologist with a master's degree in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies, The Netherlands. He has extensive experience in both academic and public agencies working on local and regional development matters. In his work and publications, special attention is given to the relations between culture and economic development. During the past four years, he has been involved in research on learning practices among firms and development organisations in Manizales, Colombia. Recently he joined the knowledge sharing team at Hivos.
Camilo Villa, Institute of Social Studies, Kortenaerkade 12, 2518 AX, The Hague, The Netherlands. E-mail: camilo@iss.nl

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An interview with Clive Holtham
Knowledge and culture: learning from the past

Interviewed by Katty Marmenout

Clive Holtham is Professor of Information Management at the Cass Business School, City University in London, UK. Professor Holtham's keynote session on *Knowledge and culture - can there be global solutions to worldwide problems?* at the Geneva KM4Dev meeting in June 2005 sparked the community's interest on his work. Katty Marmenout from McGill University, Canada, sat down with him to discuss some of his views on knowledge sharing today and in ancient civilisations.

Prof. Holtham first of all, what attracted you to the study of knowledge sharing in primitive societies?
Instead of the term 'primitive', I prefer to talk about 'ancient' societies. But to answer your question, my interest in knowledge amongst ancient societies was sparked while visiting a museum, so it was quite by accident – although the reason many people go to a museum is to look for new ideas, receptive to knowledge that is new to them. Looking at the exhibits, it appeared to me that knowledge was very important to ancient societies.

Another point I want to make is related to the idea of progress. In natural sciences, for example in physics, we can see a clear progress in our knowledge. However, in social sciences we go in circles, that is, we learn things and then, as societies, forget them. Therefore, I don't believe that social science really progresses. The human condition is still the same as it was in the time of Shakespeare or of Socrates. There has been technical and social change, but there has been no genetic change. It is depressing that what we learned over centuries, we may have forgotten or ignored, so we do have to revisit the past to recapture these lost learnings. We must actively seek out insights from our past to help our own futures.

Could you give an example of such an insight, what we can understand by looking at our past?
Hunter-gatherers in Africa lived in tribes of about 50 people. Survival was their key issue, the threat was such that it might well be that tomorrow they would not any longer exist. So in this context, if you did not share what you knew, the whole tribe could die. We today are getting lazy. Back then, when it was about life and death, there was little hierarchy for sharing knowledge. Anyone who had the knowledge, would share it for the survival of the tribe.

If you look at how ancient societies represent knowledge, it is interesting to see that many have a so-called 'tree of knowledge'. Especially Nordic myths use this conceptualisation to organize their knowledge. As a student I had studied ancient philosophy, but I had completely forgotten about how the Greeks had developed epistemology (the science of knowledge). Actually, when revisiting Greek

epistemology, one discovers that in recent management literature we are often only reproducing the same ideas. Many 'modern' ideas go back to the deep thoughts of the ancient Greeks. In my current research, I am building on the work of Aristotle, who distinguished five intellectual virtues. These correspond exactly to what current executives now need in the 21st century. Aristotle talks about technical skills and practical wisdom, and of contemplative wisdom being scientific knowledge plus insight. When doing research into knowledge management and capabilities, I could not find any better schema to classify knowledge, yet this is 2500 years old. We should not forget that Aristotle was the tutor of Alexander the Great, so in fact he was kind of a high-level management consultant or a coach. In his opinion, to be a leader you need practical wisdom. He argued that people with 'scientific' knowledge often do not have the right qualities for practical wisdom. This idea would be dynamite today, now that technical knowledge is very highly valued, and people in leadership positions usually have a strong functional background, in accounting or finance, for example. The importance of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) has often been neglected, and this has implications for our educational system, which often only transmits information, rather than produces a context in which practical wisdom can be enhanced.

So although we live in a modern and quite different society, we can still learn from ancient societies. Take for example the work of Professor Gardner at Harvard, who started off with a criticism of IQ tests, arguing that they only capture two (linguistic and logical/mathematical) out of eight types of intelligence. Then he went on to study aboriginals and understood these other six kinds of intelligence, some of which most 'modern' societies have lost over time, not least spatial intelligence, which was used, for example, to navigate. He also identifies interpersonal intelligence, which has a lot to do with sharing of knowledge.

Another type of understanding we can get from our past is the practice of storytelling. Recently, there has been a lot of management research on storytelling, but this has been basically borrowed from the deep history of humanity. Until the appearance of writing and printing everything had to be passed on through memory, serving purposes such as teaching children what to do and what not to do. However, now we have lost this art of memory.

Do you think there are any ways in which we could recover some of these lost skills?
What I recently tried with a group of my students was to abandon Powerpoint presentations in favour of making a video. This is really storytelling, and it turned out to be a very effective exercise. But I think in practice, and especially in organisations involved with development, there is a lot we could learn from developing nations: some of these societies have retained these powerful methods for knowledge transmission, and we could benefit from using these methods. For example, the 'talking stick' is still used by Native American tribes, where people sit in a circle to discuss and only the person with the stick is allowed to talk. So there is no talking all at the same time. I think in our Western meetings today we could use a 'talking stick'! Meetings might perhaps take longer but then again it involves a different attitude to life and to listening.

In aboriginal tribes, knowledge is so fundamental to society it may best be described artistically, for example in a painting. Knowledge management 'guru', Karl-Erik

Sveiby, worked with the aboriginal artist Tex Skuthorpe in order to understand how knowledge is shared in aboriginal cultures, and their work clearly demonstrates how fundamental knowledge is to ancient societies.

So why is knowledge not as significant for us today?
It is significant; it is just not valued as such. As a result of our financial and informational affluence, we have become 'informationally' lazy and we often treat knowledge as if it didn't really matter – look at the 'cut and paste' mindset, which is growing fast, and serving as a substitute for clear thinking. In the past, there were so little resources and so few books to pass on things formally, that knowledge acquisition was highly valued. Sveiby talks about how aboriginal societies in Australia would send out young men on a physical 'quest for knowledge'.

But the real problem today is the confusion between information and knowledge. We are information-rich today, but that may actually make it harder to gain real insights. And collectively we have forgotten so many things that we can still learn a huge amount from our ancestors. Coming back to storytelling, in a recent MBA class, a professional storyteller told a story from Ghana, which is perhaps 500 years old: yet it perfectly summarised the problems of conflict we face in our current societies!

Suggested Readings

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About the interviewee

Clive Holtham's research is into the strategic exploitation of information systems, knowledge management and management learning. He has managed a number of large applied research projects including a major research project for the Institute of Directors, examining the IT needs of executives and as research director of the European Union's 1.6m euro study PRISM (Measurement and Reporting of Intangibles). Professor Holtham is one of the leading architects of the 'electronic boardroom', involving the use of information technology by executives in meetings. He has been an adviser to the European Parliament on educational multimedia, and was named as one of the UK's top 3 'e-tutors of the year' by the Times Higher Education Supplement in summer 2001. In 2003 he was awarded a UK National Teaching Fellowship as one of the 20 leading university teachers in the UK. He is author of a large number of publications, and lectures, broadcasts and consults in the UK and internationally.

Wagenaar, S. 2005. Review of 'The leader's guide to storytelling: mastering the art and discipline of business narrative.'
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Review

Stephen Denning (2005) *The leader's guide to storytelling: mastering the art and discipline of business narrative*. Jossey-Bass: San Fransisco

Sibrenne Wagenaar

Stephen Denning starts his book with the notion that 'the best way to communicate with people you are trying to lead is very often through a story.' His book shows how storytelling can help deal with difficult challenges faced by leadership. 'Leader' in this context is anyone who wants to lead from whatever position they are in, anyone who sees a better way to do things and wants the organisation to change. Combining those two worlds of storytelling and leadership is a big challenge.

In the first two chapters, Denning focuses on what it means to tell the right story, and what key elements are in telling the story right. Different narratives are useful for different purposes of leadership. When you want to spark action, you tell a story of a successful change implemented in the past. When you want to stimulate your team to share knowledge, your story should focus on problems, with an explanation of possible solutions. And with a story that recounts a situation that listeners have also experienced and that prompts them to share their own stories about the topic, you stimulate collaboration. Knowing which pattern is suitable for which task is key in using storytelling effectively. Denning distinguishes between eight different narrative patterns. Later on I will give a short summary of each of these patterns.

Denning sees storytelling as performance art, of which we all master the basics. He refers to the informal social settings where we constantly use stories. In other words, learning to tell stories is more about reminding ourselves of something we already know how to do. It is a matter of transposing the skills we apply effortless in a social setting to formal settings. According to Denning, the main elements that are important in forming the social act of storytelling are:

- *Style:* A plain, simple, and direct style is most suitable for the organisations of today. Customize the style for particular settings. Keep the story focused, simple. Make the story transparent as if listeners look at the subject through a perfectly clean window. Tell the story as if you were talking to one person. This may give your speech a rhythm of conversation and spontaneity. And tell the story as something valuable. You know what you are saying to be true. By telling the story as presenting reality instead of trying to persuade, listeners are free to draw their own conclusions.

- *Truth:* As a storyteller, believe in the idea that it is possible to share a truth. Accept the conventions of the story at least for the duration of the performance. In performance, you are certain, fearless, and relentless in presenting things 'as they really are'. It is about presenting the truth as you see it. Treat everyone in the audience as equals – people who can all understand the truth. Don't attempt to

persuade by using arguments, but let the listeners see what you are seeing and assume that they will be able to verify and accept it.

- *Preparation:* The essence of good storytelling is careful preparation. Prepare so you don't have to hesitate, revise or backtrack during the performance. The story should appear as if it could not have been told in another way. Effective storytelling is about a combination of perfection and spontaneity. In the preparation, think about elements to be included, the order of the telling, the particular emphasis. To the listeners, only show the final cut.

- *Delivery:* Much depends on the non-verbal aspects, the tone of voice, the facial expression, the gestures. Try to feel calm and relaxed at the start. Be close to the audience you are presenting your story to as an individual, in a conversation. Use body movements to show your interest in the entire audience. Move toward the audience, look around. Maintain eye-contact. Appropriate gestures and intonation can emphasize key elements. Vary the pace and tone of your story to keep people alert.

At this point the book gave me as a reader the feeling that storytelling was not so easy. That it was a rare skill you really have to practice and practice. And probably it is something that should 'belong' to you, which should fit you. You already need to have a sort of feeling for it. While reading the next eight chapters (every chapter focusing on one narrative pattern), this feeling started to shift. I began to see that stories can be very different. Some stories, like a springboard story (a story you can use to motivate other to action) need to be well prepared. You need to think it through, practice, and perform the story at a specific moment. Other kinds of stories, like introducing yourself or motivating your team to work together are almost already there. It is more about learning to see them and to use those stories in appropriate situations. I realised that to be able to tell a compelling story, you need to know yourself, your values, your way of looking at the world, and your challenges for the future. While reading the book, I started to recognise moments of storytelling done by others. I also started to see possibilities for storytelling in my work and examples of situations where I already used some storytelling.

In the next chapters of the book, Denning describes all eight narrative patterns. From motivating others to action, showing people who you are, to transmitting your or your company's values, sharing knowledge and stimulating collaboration. I very much appreciated the way Denning described those narrative patterns: many examples of stories, concrete suggestions, alternated by deeper thoughts and opinions, and each chapter ending in a practical template to use for crafting a story. It will help you to get a clear view of the kind of story he is talking about and the possible effects it might have in your organisation.

1. Motivate others to action – a springboard story

When, as a leader, you have new ideas you want to implement, storytelling can be of help. This is what Denning calls a 'springboard story'. It helps communicate a complex new idea and ignites action to implement it. It inspires people to implement new ideas in the future and motivates them to take action.

A springboard story is based on an actual example whereby a change was successfully implemented. It is a true story, so specific that people can see the progress they can make by implementing the change idea.

2. Show people who you are – an identity story

Storytelling can also be used to communicate who you are. Denning calls this 'identity stories'. You can use them in situations where you as a manager are asked to take charge of a team, or whereby you need to give a talk to a new audience. Through an identity story you try to convey to the audience that you are someone who might be worth listening to. You don't communicate your entire lifetime of experiences, Denning says. Your audience can easily determine who you are from a representative selection of your life story.

3. Communicate who the company is

Stories can also be used as a way of advertising, branding, communicating who the company/organisation is. Electronic media make it possible to transmit the story globally and repeat it endlessly. Strong 'brand narratives' we all recognise are the Levi Strauss brand, which conveys the message: '*we don't make jeans, we help people look young and hip'*. Or IBM: '*we don't sell computers, we offer business solutions'*. Denning describes in more detail what a brand is, how strong a promise can be and how hard it is to make changes to a brand. Less attention is paid to how to come up with a 'brand narrative', or what such a story should look like.

4. Transmit your values – a values story

Before using a story as a tool to transmit values, leaders need to think clearly about what kinds of values they are talking about. 'Declaring values that are not consistently acted upon may be worse than not declaring any values at all'. Probably this is the most difficult part! Furthermore, Denning says that you can't dictate values. You can only let the listeners see the point for themselves in the story. A values story should therefore be told in a minimalist fashion. This allows the listeners to imagine the details and be involved more actively. The story should be timeless but believable; moreover, a values story doesn't need to be true or to have actually happened.

5. Get people working together

According to Denning, collaboration rests on values, which need to be shared in order for people to work together effectively. Examining underlying values to discover or generate common values brings the group to a deeper understanding, learning and working together. Storytelling can help in establishing common meaning and transmitting values and can give a team the spark that will help it lift its work to a new level.

6. Share knowledge – knowledge sharing stories

According to Denning, the transmission of knowledge is largely made up of storytelling. He states: 'when a problem arises there is something to tell a story about. Weak signals are the fertile area for knowledge sharing stories. We can learn a great deal from stories about 'near misses'. We can also learn from stories with a positive tone. But negative stories far outnumber positive ones.' Knowledge sharing stories should be about issues and difficulties and how they were dealt with, and why the course of action solved the problem. An important aspect is that these stories need an

explanation. Without an explanation, a story about something that has happened is just information.

7. Tame the grapevine

Taming the grapevine is about influencing rumours. Denning looks at rumours, jokes, and anecdotes that go around in organisations as stories in and of themselves. These stories communicate and embody the culture in an organisation. And as a leader you have narrative options for dealing with the 'underground' flow. You can fight story with story, therefore taming the grapevine. The trick is to work with, not against, the flow of the underground river of informal communication that exists in the organisation.

8. Create and share your vision.

The last narrative pattern is about creating a shared vision: telling a story about the future. Something that is not so easy because it requires that you *have* a clear view of the future. And no matter how thoughtfully you look ahead, the future is uncertain and inherently unknowable. There is unpredictability about the future. Because of this uncertainty, choose a story that inspires listeners to think along with you, to start imagining the future for themselves. But beware: people tend to be less willing to believe in future stories, preferring to stay anchored to our past, coupled with a strong desire to hang on to what we know…

The last two chapters of the book are about 'putting it all together', or as I read it, putting storytelling in the work in context. And to be honest, in the beginning I was a bit lost here. Denning goes back to where the book started: leadership. He says, 'in practice, no one faces leadership problems in isolation or in a neat order. Instead, you run into complex situations where multiple challenges appear simultaneously: people need to be persuaded, alliances need to be built, the grapevine needs to be tamed, and knowledge needs to be shared. All at once.'

Having said that, he makes the switch towards transformational innovation as a domain where these kinds of leadership problems occur and where many theories are written and solutions proposed. But none of these theories and solutions solves the problems. Denning's remarks are about using a more organisation-wide approach, less focused on generating ideas, than taking the really good ones and making them actually happen, or looking at innovation as stimulating people to act differently instead of a new way of understanding the problem. Probably my confusion comes from the big step between different narrative patterns, and leadership and innovation. While reading I was trying to find the link with storytelling.

Denning resolves this towards the end of the chapter, stating: 'to solve the problem of innovation, you have to see things from the point of view of participants who are living, breathing, and acting in the world. It is through narrative that we imagine a new story of the future in which we can passionately believe. It is principally by listening to narrative that we learn to adapt the innovation to the evolving realities of the marketplace.' Denning is not so much talking about narrative as a tool for accomplishing a certain purpose, but rather as the basis of an interactive mind-set that involves continuously looking at the world to understand the story that is emerging, and being on the outlook for the possibility of creating a new story that can transform the future. He closes the book by going into the difference between a Napoleonic style

of leadership and being a more interactive Tolstoyan leader. This fits into his idea that storytelling is not just a tool but more a way of looking around, seeing things and being in interaction with the world around you… basically, an interactive approach to leadership.

My reflection

In my opinion, Denning makes a convincing case in this book. Moreover, writing a book in which storytelling comes alive for the reader is no mean feat. The book itself is a demonstration of how the performance of a story is crucial. The many interesting examples he gives bring his point alive, putting storytelling in a broader perspective and making it concrete.

When I started to read the book, telling stories was something huge, something special which is totally different from the things I am doing, and hard to learn. During the course of reading the book, my thoughts about storytelling changed from thinking it was difficult, to the impression that with some practice and feeling for it, it is possible to start using some storytelling in my work, becoming a more interactive leader myself.

Some elements in the book (for example the part about telling your life story) make you think more thoroughly about yourself. What would be your story? Is this story authentic? Or do I allow myself to let my values be defined by others? Or, in what situations am I a leader? Where can I use storytelling? How do I talk about myself at the moment? What would change if I add storytelling to my personal introduction?

Finally, I appreciate the connection between storytelling and leadership Denning makes. It is this broader perspective that differentiates the book from other storytelling guides. But to truly appreciate storytelling as an interactive approach to leadership, rather than just a communication tool, you have to read the whole book.

I would definitely recommend this book to everyone who is interested in storytelling from an organisational point of view, whether you are a leader, or you have moments in your work where you have a leadership role. This book might help you look at the stories you and others are using and help you to see new opportunities for change and innovation.

About the author

Sibrenne Wagenaar studied Educational Science and Technology at the University of Twente in the Netherlands. She worked for eight years with Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company, a consultancy firm that is specialised in the field of learning problems in organisations, strategic human resource development, competence development and knowledge productivity. She is now a learning facilitator at the Knowledge Centre of PSO, an umbrella organisation for capacity building of civil society organisations in developing countries. Her fields of interest are professionalising people responsible

for learning in organisations, making the design process a learning process, competency based learning, and facilitating learning and knowledge sharing in groups. In her work she has a special focus on humanitarian assistance.
E-mail: Wagenaar@pso.nl

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The KM4Dev FAQ Renewal Project: a cross-organisational knowledge sharing experience

Urs Karl Egger

This contribution to *Community Notes* gives a glimpse into the workings of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Renewal Project. The team consisted of Urs Karl Egger, Ben Ramalingam, Lucie Lamoureux and Nancy White. With a grant from Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC), the team started in the spring of 2005 with a project for updating and reviving the FAQ section on the website (http://www.km4dev.org/index.php/articles/faqs/) of the Knowledge Management for Development (KM4Dev) online community.

Up to now, the team has scanned all the past KM4Dev mailing list messages along with the data from KM4Dev community surveys and have compiled a list of 150 potential topics. We have chosen four of them and are about to choose the next four based on a recent survey among the members. In the following section, a first instalment of our work is presented: an answer to the question 'What are effective ways for cross-organisational knowledge sharing?'

We have been having a grand time creating sample FAQs in our online 'FAQtory' - a wiki where we have gathered our source material to draft and edit our initial offerings (http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/). Very helpful are also our electronic workspace on Dgroups (http://www.dgroups.org) and regular phone conferences. We have also started to gather our reflections on our process so we can learn about making FAQs. (http://www.km4dev.org/wiki/index.php/FAQtory_Process_Observations). The examples of statements below show that writing FAQs for KM4Dev is an enriching experience for all involved:

> *I was at first quite overwhelmed when mining the archives to find source materials for the FAQ I was working on. But once I gathered all the material into a word document and started reading it closely, it became fascinating.*
>
> *The amount of wisdom packed into our discussion archives is amazing.*
>
> *By carefully sifting through the (often impassioned) discussions between KM4Dev community members to synthesise my first FAQ, I found myself reflecting deeply on the subject, and learning a lot about my own approach to my work.*
>
> *Going through archived list emails has been much more fun than I ever expected!*

Effective ways for cross-organisational knowledge sharing

Across the globe, thousands of development agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), other organisations and consultants are reinventing wheels and repeating the same mistakes again and again. So why is there not more cross-organisational knowledge sharing and learning?

In fact, there is a lot of cross-organisational knowledge sharing going on, and sometimes too much. Numerous cross-organisational communities of practices or networks exist, countless workshops and conferences are taking place, and hundreds of training institutions offer courses for almost every topic relevant for development cooperation. Is this not enough or is current cross-organisational knowledge sharing simply not effective?

This FAQ discusses first what added value cross-organisational knowledge sharing creates and what is different about knowledge from within organisations. Afterwards the pre-conditions for cross-organisational knowledge sharing are outlined and possible organisational forms presented. In the last part, you will find some tips on effective approaches and tools for cross-organisational knowledge sharing and how to get started.

Added value of cross-organisational knowledge sharing

Why is cross-organisational knowledge sharing important? Knowledge sharing between organisations can be beneficial for the participating individuals and organisations, as well as, as the examples below show, for development cooperation in general.

Examples of benefits for individuals and organisations include:

- Access to information and knowhow;
- Learning from others;
- Better understanding of needs and political agendas;
- Strengthening of capabilities;
- Pooling of resources and synergy development;
- Network expansion;
- Catalyst for establishing partnerships;
- Staging area for new ideas and innovative solutions;
- Intelligent division of assignments by focusing on specific strengths; and
- Benchmarking with other organisations or institutions.

Cross-organisational knowledge sharing also creates general benefits for development cooperation:

- More efficiency and effectiveness in development cooperation;
- Wider acceptance of complex challenges in development cooperation;
- Contributions to learning and shortened learning cycles by way of information and knowledge exchanges;
- Improvements to the information and knowledge base for decision-making enabled through the accumulation of information and knowledge;
- Linking of sectors, professions, countries, regions, and cultures and so on, contributing to more coordination, coherence and innovation;

- More balanced policy decisions; and
- Increased attention to certain topics in the policy agenda.

What is different about cross-organisational knowledge sharing?

The challenges of cross-organisational knowledge sharing are very similar to those in large international organisations, but there are also some differences. Cross-organisational knowledge sharing depends on the motivation and engagement of the involved organisations or professionals. Unlike in organisations, for example, there is no Director or Management Board demanding a knowledge sharing system.

Knowledge sharing between organisations faces a couple of challenges. Working in similar areas, they are in competition with each other for mandates and funding. They generally focus on their own needs and interests and, in order to avoid being taken advantage of, hesitate to share their knowledge with others. The staff in many organisations has no incentives to share their experiences with other organisations. Their engagement in external knowledge sharing, for example, is not appreciated and does not contribute to their internal career. Copyrights, patents, and other ownership issues are another challenge for cross-organisational knowledge sharing. In some cases also bureaucracy and red tape block knowledge sharing.

Cross-organisational knowledge sharing is also challenged by the variety of organisations and people involved: multiple cultural perceptions; language problems; different interpretations, frameworks and wording in the numerous disciplines and varying interests in the North, South and East. Such diversity makes it difficult to find a common denominator.

Last but not least, there is strong pressure in development cooperation to produce concrete outputs and outcomes. Cross-organisational knowledge sharing, however, is a long-term task where the output and outcome is not evident in the short term and often very difficult to measure. This is one of the reasons why it is more difficult to raise funds for cross-organisational knowledge sharing.

Pre-conditions for cross-organisational knowledge sharing

Successful cross-organisational knowledge sharing depends on a number of pre-conditions:

- Those involved and the organisations, as well, must clearly see a need for cross-organisational knowledge sharing and a benefit must result for all partners.
- The organisations involved require sufficient resources, such as time and funding for cross-organisational knowledge sharing, or they have to allocate their immediate resources accordingly
- Cross-organisational knowledge sharing is strongly based on good personal relationships or networks. These relationships form the basis for the necessary trust and confidence.
- Those individuals involved and their organisations have to be strongly committed to cross-organisational knowledge sharing and should not treat it as a side activity.

- Important are intercultural communication skills, open-mindedness and the willingness to learn from others.
- Cross-organisational knowledge sharing requires facilitators or brokers, be it organisations or people, who link organisations and people and moderate the communication flows.
- A sustainable partnership requires a culture of give and take. If partners feel exploited through cross-organisational knowledge sharing they will retreat.

Organisation forms for cross-organisational knowledge sharing

Cross-organisational knowledge sharing can take place through various organisational conduits:

- Thematic local, regional and international networks for knowledge sharing exist for almost every topic in development cooperation. Some are even legal entities and are similar to organisations;
- Strategic partnerships or learning alliances between organisations can contribute considerably to cross-organisational knowledge sharing;
- All over the world, communities of practice are facilitating cross-organisational knowledge sharing;
- A loose organisational form for bringing organisations together for knowledge sharing for a limited time include working groups or joint projects;
- Resource centres also play an important role in cross-organisational knowledge sharing. Resource centres are organisations focusing on information and knowledge sharing in a certain area by providing information, networking, training and capacity building;
- Although often not considered, consultants working for different development organisations are important facilitators for knowledge sharing between organisations. Flying like bees from one organisation to another they cross-pollinate by consolidating and disseminating the experiences they have made;
- Professional associations also play a major role in cross-organisational knowledge sharing by developing professional standards, organising conferences, setting up web portals, or compiling expert directories.

Enabling ways and tools

Most of the tools appropriate for knowledge sharing and learning within organisations are also useful for knowledge sharing across organisations. Examples of particularly useful approaches and tools for cross-organisational knowledge sharing include:

- Learning visits or learning exchanges between two or several organisations;
- Organisation of knowledge fairs for exchanges and learning;
- Organisation of conferences and workshops on specific topics;
- Websites or web portals or cross-references to each other's website;
- Dissemination and exchange of publications (hardcopies and electronic versions), CD ROM, videos, and other information resources;

- Common databases with documents, web links, expert directories or yellow pages, etc.;
- E-mail discussion groups and communities of practice;
- Staff exchanges or staff sharing between organisations; and
- Joint projects and programmes.

Procedure

How should you proceed if you would like to enter into cross-organisational knowledge sharing? Every long journey starts with a first step. If you are interested in sharing information and knowledge with other organisations, provide leadership and do it. Pick up the phone, write an e-mail or contact people at workshops and conferences. Think about what kind of added value of cross-organisational knowledge sharing you expect and what benefits your partners could be interested in.

Keep in mind that you will have to be patient. Cross-organisational knowledge sharing needs time. You have to establish good personal relationships and build trust. A good place to start is with small concrete activities like knowledge sharing meetings, mutual exposure visits, or by a regular exchange of publications. Organise these activities from the beginning jointly with your partners, but enlarge the circle of involved people and organisations not all too quickly. Keep the group small at the beginning. This makes coordination easier and you will develop a kind of group spirit.

Once a cross-organisational collaboration is established, you may try to build up a small community of practice around a specific topic or to launch small joint projects. The scale of possibilities for collaboration is now open and may range from informal exchanges to formal networks or formally agreed upon strategic partnerships.
Cross-organisational knowledge sharing can be very enriching and create benefits for all involved parties, if well organised. But you also have to be aware that sufficient resources like time and funding will be required. So make sure that the organisation you are working for allocates its resources accordingly.

KM4Dev discussions

Since the establishment of the KM4Dev mailing list only two enquiries have addressed knowledge sharing *between* organisations or *cross-agency* knowledge sharing. One of these enquiries led to a number of rich contributions, whereas the other received no responses. In the enquiry stimulating an e-mail discussion, Benjamin Docker raised two questions:

1. Does an internal knowledge sharing culture solicit an inter-agency knowledge sharing culture? What techniques have been used within the development community to produce cultural shifts, through attitude and behavioural changes across organisational boundaries?

2. What examples of the institutionalisation of cross-organisational KS activities exist? What has worked? What lessons have been learned?

The content of the contributions has been summarised in detail above. On the whole the answers given did not differ much.

The respondents were convinced that cross-organisational knowledge sharing is the only way information and knowledge resources can be applied on development problems. However, it was also highlighted that building effective knowledge sharing activities across organisations is very difficult as there are a number of barriers such as a lack of trust, competition, the pressure for concrete outputs, lack of understanding for each other's needs or bureaucracy. Some of the pre-conditions for knowledge sharing between organisations mentioned were, for example, trust established through personal contacts and a knowledge sharing culture based on give and take.

This culture of cross-organisational knowledge sharing will not appear out of the blue, but must be built up based on needs and with sufficient resources, at best from the bottom in small steps, e.g. by creating smaller communities of practice or projects. The respondents also noted that there are several types of cross-organisational knowledge sharing ranging from a unilateral provision of information, to rather general exchanges and knowledge sharing, and on to jointly established partnerships. Organisations can promote cross-organisational knowledge sharing by removing internal hindrances for knowledge sharing, creating incentives and internal policies or acting as brokers and facilitators.

The following members of the KM4Dev community contributed to the discussion thread on cross-organisational knowledge sharing: Benjamin Docker (launched the discussion), Peter Ballantyne, Lucie Lamoureux, Tony Pryor, Chucri Sayegh, Barbara Weaver Smith.

Abstract
This contribution to *Community Notes* gives a glimpse into the workings of the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Renewal Project of the KM4Dev online community, covering the example of cross-organisational knowledge sharing. The FAQ discusses first what added value cross-organisational knowledge sharing creates and what is different about knowledge from within organisations. Afterwards the pre-conditions for cross-organisational knowledge sharing are outlined and possible organisational forms presented. In the last part, you will find some tips on effective approaches and tools for cross-organisational knowledge sharing and how to get started.

About the author

Urs Karl Egger is Knowledge Management and Networking Specialist. He has been working for Skat for four years, a resource centre and consultancy for development cooperation.

Urs Karl Egger, Skat, Vadianstrasse 42, CH-9000 St. Gallen, Switzerland. E-mail: urs.egger@skat.ch

Next issue of the *KM4D Journal*

The first issue of the *KM4D Journal* second volume (April 2006) will deal with 'Effective knowledge sharing for development in Africa.'

Guest editors comprise Dina El Halaby (Global Development Network), Reine Djuidje Kouam (Young Entrepreneurs for the NEPAD), Kingo Mchombu (University of Namibia) and Alice Mungwa (African Union Commission), working with Chief Editor, Julie Ferguson (Hivos).

It is widely felt that policies informed by a local understanding of development problems and solutions are more likely to have positive outcomes for poor people in developing and transition countries. However, national producers of knowledge may face problems in communicating this understanding and knowledge to national, regional and international audiences due to limiting factors, such as lack of access to the Internet, closed institutional cultures, lack of resources and capacity to share knowledge. At the same time, potential endusers of knowledge may have problems accessing locally generated knowledge due to factors such as atomised availability, lack of time, variable quality and the wider availability of Northern knowledge.

This issue of the *KM4D Journal* will present the challenges that African institutes face in knowledge sharing (KS), how to overcome these challenges, who will play a role and the potential for partnerships and capacity building efforts to share knowledge more effectively across the continent. Case studies of KS initiatives in Africa – both successes and failures – will be presented.

This issue will include the following contributions:

- A case study by Ednah Karamagi on an initiative towards improving farmers' livelihoods through knowledge exchange in rural Uganda.
- A comparative analysis of two networks focusing on knowledge management and natural resources in Africa, by Tony Prior, Anna van der Heijden and Lars Soeftestad.
- An article by Amenya Nyakundi focusing on the challenges faced by communities in Kenya to sustain, pass-on and effectively use indigenous knowledge sharing methods, in the absence of modern health facilities.
- Zenobia Africa will share experiences using peer reviews in building a learning network for local government in South Africa.
- Contributions from DR Congo, Kenya, Tanzania, and more, plus an interview with Kingo Mchombu.

Forthcoming: **April 2006**