Knowledge Sharing in International Development
NGOs and Partnerships: Towards Addressing the Inefficiencies

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Knowledge is going to be the new inequality – where does it fit in the SDGs?


• NGOs need to reinvent themselves in light of contextual changes and increasing challenges (Elbers and Schulpen, 2015).
• Organisational learning (Kwon, 2012) – linked to evaluation and accountability (Ebrahim, 2003)
• Knowledge management: organisational practices that facilitate and structure knowledge sharing and learning (Ferguson et al., 2010).
• Practices never fixed or even self-evident (Corfield et al., 2013)
• Prioritisation of policy-related learning over field-based learning (Hovland, 2003)
• Successful development interventions depend on the availability and application of context-relevant knowledge (Powell, 2006; Ferguson et al., 2010; Ferguson, 2016).
Our Research Study

Aim: To informing the development and implementation of an effective knowledge management strategy in an international development NGO [Trócaire]

Objectives
- Understand how knowledge is shared in practice in Trócaire
- Outline potential to improve how knowledge can be shared more effectively in the context of a partnership approach to development
- Identify opportunities for improved knowledge sharing across the sector

Methodology

- Sectoral Perspective
  - Workshop, June 2016
- In-depth engagement with NGO:
  - Headquarters
  - Field perspective

Research informed by ...

- Types of knowledge: General / specific (contextual) (Zack, 1999; Choudhury and Sabherwal, 2001) ... Declarative / procedural (Moorman and Miner, 1998) ... Rationale / analytic (Markus, 2001) ... Process / domain / institutional (Reich, 2008) ...
- Kontinen (2016) - “vocabularies of practice”: project management, facilitation, community, bureaucracy, enterprise, friendship, faith, science
- Knowledge as an ongoing social accomplishment (Orlikowski, 2002)
The Sectoral Perspective: Gaps

- Learning at the individual level
  - Staff turnover
- Overcoming silos of knowledge
- Dominance of organisational culture
- Facilitating adaptive programmes
- Identifying/Prioritising what knowledge needs to be shared
- Linking/Connecting to knowledge at the right time
- Lack of reflection and reflective spaces
- Knowledge co-creation

The Sectoral Perspective: Investment

- Learning events
- Peer learning
- Targeted knowledge sharing
- Building the right systems to identify and connect people
- Making Knowledge consumable
- Knowledge sharing advocates
- Trial, Learn, Adapt
Context is critical...

Towards Effective Knowledge Sharing [NGO]

**Stages**

- Prioritising the knowledge that needs to be communicated
- Prioritising Learning and Sharing K. Sharing advocates for use and benefits
- Representing field staff knowledge
- Targeted knowledge sharing
- Linking to right expertise at right time
- Expertise Database
- Valuing field staff knowledge
- Overcoming silos
- Engaging in peer learning
- Recognising contextual obstacles
- Provide space(s) for reflection
- Trial, Learn, Adapt

**Conceptualising (Roles)**

- Trigger: Problem
- Outside existing network
- Sharing for impact
- Is sharing something I/we do?
- Is sharing something I/we’re supported to do?

**Categorising (to Connect)**

- Who can help solve my problem?

**Co-Creation (through Connection)**

- What is the conversation about?
- How is it facilitated?

**Reflection**

- Closing the learning loop
- Organisational learning