



Facilitating Organisational Learning; Insights from Practice

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Preface

When it was decided that PSO would stop its activities by the end of 2012, it became clear to us that our work would best be finalised in such a way that our members and the entire sector as such would feel inspired to continue to improve their work based on their learning as participants in a number of PSO collaborations over the years.

PSO has on a regular basis carried out its own evaluations of the learning trajectories based on which we would define a next phase with the participating members and their partners. However, this time there will be no next phase under the leadership of PSO. We therefore realised that it was now more important than ever to make a special effort to lift all the individual learning trajectories up to a higher level. It was also a challenge, since we did not have a lot of time to realise this for all the running learning activities being some 50 learning working trajectories with members, 6 collective learning trajectories, 13 thematic learning trajectories and quite a number of additional events and networks. Moreover, the lessons learned from these evaluations should lead to interesting insights for the Dutch Development NGOs and the sector as a whole since PSO is no longer able to incorporate these lessons into their own work.

To coordinate this huge undertaking we contracted Kees Zevenbergen as our evaluation coordinator. He was able in a very short time to assemble a group of skilled evaluators who managed to do the job and in doing so also stimulating our members to think through the whole road they had walked with PSO, to capture the most important lessons, and to work on steps for the future.

Many thanks to Cees Balk, Linda Blank, Jos Brand, Paul Buhrs, Heinz Greijn, Thomas Lewinsky, Geert Phlix, Fons van der Velden and Marieke de Wal. Four of them – Geert Phlix, Fons van der Velden, Marieke de Wal and Kees Zevenbergen – were also tasked to carry out a so-called meta-evaluation in order to draw lessons that will have meaning for the sector as whole. Their findings are laid down in this report 'Facilitating Organisational Learning; Insights from Practice'.

I am proud to present the results of the combined effort of members, the PSO learning facilitators and the team of evaluators. It shows that PSO has made a difference in many organisations and that capacity development and learning is now firmly on the agendas of many of them. We have dared to venture in the area of organisational change processes, where success is not easily achieved even in the best of circumstances. We have worked from practice, and learned by doing and by doing so have made a beginning in a change process in the sector. We are proud of that. We have learned a lot on the way. We share the insights presented in this report, and hope they will be of value to our

members, their partners as well as to the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs in furthering the discourse on and experience with capacity development.

Finally, I sincerely hope that this legacy of PSO will inspire you, the sector as a whole, and our partners in the South to continue to work for better development results and a stronger civil society in a rapidly changing world.

Margo Kooijman
Director PSO

List of Major Abbreviations

CBO	Community Based Organisations
CIDIN	Centre for International Development Issues Nijmegen
CLT	Collective Learning Trajectory
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAI	Development Alternatives, Inc.
DFD	Diaspora Forum for Development
ETC	Educational Training Consultancy
FOEI	Friends of the Earth International
FPU	Free Press Unlimited
GIP	Global Initiative on Psychiatry
HIRDA	Himilo Relief and Development Association
HRD	Human Resource Development
IANRA	International Alliance on Natural Resources in Africa
ICCO	Interkerkelijke Organisatie voor Ontwikkelingssamenwerking
IDS	Institute for Development Studies
IICD	International Institute for Communication and Development
INK	Instituut Nederlandse Kwaliteit
INTRAC	International NGO Training and Research Centre
IOB	Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie
LWP	Learning Working Path
MF	Marokko Fonds
MCNV	Medisch Comité Nederland-Vietnam
MFS	Medefinancieringsstelsel (Co-financing system)
MSP	Multi Stakeholder Processes
MWPN	Multicultural Women Peacemakers Network
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIMD	Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy
NIZA	Nederlands instituut voor zuidelijk Afrika
NLRC	Netherlands Red Cross
OA	Organisational Assessment
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OPIT	Overleg Particulier Initiatief Tropenartsen
PM&E	Planning, Monitoring & Evaluation
POP	Persoonlijk ontwikkelingsplan (personal development plan)
PRIA	Participatory Research in Asia

SNV	Netherlands Development Organisation
SOMO	Stichting Onderzoek Multinationale Ondernemingen
SRHR	Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
STRO	Social Trade Organisation
TA	Technical Assistance
THP	The Hunger Project
TIE	Transnationals Information Exchange
TLP	Thematic Learning Programme
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOY	United Network of Young Peacebuilders
VSO	Voluntary Services Overseas
VWN	VluchtelingenWerk Nederland

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1 History, Methodology & Backdrop

Organisational Learning: Knowing what Works

Way back in 1993 an OECD publication stated that ‘the failure to learn from failure’ is most probably the most important shortcoming of the development sector. They observed that development is, or should be, a knowledge-based endeavour. The importance of learning from what works, and why, is essential to success. Knowing what does not work might even be more essential.¹ A year later, Peter Senge published the *Fifth Discipline*, one of the first major studies that indicated the positive correlation between organisational learning and organisational effectiveness.² From the mid-nineties onwards, the notion of organisational learning, which predominantly emerged from the corporate sector, slowly but steadily gained more ground in the development sector as well.

In the Netherlands, the PSO Association (an umbrella organisation of all the major Dutch development organisations) has been a leading institution with regard to capacity development in general and organisational learning in particular. From 2007 onwards, PSO has been supporting organisational learning through a variety of instruments and approaches. The present publication has the ambition to share insights and lessons that can be learned from experiences with these instruments and approaches. The purpose is to provide suggestions at strategic, policy and operational level that may enhance the organisational learning of development organisations.

From ‘Personnel Service Overseas’ to ‘Facilitating Learning’

The PSO Association³ is an institution, not only within the Dutch development community but also in a number of low and medium-income countries (‘developing countries’), where Dutch expatriate development workers and PSO member organisations have been working with local partner organisations. PSO was founded in 1985 as a result of the merger between the Dutch Youth Volunteers Corps and OPIT.⁴ During the initial years the emphasis was on making Dutch expatriate personnel available to the partner organisations of Dutch development organisations in developing countries. Generations of Dutch experts, in the beginning often called volunteers, have served as

1 Smillie, I., & Helmich, H. (Eds.). (1993). *Non-Governmental organisations and governments; stakeholders for development*. Paris: OECD. p. 18.

2 Senge, P. (1994a). *The fifth discipline fieldbook. Strategies and tools for building a learning organisation*. London: Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

3 Originally: Personnel Service Overseas.

4 In Dutch: Jongeren Vrijwilligers Corps en vereniging Overleg Particulier Initiatief Tropenartsen.

staff for local development organisations that were faced with an absolute or relative shortage of personnel.⁵

On account of especially UNDP publications⁶ from the late nineties onwards a debate emerged about the relevance, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability of personnel services and technical assistance. As a result PSO evolved into an organisation that provides support to the capacity development⁷ of development actors in developing countries. In 2003 PSO established a knowledge centre on capacity development and started funding capacity development projects and programmes. In 2010 the organisation merged its knowledge centre with project management, which led to the Learning for Change programme.

In 2010 PSO reformulated its mission:

'PSO's aim is to improve the quality and effectiveness of Dutch international cooperation. More specifically we challenge development organisations to do things better and to do better things. PSO offers opportunities by providing effective instruments for Dutch NGOs to learn and experiment with their partners in the South and with colleagues in the North on the subject of sustainable capacity development of civil society. PSO fills the gap between context-specific learning-through-practice of development organisations and the generic learning of knowledge institutions. PSO offers a multi-perspective approach to problems and solutions, as it is embedded in an international coalition of knowledge and learning organisations that share similar principles'.⁸

5 For a brief history of Technical Assistance in general and with regard to PSO in particular reference is made to Hoebink, P., & Van der Velden, F. (2001). *Van tropenarts en vrijwilliger tot institutieopbouw: Nederlandse technische hulp in verleden en toekomst*. In L. Schulpen (Red.). *Hulp in ontwikkeling: bouwstenen voor de toekomst van internationale samenwerking*. (pp. 75–90). Assen: Van Gorcum; Zevenbergen, A. (2002) *De deskundige: leerling en leermeester: een halve eeuw uitzending van ontwikkelingswerkers*. Den Haag: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken; Van der Velden, F., & Zweers, J. (1997). *Personele samenwerking: Beleid, resultaten en perspectieven*. In K. Lieten & F. van der Velden (Red.). *Grenzen aan de hulp: Beleid en effecten van ontwikkelingssamenwerking*. (pp. 245–269). Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Het Spinhuis; Van de Veen, H., & Ars, B. (1997). *Vogels van diverse pluimage: Vereniging PSO, 10 jaar personele samenwerking met ontwikkelingslanden*. Den Haag: vereniging PSO.

6 Berg, E.J. (1993). *Rethinking technical cooperation. Reforms for capacity building in Africa*. New York: UNDP; Fukuda-Parr, S., Lopes, C., & Malik, K. (Eds.). (2002). *Capacity for development. New solutions to old problems*. New York/London: UNDP/Earthscan; Browne, S. (Ed.). (2002). *Developing capacity through technical cooperation: country experiences*. London: Earthscan/UNDP; Lopes, C., & Theisoohn, T. (2003). *Ownership, leadership and transformation: Can we do better for capacity development?* London/New York: UNDP/Earthscan.

7 Defined by the UNDP as '... the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development goals over time'. UNDP. (2009). *Capacity Development; A UNDP primer*. New York: UNDP. p. 54.

8 PSO. (2010). *Knowing what works; PSO Policy Plan 2011 – 2015*. The Hague: PSO. p. 27.

PSO supports development organisations that want to improve the capacity development work they undertake with their partners in the South. All PSO interventions are aimed at capacity development and ultimately the improved quality and efficiency of development work.

In hindsight it should be observed that over the past one and a half decades the core identity of PSO has changed substantially. Accommodating these types of fundamental changes asks a lot from any organisation, both in terms of methodology and instrument development, in terms of personnel development as well as in terms of managing external expectations. As will be elaborated in the next sections of this publication, the rapid and fundamental nature of the changes PSO had to effectuate did indeed influence the effectiveness of the organisation's operations.

PSO Instruments to Support Learning

Since 2007 PSO supports learning processes on four levels:

- 1 organisational learning through so-called Learning Working Paths;
- 2 inter-organisational learning through Collective Learning Trajectories;
- 3 in-depth learning through Thematic Learning Programmes; and
- 4 sector-wide knowledge sharing through Outreach Programmes.

These are further explained below.⁹

Learning Working Paths (LWP) – To Support Organisational Learning

The aim of organisational learning support¹⁰ is to further professionalise development organisations in order to improve the quality of capacity development interventions in the South as well as the relations with partner organisations. In this context 'professionalise' means: further increase the knowledge of capacity development, to be able to interpret this knowledge in one's own practice (policy, strategy, interventions, behaviour), and to improve learning on these issues. The LWP is one of the instruments for supporting organisational learning and is always tailored to the specific needs of the organisation concerned. A LWP is generally designed by a member of PSO and benefits the organisation in the Netherlands, its field offices (if applicable and relevant), offices of its international family (if applicable and relevant), and its partner organisations.

⁹ Ibid, page 35 – 51.

¹⁰ PSO. (2011). *Learning by doing – the role and ambition of PSO; PSO Business Plan 2011–2012*. The Hague: PSO. p. 8.

A typical LWP is characterised by:

- a preparation phase during which a specific learning question, or sometimes a learning objective, is identified and a contract is signed between PSO and the organisation concerned;
- an implementation phase during which the learning question is addressed. This can happen through a broad array of activities like organising workshops/trainings, facilitating partner meetings, organising brainstorming sessions and writeshops and undertaking field visits;
- a consolidation phase during which lessons learned, and the tools, policies and strategies developed become embedded in the organisation's way of working; and
- an evaluation and reflection phase during which the effectiveness of the LWP for the organisation and its partners is assessed.

Collective Learning Trajectories (CLT) – To Support Inter-organisational Learning

The aim of inter-organisational learning support¹¹ is to professionalise organisations in the field of capacity development by learning together on a specific topic with other organisations from and with each other. Through CLTs staff from different development organisations come together around a specific subject to jointly learn and become change agents in their respective organisations. A CLT enables organisations to tap into existing knowledge and generally consists of a number of training sessions and gatherings on an issue over a longer period of time, typically 2–6 months. In between meetings the participants test or implement the practices they learned in their work environment. The presence of external experts, often supported by a virtual learning environment, enriches the meetings.

Thematic Learning Programmes (TLP) – To Support In-Depth Learning

The aim of in-depth learning support¹² is to enlarge thematic knowledge in the field of capacity development and to enable its field-testing. TLPs provide development organisations with opportunities to undertake studies and action research on a specific topic in collaboration with their partners and supported by capable and relevant academic institutions. The themes on which TLPs may be organised emerge from LWPs, CLTs, or from the PSO International Advisory Board. A typical TLP consists of a series of field studies or action research supported by an academic institution, case writeshops, cross-case analyses, mini-conferences, publication writing and the sharing of insights. By participating in a TLP, development organisations and their partners collaboratively experiment with new tools and strategies, jointly implement peer reviews and share lessons learned through collective learning activities.

¹¹ Ibid, p. 9.

¹² Ibid, p. 10.

Outreach Programmes – To Support Active Knowledge Sharing

The aim of the outreach programme is to optimise the sharing of knowledge¹³ in order to increase the quality of development work. The outreach programme is an umbrella under which PSO, often in close collaboration with Partos – the branch organisation of the development sector in the Netherlands – has organised a series of diverse activities to share the knowledge and lessons learned during the various learning trajectories with a wider audience of both members and non-members. These activities range from the organisation of a single workshop to a series of events or the facilitation of a network with a more or less fixed audience. Whereas LWPs, CLTs, and TLPs are only open to member and partner organisations, outreach activities are open to anyone interested.

Evaluation of Learning Paths with a Focus on Learning

Scope of the Evaluation of LWPs and TLPs

At the end of 2012 PSO will cease to exist. As part of the process of closure the PSO management decided to commission an external evaluation of the various learning instruments, with a forward looking aim:

'The focus of the evaluation will be on learning from the past with a forward looking eye: to collect and review the experiences and lessons of the learning trajectories to further the process of exploration and reflection on a sustainable integration of learning practices and improved learning capacity within the organisations concerned'.¹⁴

The evaluation was carried out in two stages. First, individual evaluations of LWPs, TLPs, CLTs and the Outreach Programme¹⁵ were executed. Secondly, a synthesis of the major insights that have emerged from the case studies was written (the present document).

During 2011–2012 PSO supported a total of 49 LWPs, all with member organisations, most of which were launched during 2009 and 2010.¹⁶ Out of these 34 have been evaluated by an external

13 Ibid, p. 11.

14 PSO, Terms of Reference Evaluation PSO Learning Trajectories, June 2012. (Annex I)

15 An overview of the evaluation reports in which the present synthesis report is 'grounded' is provided in Annex II.

16 Of these 49 LWPs, 4 ended prematurely because the organisations ceased to exist and 2 LWPs joined into one as both organisations concerned merged. Of the remaining 46 LWPs, 37 have been evaluated by external parties, of which 34 during the past months and 3 during 2011. 6 LWPs have not been externally evaluated as these ended during the beginning of 2011 or because they were considered to be too small or too specific to justify such an external exercise. Of the remaining 3 LWPs, one organisation undertook an evaluation of the LWP through the production of a video, and for two LWPs the evaluation is in process.

evaluator during the period June – October 2012. Alongside these recent external evaluations, three LWPs were evaluated in 2011 and nine conversations have taken place with the leadership of member organisations concerned for those LWPs in particular that were either not evaluated or for LWPs that were evaluated during 2011. PSO has in the same period supported 13 TLPs, of which 11 have been evaluated. The present synthesis builds on both the external evaluations undertaken as well as on conversations with the leadership of member organisations concerned.

The main users of the outcomes of the individual LWP and TLP evaluations are first and foremost the organisations directly concerned. They may use the findings of the individual evaluations to feed into and strengthen internal learning processes and structures, and to feed into relevant learning processes with external actors.

In order to achieve a certain degree of uniformity in the evaluation of all the learning trajectories, a generic Terms of Reference for all individual LWPs and TLPs was formulated in order to assess the degree to which:

- 1 the personal capacities of staff involved in the learning trajectories improved;
- 2 the organisation's internal learning processes improved as a result of the learning trajectories;
- 3 the organisation changed its policies, strategies or intervention tactics concerning capacity development of civil society as a result of new insights gained from the learning trajectories;
- 4 the quality of capacity development interventions and partner relations improved as a result of the learning trajectories.

Evaluation of the CLTs¹⁷

During the period under review 2010 – 2012, six different CLTs were organised once or twice, with groups of participants varying from 8 – 35 participants. The method chosen to evaluate the CLTs was an online survey, addressing both aspects of personal capacity development, as well as effects at an organisational level. In addition, interviews were held with a select number of participants.

Evaluation of the Outreach Programme¹⁸

During 2011–2012 PSO initiated and supported some 34 Outreach activities covering a large variety of gatherings ranging from one-day meetings around a certain topic to multiple interrelated events organised over a certain period. The Outreach Programme was evaluated using an online survey addressing both the appreciation of participants for the activities undertaken as well as their effect at a personal and organisational level.

17 Blank, 2012.

18 Ibid.

Methodology: Evaluation as Part of the Learning Process

The PSO learning paths were evaluated by a team of external evaluators. In view of the purpose of the evaluation, leading questions were formulated with regard to the purpose and identity of the learning trajectories, the actual implementation of the learning process and analysis of the learning process.

Due to the fact that learning processes are often nonlinear and dynamic processes in which actors co-create outputs and outcomes, learning histories in the form of time lines have been selected as the major tool for primary data collection complemented by bilateral interviews, focus group discussions and reviews of documents. Hence the emphasis was on what has actually emerged instead of a narrow focus on the intervention logic and on what was intended from the start.¹⁹ The studies were mainly qualitative in nature and the individual evaluations and the synthesis were evidence rather than theory-based.²⁰

In order to enhance individual and organisational learning and foster ownership of the outcomes, the individual evaluations were carried out with the active involvement of relevant stakeholders. These included the staff of PSO member organisations and their partners – as far as involved in the learning trajectory – and PSO staff members. Stakeholders were interviewed and participated in the formulation of learning histories. In this way the evaluation became part of the learning trajectory as well: participants were able to reflect on their own learning process while this also contributed to the formulation of lessons learned.

Each individual evaluation report ends with lessons learned and conclusions. Appreciation was expressed by the external evaluator in terms of effectiveness, relevance and sustainability. A review of efficiency of the various trajectories was not included in the ToR.

The present synthesis has been drawn based on the individual evaluation reports. The above-mentioned individual evaluations of the LWPs and TLPs and the evaluation of the CLTs and Outreach programme, plus the available secondary material, form the basis of the present synthesis report. The empirical evidence that emerged from these studies was used as the major input for a mind map that subsequently served as the basis for the structure and content of the synthesis report. The study should therefore be positioned within the tradition of the Grounded Theory Approach

19 Rather than beginning with a hypothesis, the first step was data collection, through a variety of methods. From the data collected, the key points were marked which were linked to relevant scientific theories/concept on/of learning and which generated valuable insights who are presented in the next sections.

20 For further details reference is made to the ToR (Annex I).

because the evaluation process started by 'identifying and describing' case studies and moved on to ordering, or 'categorising' and the next step 'theorising'.²¹

The PSO management provided valuable feedback to an earlier version of this report. Despite the interactive character of the review process, the contents of this publication are the product of the analysis and thinking of the external evaluators involved, who therefore bear final responsibility for the text.

Drivers of Change and Learning

PSO did not evolve in isolation. The evolution of the organisation from an organiser of personnel services overseas, to providing Technical Assistance, to a funder of capacity development programmes, to a facilitator of learning was clearly inspired by a number of trendsetting international publications, public debates and their subsequent translation into policy by the Dutch government as well as other organisations and institutions active in development cooperation. A brief overview of the backdrop and the most significant trends with implications for PSO will be provided in order to be able to position PSO within a continuously evolving development discourse.

Rethinking Technical Cooperation

In the early 1990s UNDP led an in-depth review of the role Technical Cooperation, which resulted in a book entitled 'Rethinking Technical Cooperation – Reforms for Capacity Building in Africa', the so-called 'Berg report'.²² The report concluded that technical cooperation had proven effective in getting the job done, but less effective at developing local institutions or strengthening local capacities; that it was expensive, supply and donor-driven leading to limited local ownership, which often served to heighten dependence on foreign experts, and which often distorted the local labour market and national priorities. The report called for 'radical changes', including greater use of short-term advisors and local consultants, a voluntary transfer of managerial authority over resources to local parties allowing these to organise themselves for personnel, capacity development and training, and embedding programmes in local structures and under local control.

Some ten years later, in 2002, it was again the UNDP that presented a groundbreaking book which included a range of views from practitioners, academics and policy-makers about what had gone right with technical cooperation, what had gone wrong, and how to do it better and perhaps very

21 Glaser, B & Strauss, A. (1995). *The discovery of the grounded theory: strategies for qualitative research*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

22 Berg, 1993.

differently. The book 'Capacity for Development; New Solutions to Old Problems'²³ focused on the questions of indigenous capacity, ownership, civic engagement and new possibilities for knowledge-sharing, for which the revolution in information and communications technologies appeared to offer ample opportunities.

As early as in 1999 the then Dutch Minister of Development Cooperation initiated a process to update Dutch policy and the organisation of Technical Assistance (TA). The first step in this process was the conducting of the so-called 'Interdepartmental Policy Study of the Posting of Personnel for Development Cooperation'.²⁴ This study raised the question to which extent 'the instrument of personnel posting (Technical Assistance) in the domain of development cooperation in its various modalities of operation can be streamlined and thereby applied more effectively'. The interdepartmental working group observed that there is 'room for improvement of the effectiveness and efficiency of TA'. In addition to the recommendations with respect to the organisation of TA, one of the most important recommendations was that 'the Minister of Foreign Affairs ... needs [to establish] a policy framework for TA with measurable objectives, criteria and desired impact'. At the end of 1999, a task force was established for this purpose within the TA agency of the Directorate General at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which basically suggested discontinuing the subsidised (Dutch) expatriate involvement in international development cooperation.²⁵

This change in policy had major repercussions for Dutch TA organisations such as SNV which engaged in a process to become independent from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and started repositioning itself, and for PSO which developed into an organisation first for capacity development and later on for facilitating organisational learning in and amongst development organisations.

Dutch Policy on Strengthening Civil Society

During 2009, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs amongst others inspired by the publications mentioned above, presented its policy paper on civil society organisations²⁶. The policy paper put forward:

23 Fukuda-Parr et al., 2002.

24 IBO-UPO. (1999). Uitzenden met beleid. (IBO-ronde 1998/1999, rapport nr.6, mei). Den Haag: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken.

25 Taakgroep Technische Assistentie. (2000). *Beleidskader technische assistentie; Eindrapport Taakgroep TA*. (2e versie). Den Haag: Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken; Hoebink, P., & Van der Velden, F. (2002). *From volunteerism to professionalism: Technical Assistance of the Netherlands in a change*. Paper for the 10th EADI General Conference 'EU Enlargement in a Changing World; Challenges for Development Co-operation in the 21st Century', Working Group 'Aid and Development', Ljubljana, 19-21 September 2002. (Dutch version: Hoebink & Van der Velden, 2001).

26 Directorate-General for International Cooperation (DGIS). (2009). Policy Memorandum on Civil Society Organisations: Cooperation, Customisation and Added Value. The Hague: DGIS.

'A set of principles for modernising and strengthening the role of civil society organisations in both the North and the South. The modernisation of development cooperation will involve imposing stringent requirements on CSOs in order to guarantee effectiveness. Much has already been achieved via these organisations, but there is room for improvement. The principles are set out in this policy memorandum. At their heart is the desire to achieve a greater focus on systematic social change in support of development, greater involvement among the general public in both the North and South, customised solutions, more combined effort, more effective development cooperation and less fragmentation. The aim is also to align programmes more closely with local problems, as agreed in the Accra Agenda for Action, to focus more clearly on partner countries and to achieve more transparent accountability to all stakeholders. The watchword is: do more with fewer resources'.

In further defining and shaping its collaboration with Dutch Development NGOs through what the Ministry calls its 'civil society channel', the overall strategic aim was set 'to help build a strong and diverse civil society tailored to the local situation. In this connection, strengthening the capacity of local civil society organisations is an aim in and of itself'.²⁷ The memorandum however also indicates that 'as part of the drive to harmonise and streamline development efforts, donor countries will tend to cooperate more on funding civil society organisations at local level. CSO funding will increasingly shift from the North to the South'.²⁸

The memorandum furthermore stressed the need for strategic and meaningful partnerships between Northern and Southern CSOs that aim 'to increase and disseminate knowledge and to promote change via a strong network. This means that there should be a systematic shift within Northern CSOs to allow partners and other representatives of society in the South to have more of a say and more responsibility'.²⁹

During 2010, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs invited Dutch Development NGOs to forward their programme proposals and apply for government grants. The accompanying application form built upon the directions sketched in its policy memorandum, and requested a monitoring protocol and baseline measurement effort³⁰ that went beyond 'the system of customised monitoring', 'removing bureaucracy in the monitoring protocols and annual reporting system' announced in the aforementioned memorandum.³¹

27 Ibid, P. 6.

28 Ibid, p. 8.

29 Ibid, p. 20.

30 Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.) Model Application Form. Cofinancing system II 2011–2015 (MFS II). STAGE 2.

31 DGIS, 2009, p. 26.

The 2010 policy and the accompanying grant application framework, gave the Dutch Development NGOs access to amounts of financial resources to, amongst other, co-fund their capacity development endeavours with their Southern partners. The possibilities to explicitly include learning initiatives in the proposed programmes were enlarged by the invitation of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs to include 'a learning agenda' in the various proposals. During the same period the Ministry decided to continue to fund PSO's operations for another two years. This decision resulted in two well-resourced options available to Dutch Development NGOs to co-fund their capacity development and learning initiatives.

In light of the evolution of development cooperation mentioned above, it may not be surprising that most learning initiatives supported by PSO are driven by learning questions and learning objectives that are in one way or another centred around issues such as:

- shifting from a project-implementation mode to a supporting capacity development of partners mode: addressing issues like how to understand capacity development, how to support it, how to design and manage a Dutch-based organisation around it, and which tools (e.g. how to undertake organisational capacity assessments) to best introduce to translate ambition into practice;
- shifting from a Dutch HQ-centred approach to supporting development to a more networked and decentralised approach: addressing issues like how to shape and introduce alliances, how to organise joint programming and joint resource mobilisation with partner organisations, and how to shape and organise South-South and North-South knowledge development and sharing;
- improving the nature and quality of relations between Dutch Development NGOs with their partner organisations: addressing issues like how to clarify roles and responsibilities in the international 'aid-arena', how to combine donor-roles with partner-roles, how to create more equal relationships, and how to assure a fair influence of partner organisations on the decision-making processes concerning programmes and fund-allocations; and issues like
- improving the quality of planning, monitoring and evaluation systems and the role these systems can play in learning better from practice: focusing on issues such as which systems fit best with objectives and practice, how to adapt and introduce these into the organisations concerned, how to organise the required baseline studies, how to introduce the 5C-model, and how to find the right balance between 'result communication' and 'learning'.

Since 2011 the situation has changed, mainly fuelled by the effectuated and announced cuts in the government budgets for development cooperation. It might well be that especially these budget cuts will continue to compel Dutch Development NGOs to again review their roles and relations in development cooperation in general and with regard to capacity development in particular.

Structure of this Publication

In the following chapters an overview will be provided of the results achieved by PSO and member organisations with regard to the different types of learning instruments promoted by PSO (Chapter 2). Then an overview will be provided of the major insights that have been distilled from the individual evaluations clustered into three categories: 'Theory of Learning' (Chapter 3), 'Design of Learning Trajectories' (4), and 'Implementation of Learning Trajectories' (5). Each chapter starts with the presentation of empirical evidence, followed by reflection and analysis and concludes with insights.

In the epilogue (6) the members of the study team share some strategic considerations for future policies and organisational structure with regard to how to strengthen the learning capacity of Dutch development actors working in the field of capacity development.

2 Results of the Learning Trajectories

Over the past couple of years PSO has supported an impressive number of learning trajectories. These have gathered many Dutch PSO member organisations and their Southern partner organisations around issues that in one way or another were considered of importance to strengthening their joint efforts in capacity development.

These learning trajectories have generated an enormous flux of activities, both in the Netherlands as well as overseas: gatherings have been held all over the world, training sessions have been organised, action research undertaken, coaching sessions and writeshops organised and field trips effectuated. Thousands of days have been invested, mobilising trainers, coaches, facilitators, experts, consultants and staff of the organisations and their partners who were involved.

The degree to which the various learning trajectories have been successful in properly dealing with their guiding learning questions and/or learning objectives was reflected upon during the individual evaluations. This section presents a general reflection on the results generated at instrument level. It addresses the question to which degree the specific learning instruments that PSO has developed and implemented in recent years have indeed contributed to achieving their specific aims. The various factors that are seen to have positively or negatively influenced the effectiveness of the learning instruments will be hashed out in subsequent sections.

Results of the Learning Working Paths

Appreciation of Results

The aim of the learning–working paths (LWP)³² was to further professionalise development organisations in order to improve the quality of capacity development interventions in the South as well as relations with partner organisations.

In this context, PSO defined 'professionalise' as: to further increase the knowledge of capacity development, to be able to interpret this knowledge in one's own practice (policy, strategy, interventions, behaviour), and to improve learning on these issues.

An analysis of the degree to which the LWPs have in their own right contributed to a significant improvement of the quality of capacity development interventions is a hazardous endeavour.

32 PSO, 2011, p. 8.

First of all because both 'capacity development' as well as the 'increased quality' thereof are vast containers which neither PSO nor its members have a well-defined nor explicit and commonly shared understanding of. There are also no commonly shared and agreed upon indicators for such interventions. In brief, the development sector in the Netherlands has not been able to produce, and/or uphold, commonly shared quality criteria for capacity development.³³ Secondly, because a specific baseline was established in only three LWPs³⁴ to enable a formal assessment of progress made on the matter. Thirdly, and most importantly, because not all LWPs explicitly focus on a full blown improvement of their capacity development interventions in the South.

What can however be said is that the analysis of the evaluations of the 49 LWPs that PSO supported during the 2011-2012 period, clearly indicated the following results that have in one way or another contributed to the LWP aim mentioned above:

The LWPs have contributed to increased personal capacities of the staff involved in their implementation, both at PSO member organisations as well as at participating Southern organisations.

In 87% of all LWPs evaluated, there were clear indications of the improved personal capacities of staff involved in the learning trajectories. As a matter of course, the exact nature of these improved capacities depends on the specific learning questions or learning objectives for the LWP and the learning path followed. For some staff these were improved capacities on the design and/or use of a specific tool, for others it was about how to better relate to partner organisations. For some staff the improved capacities were about better understanding how learning works and how it can be embedded in practice, for others they were about how to combine knowledge development with capacity development.

In 10% of the LWPs the indications concerning improved personal capacities were mixed (some did – some did not), and in 3% of the LWPs no improvements were reported. These were all LWPs that either focused on issues that no longer appeared to be of relevance during their implementation or LWPs that did not fully materialise as a learning exercise (as accessing PSO funding appeared to be their only driver).

³³ In its *Synthesis report of the evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development – Facilitating resourcefulness* (2011), the Policy and Operations Department of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs (IOB) formulated a number of key characteristics of 'sound' capacity development (see page 130 of the report). These have however, as yet, not been widely embraced and translated in operational guidelines by organisations working on capacity development.

³⁴ These three LWPs were the last supported by PSO. In their design PSO included lessons learned from earlier LWP.

The LWPs have contributed to the professionalisation of PSO member organisations as well as of participating Southern partner organisations.

In view of the more general aim for the LWPs that was formulated as the ability to interpret increased knowledge on capacity development in one's own practice, it appeared appropriate to analyse the different individual LWPs and to assess the degree to which these LWPs were indeed instrumental in:

- the development of a capacity development-related policy, strategy, method or tool (in brief 'a capacity development product');
- the implementation of that 'capacity development product' (a policy, strategy, method or tool agreed upon, rolled out and implemented at the relevant levels within the organisation and/or amongst partner organisations); and
- having the 'capacity development product' operational (a policy, strategy, method or tool is mastered at the relevant levels and is beginning 'to do what it was designed to do').

The analysis revealed that at the time of this evaluation in 64% of all LWPs evidence was found that the organisations concerned did indeed develop the specific product that was either intended right from the start of the LWPs, or that appeared to be of relevance during the implementation of the LWPs. In 56% of the cases, this 'product' was implemented and in 44% of the cases it is fully operational.

Based on these results, one could safely assume that in 44% of the LWPs under consideration the organisations concerned are better off and more able at performing at least parts of their core-business. One could furthermore safely assume that for at least 64% of the LWPs the organisations concerned now have a number of building blocks in place that are considered to be of importance on the path to becoming more able organisations in terms of supporting capacity development processes.

The LWPs have contributed to the introduction and strengthening of learning moments at PSO member organisations.

54% of the LWPs have addressed 'learning issues' with a sometimes explicit and sometimes implicit intention to become a more learning-oriented organisation. In most of these cases the organisations concerned provided more attention to learning, created opportunities for learning through e.g. lunch meetings, post-field trip debriefings, 'home weeks', introduced learning targets in their HRD policies and tools, or made additional resources available to facilitate learning. This is not to say that organisations implementing LWPs have now become true 'learning organisations' as that would require deep shifts in organisational cultures beyond the scope of the LWPs. But it is fair

to say that more than half the organisations that undertook a LWP have now added a reflective mode to their original active mode. The current evaluation does not allow for any statements on the matter with regard to partner organisations.

Apart from this more general result it is interesting to note that:

- 21% of the LWPs have exclusively focused on knowledge development and/or knowledge sharing on specific thematic and technical issues, without giving specific or explicit attention to the capacity development dimension of these issues.
- 77% of the LWPs focused on a broad array of methodological issues ranging from strategy development on capacity development or partner relations to specific tool development and tool implementation for, for example, organisational capacity assessments or on how to properly organise and facilitate meetings with partner organisations. Of these 77%, nearly half focused on full or partial development and/or implementation of systems for planning, monitoring and evaluation.
- On a side note: of the three LWPs with a baseline (using the 5C model), two organisations noted a significant decrease in the scores for a number of pointers during the final evaluation. 'Some explained these worsening scores because they went from being 'unconsciously incompetent' to 'consciously incompetent'. When further discussing this particular use of the 5C approach, it appeared that using quantifications in this framework is multi-interpretatable. It was concluded that these quantifications should be taken with a pinch of salt'.

The LWPs have contributed to the improvement of partner relations.

The various evaluations of LWPs do present evidence that partner relations have indeed improved. Such was clearly the case in 39% of the LWPs, where mention was made of partners having a greater say in policy and strategy decisions; where members and partners were more explicit about roles and responsibilities; where more mutual respect was created; where members clearly dare to let go of control; and where increased South-South contacts were creating enhanced pride and self-esteem among partners organisations. In 18% of the LWPs indications were given that partner relations were being addressed, but that these are only improving modestly, whereas in 42% of the LWPs no changes in partner relations were being reported. The latter might be explained by the simple fact that not all LWPs focused explicitly or implicitly on improving partner relations.

On LWPs' Relevance, Effectiveness and Sustainability

Of the total number of LWPs implemented, only 8% were considered to be not relevant and a mere 11% were viewed as being not very effective. These specific outcomes all concerned LWPs that lost relevance or effectiveness due to changes in management and/or strategic choices; one organisation, for example, decided to no longer participate in MFS II but instead reorient itself

entirely towards its international network; another organisation decided to no longer implement the INK quality standards for which it used the LWP. 82% and 66% of the LWPs are considered to be relevant and effective respectively.

The sustainability of the LWPs sketches a more diverse picture: for 37% of the LWPs sustainability of results seems assured as systems, staff and funding are in place to maintain and continue these. For 34% of the LWPs the sustainability of results remains a challenge, whereas for 29% of the cases sustainability is at risk. In the latter cases, improved professionalism of staff has not yet been translated into policies, strategies, methods and/or tools that are fully developed, implemented and operational.

Results of the Collective Learning Trajectories

Appreciation of Results

With its support to Collective Learning Trajectories (CLT), PSO aimed³⁵ to professionalise organisations in the field of capacity development by learning together on a specific topic with other organisations and teaching each other through peer learning.

During the period under evaluation six different Collective Learning Trajectories were organised once or twice each, with groups of varying sizes (see the overview below).

<i>Collective Learning Trajectory</i>	<i>Number of trajectories</i>	<i>Number of participants</i>
<i>CLT-01 Introduction Capacity Building and Civil Society</i>	2	35
<i>CLT-03 Coaching</i>	2	18
<i>CLT-04 Effective in Partnerships</i>	1	11
<i>CLT-06 PMØE</i>	1	8
<i>CLT-23 Facilitation of Learning</i>	1	16
<i>CLT The Basic (2011)</i>	2	18
<i>Total</i>	8	106

35 PSO, 2011, p. 8.

CLTs are about capacity building at both a personal and an organisational level. In order to take these two levels into account, the CLT evaluation³⁶ not only addressed the individual participant of the CLTs, but also his or her direct supervisor.

The evaluation of the CLTs revealed that their long-term effect at organisational level was not monitored systematically, nor did the CLTs in their set-up explicitly focus on organisational development: in practice most were focused on an increase in personal capacities concerning a specific topic related to capacity development. The findings are summarised below.

The CLTs contributed to the increased personal capacities of staff that participated, mainly at PSO member organisations.

The evaluation of the CLTs clearly demonstrated that the instrument is an effective way to share knowledge and to learn about a specific issue in a safe and well-facilitated environment. Peers being open and willing to share experiences, practical exercises during and in between the meetings, and good, knowledgeable facilitation play key roles in this process. The majority of participants indicated the CLT had made them aware of new issues, instruments or approaches and to a more moderate extent that they had started to use this knowledge in their daily practice. All respondents indicated that they had become more aware of the different aspects of the subject of the CLT. A large majority had started to ask themselves (89%), colleagues (83%) and partners (75%) other questions. When it comes to actual changes in implementation methods, the rates are slightly lower. 56% changed or adjusted aspects of the way they work, while 45% started to use new instruments or tools and 62% new approaches.

Since CLTs were, mainly for practical reasons, not accessible to staff from partner organisations, their influence on these is only indirect and was not assessed during the evaluation.

The CLTs have only contributed modestly to more professional organisations in the field of capacity development.

Evidence gathered during the evaluation has shown that increased personal capacities do not automatically lead to organisational change. This was also indicated in the 2010 PSO programme evaluation and the meta-evaluation of 2012. Or, to put it in PSO terms: transfer does not automatically happen. Taking all CLTs together, the effects on the team were clear, but were lower

³⁶ The CLT evaluation has been effectuated through an online survey in which in total 10 supervisors and 38 participants have participated. As an additional check some extra interviews were held with individual participants. For detailed results on individual CLT, one is referred to the Collective Learning Trajectories Evaluation Report (Blank, 2012).

than at an individual level: the further away from the sphere of influence of the participant and the closer to actual practical measures in daily practice, the lower the effect. 45% of the participants indicated that their team had become more aware of different aspects of the subject and 39% thought their colleagues had started to ask themselves other questions. Yet, the more it comes to the active use or implementation of these new insights, the lower the perceived effect. According to the CLT participants, 22% of the teams had started to ask their colleagues other questions, and 23% asked partners different questions. 22% had started to use new tools, 25% new approaches. 28% of the team were reported to have changed ways of working and 20% changed their strategy. Finally, 14% of the organisations changed or adapted their policy with regard to the issues concerned.

The CLT evaluation provided a clear indication that transfer of knowledge and insights acquired by the participant during the CLT to his or her team and organisation was enabled by:

- PSO efforts to include the organisation and its management through their inclusion in the intake process and through their written commitment to the process and the intended change;
- an explicit selection of CLT participants that have the position in the organisation and the personal capabilities to act as change agents in their organisation;
- explicit coaching of the participant to act as a change agent;
- an obligation of the participant to write reflection letters addressed to management of the organisation;
- a close alignment between the subjects addressed in the CLT and an urgency and relevance of issues that need addressing which arise from and influence practice;
- a close alignment between the issues addressed in the CLT to which an organisation dispatches its staff and the LWP undertaken by that organisation and possibly the TLP in which the organisation participates.

The evaluation has also provided clear evidence that transfer is not likely to happen if the above is not actively pursued, which was the case for the better part of the CLTs.

The most convincing example of 'what works' is found in the CLT The Basic that indeed had most of the abovementioned characteristics. CLT The Basic stood out in effects reported at team and partner level. 83% of the participants to this CLT reported a higher awareness among their team members, and 63% claimed the same for their partners. Also in the active use of newly acquired skills or tools, the rates were much higher than with most other CLTs. 64% claimed that their team started to use new approaches and tools, and 82% of the teams changed aspects of the way they work and 60% changed their work strategy. Moreover, 50% of the partners started to use new approaches and have changed the way the work. These rates are obviously much higher than average and can be explained by the inclusive nature of this CLT in which alongside several team members and management, partners were also consulted before or during the process.

On CLTs' Relevance, Effectiveness and Sustainability

All of the CLTs implemented were considered relevant by their participants and all can be considered effective in sharing knowledge and in increasing participants' insights into specific issues.

The sustainability of the CLTs and the results they yielded at organisational level, far from being guaranteed as the transfer of insights from the participants to the organisation, in most cases did not take place or did so only modestly. All CLTs were furthermore directly facilitated and coordinated by PSO staff that can no longer do so after 2012. New ownership and new funding for the CLTs is not assured.

Results of the Thematic Learning Programmes

Appreciation of Results

With its support to Thematic Learning Programmes (TLP), PSO aimed³⁷ to enlarge thematic knowledge in the field of capacity development and to enable its field-testing.

During 2011–2012 PSO initiated and supported some 13 Thematic Learning Programmes, of which 11 have been included in the current evaluation (see the table below).

<i>Thematic Learning Programme</i>	<i>Participating organisations</i>
<i>PM&E of Complex Processes of Social Change (further referred as TLP PM&E)</i>	<i>CDRA, Light for the World, ETC, HIVA, INTRAC, Oxfam Novib, PRIA, STRO, War Child, Woord & Daad, WorkNets, ICCO, MCNV, CORDAID, Vredeseilanden</i>
<i>Networks</i>	<i>ETC, Free Voice, NIZA, Solidaridad, SOMO, UNOY</i>
<i>Mainstreaming Disability (MD)</i>	<i>Tear (also representing Tear Fund UK), Red een Kind, Oikonomos, Edukans, Light for the Word (coordination), Athena Institute (Free University), Dutch Coalition on Disability and Development, three Southern facilitating organisations, 9 local partners in Ethiopia and 12 local partner organisations in India.</i>
<i>Fragile States /DRC</i>	<i>ZOA, Agritererra, CARE, Impunity Watch</i>
<i>Organisational Assessment (OA)</i>	<i>Light for the World (D&L), Woord & Daad, War Trauma Foundation, Red een Kind, MCNV, GIP</i>
<i>Gender</i>	<i>Dorcas Aid International, Justitia et Pax Netherlands, TIE, CIVICUS, IICD, MWPN</i>

³⁷ PSO, 2011, p. 10.

<i>Power in Multi Stakeholder Processes (MSP)</i>	<i>Both Ends, Cordaid, ETC Foundation (coordination), Fair Trade Original, ICCO and WASTE</i>
<i>Human Mobility (HMD)</i>	<i>CIDIN, CIDIN/CORDAID, Radboud (TRANSCODE), IDS, THP, DFD, Oxfam Novib</i>
<i>Remittances (RMD)</i>	<i>STRO, COS-Utrecht, Nedsom, DFD, Marokko Fonds (MF), Oxfam Novib, HIRDA</i>
<i>Sexual Diversity</i>	<i>dance4life and Rutgers WPF supported by other actors in the MFS II SRHR Alliance</i>
<i>Fragile States / South Sudan</i>	<i>ZOA, SNV South Sudan, SPARK, Justice Africa</i>

In indicating the results of the TLPs at a more general level, one has to take into account that most TLPs have just terminated their implementation phases of action research or action learning around pilots and are in most cases yet to finalise their documentation.

The TLPs have contributed to the increased personal capacities of staff that participated, both at PSO member organisations as well as at participating Southern organisations.

In most of the TLPs specific learning questions at organisational level are being addressed through the implementation of pilots to stimulate action learning and/or action research projects. These pilots or action research projects clearly contributed to enhanced competences and increased insights of those people involved in the North and South. The extent to which these insights are shared with colleagues within the participating organisations depends on the organisation and shows a mixed pattern. It is clear that most learning takes place among staff members actively involved in the action research or pilots.

Much attention is given to inter-organisational learning and collective learning. To this end, group sessions were organised to stimulate peer exchange and joint reflection. These gatherings seem to be appreciated very much by participants who confirmed that they have learned a lot from others. On the other hand, this inter-organisational learning has not materialised in all TLPs and the participants concerned considered this a missed opportunity. Most of the TLPs have organised or plan to organise public events that are open to non-participants. At these meetings insights will be shared with others. Overall, these public events received positive feedback.

Addressing the central learning questions seems a challenge. Systematisation and cross-case analysis is difficult and did, as yet, not occur in all TLP cases. Some TLPs (like OA, MSP, Barefoot Guide, PM&E and MD) have generated a vast body of information and documentation, and most will produce synthesis documents during the second half of 2012.

The TLPs have, as yet, only contributed modestly to an enlargement of thematic knowledge in the field of capacity development.

It is hard to distinguish 'old' knowledge from 'new' knowledge and to determine whether the thematic body of knowledge in the field of capacity development has actually increased as a result of the implementation of the TLPs. It appears fair to say that the bulk of the TLPs did focus on field experimentation with existing methods, instruments and tools and on gaining experience with these to assess their applicability and usability under specific circumstances. Defining, shaping and/or experimenting with truly innovative approaches and tools and methods new to the development sector did not materialise in the TLPs. On the other hand, for many a professional and his or her organisation, these TLPs did indeed offer a good opportunity to get acquainted with knowledge, methods and tools with which they had no prior experience.

The TLPs have only contributed modestly to a change in the policies, strategies or intervention tactics of the participating organisations concerning the capacity development of civil society.

There is not much evidence yet for changed policies and interventions at the participating organisations. Up-scaling of pilot projects seems difficult and implementation of lessons learned into daily practice remains limited.

The above may be understood in the light of the fact that many TLPs have been launched rather recently. It appears unlikely that multi-actor learning processes with extensive action-research programmes, cross-case analyses, joint learning moments and the subsequent translations of findings in documents, revised organisational strategies and set-up can be made truly effective in less than 2 years. The initial exploration of getting to grips with what's up, the establishment of relationships, the inception of the learning trajectory while defining boundaries of the content, organising process, people and organisational and institutional requirements, the introduction of the learning trajectory and a further introduction with all participating organisations, including local partner organisations and request, support, motivate them to make this part of their on-going learning discipline and internal cycles/culture/system/procedures, the actual implementation of the trajectory, the full documentation of process and findings, the dissemination of these through well-packaged knowledge products, and the translation of these into improved practices simply requires more time and more effort.

All TLPs invest in the publication of the results from action research and pilots and/or the lessons learned. A number of publications have been created (e.g. organisational assessment, networking, barefoot guide, PME, mainstreaming disabilities). These are distributed during public events, through the PSO or other websites (e.g. www.barefootguide.org) or through

communities of practice. There is no information available on the academic relevance and quality of these publications.

On TLPs' Relevance, Effectiveness and Sustainability

All of the TLPs implemented are considered relevant and all but two are considered to be moderately effective. The two least effective were the TLPs launched most recently (on Remittances and Human Mobility) which are probably too 'young' to yield actual and tangible results at this stage. The sustainability of the TLPs and their results is generally hard to assess at present. In many cases, final documents have as yet to be produced and the transfer of insights to the organisation still has to take place or is in process. Furthermore, all but two of the TLPs were directly facilitated and coordinated by PSO staff that can no longer do so after 2012. New ownership and new funding for those TLPs that wish to continue to fully finalise their learning trajectories is not assured in most cases.

Results of the Outreach Programme

By undertaking its Outreach Programme, PSO aimed³⁸ to optimise the sharing of knowledge and to be a central place for professional organisations and private initiatives with questions about sustainable development of Southern civil societies.

During 2011–2012 PSO initiated and supported 34 outreach activities, covering a large variety of gatherings ranging from one-day meetings around a certain topic to multiple interrelated events organised over a certain period. A key feature of these events is their openness to all, even though a large part of the attendants in fact work at a PSO member organisation. See the table below for a summary of the outreach activities undertaken.

<i>Outreach activity 2011–2012</i>	<i>Participants</i>
<i>PME & Organisational Learning (13 events & conferences)</i>	530
<i>Humanitarian Assistance (3 events and 6 gathering 'Café Humanitaire')</i>	185
<i>Civil Society (5 events, workshops & seminars)</i>	202
<i>Migration & Development (7 gatherings community of practice)</i>	112

38 PSO, 2011, p. 10.

The activities undertaken under the Outreach Programme can be considered to be informative and inspirational.

From this evaluation³⁹ a picture arises that a convincing 80% of the participants became more aware of different aspects of the subject and that they started to ask themselves new questions (70%), indicating that the events were generally informative. Even though some attendees indicated to have heard nothing new, meetings were generally seen as inspirational, refreshing existing knowledge and often enriching understanding by sharing new ideas, topics and/or tools.

The events organised under the Outreach Programme are generally appreciated for providing the possibility to share among peers, and to learn about or to be updated on new developments in the sector. A key factor in these programmes is their relevance to own contexts and the opportunity to interact. Discussions, well-chosen topics, and good facilitation of events are pivotal. The facilitation of PSO is valued for its relatively neutral position in the sector, fostering a safe environment to be open and share experiences in.

Participants of outreach activities have only used the acquired knowledge and insight to a modest extent in their daily practice.

In this evaluation four groups of outreach activities have been distinguished, all with the same objective, but in practice attracting different types of people with different objectives. Whereas the participants of the outreach activities on PM&E and organisational learning were mainly looking to learn – from each other and from the information presented by PSO – participants of outreach activities events on humanitarian issues appeared less interested in learning and more in expanding and intensifying their network. In this light, it is logical that a number of people attending parts of the programme did not even try to spread new knowledge into their organisation, or only did so marginally. That simply was not their objective.

For those participants for whom learning was the main objective of participation, the results showed more activity towards the team, especially when it concerned practical tools and organisational models. 40% of the respondents that participated in the PM&E events indicated they had started using new tools.

³⁹ The Outreach Programme has been evaluated through an online survey addressing 411 participants of which 129 responded. Of these 129 persons 60% works for a PSO member organisation and 65% is active as programme officer or as PM&E officer.

A Bird's-Eye View of the Learning Trajectories

In recent years PSO has offered ample opportunity to its member organisations and their Southern partners to launch and undertake initiatives that in one way or another were aimed at improving the practice of capacity development and the quality of partner relations between the organisations concerned. The learning trajectories have stimulated debate and dialogue; have unleashed energy and change dynamics, sometimes causing pain and frustration. Although the launch of some of the learning paths was a lengthy and bumpy process, especially during the introduction of the instrument, rarely would the organisation or participant in retrospect have preferred not to have participated in the various endeavours.

When it comes to the results achieved, the picture is clear: most trajectories have in one way or another contributed to increased competencies – people have learned interesting things and gained relevant insights and have appreciated that. Most of the instruments have contributed to the development, introduction and operationalisation of elements of capacity building strategies, policies, methods and/or tools, with a degree of effectiveness that decreases from development to operationalisation of these. A minority of the learning trajectories have positively changed the relations between PSO member organisations and their Southern partners. In this context, it seems that the LWPs have had most effect on the participating organisations and that the CLT were most effective in transferring specific knowledge and insights to individual participants.

As indicated earlier, the current evaluation does not allow for the development of an overall general statement on the degree to which capacity development interventions have indeed improved beyond individual organisational developments as a result of the learning trajectories. The appreciations undertaken during the individual evaluations of the quality and relevance of the policies and tools developed have revealed a very diverse picture. What has become clear, however, is that following a learning path does not have a direct and linear correlation with improving one's practice in capacity development. That being said, the various individual evaluations do present ample evidence that:

- capacity development is increasingly on the agenda of the organisations concerned and that a shared language on the matter within and between organisations is slowly but steadily being developed and introduced; and
- most organisations are in one way or another developing, introducing and further strengthening either fully-fledged policies and strategies with regard to capacity development and/or experimenting with methods and tools in their practice.

In light of the above, it seems fair to say that the PSO learning instruments have proven a valuable tool for participating Dutch Development NGOs, their Southern partners as well as the Dutch Ministry

of Foreign Affairs in furthering the discourse on and experience with capacity development. The recent IOB synthesis report however indicated that much needs still be done to make capacity development policy and support more effective: "It is necessary to shift support for capacity development in such a way that it helps Southern organisations to learn from their practice – particularly in terms of encouragement to probe the assumptions on which their strategies are based (second-order learning). It may require an in-depth investment by all Dutch development organisations to develop the expertise that is required to support these processes".⁴⁰

These in-depth investments are now to be undertaken by the development sector itself, without PSO's support. The next section provides some insights into how to best approach these and other interesting and sometimes even crucial learning questions: as such they present a true PSO legacy – the lessons learned from learning itself.

⁴⁰ IOB, 2011, p. 20.

3 Sound Theory of Learning

Chapter 2 described the main results achieved by PSO with regard to the various learning instruments. The next chapters (3 – 5) provide empirical evidence, reflection, analysis and insights from three different perspectives: theory of learning; design of learning trajectories and implementation.

Based on the evidence of the evaluations it can be concluded that in almost all cases the learning trajectories have contributed to the improved personal skills of staff involved and in most of the trajectories a 'capacity development product' has been implemented or is now operational. Therefore, it can be stated that the internal learning processes of member organisations have been enhanced and that new insights have been gained, new products have been developed and in just over a third of the cases it has been reported that partner relations have improved. However it remains a bit unclear to what extent these insights and products ('policies, strategies or intervention tactics concerning capacity development of civil society') actually work; in other words: do they do what they are intended to do? Let alone that something can be said about the quality of the capacity development interventions in terms of the right things needed by organisations who wanted to improve their organisational learning process on capacity development.

For Organisational Learning There are Three Stages of Learning

The overall picture of the results of learning indicates that improving staff capabilities has definitely been achieved. Organisational learning appears more complicated. The interrelatedness between individual learning and organisational learning let alone inter-organisational learning is not that obvious⁴¹ and is nowhere made explicit, neither in PSO policy nor by member organisations.⁴²

Based on the evidence most organisational learning taking place has focused on improvement of skills and/or capabilities or relationships with partners. Most of the learning questions of

⁴¹ Pedler et al. (1996); Pedler, M., & Aspinwall, K. (1998). *A concise guide to the learning organization*. (p. vii). London: Lemos & Care.

⁴² With regard to PSO policy see Box on Conceptual Framework in the PSO Policy Plan in section 3.3. With regard to member organisations: for example in the evaluation report of the IKV Pax Christi LWP it was stated: '*A topic of attention not yet addressed is the link between learning and professionalisation on the one hand, and performance evaluation and personal education plan (POP) on the other*' (page 11).

the evaluated learning trajectories are 'how to...?' questions. Organisations wanted to know how to implement new capacity development interventions, or how to work with new monitoring and evaluation methods, or how to mainstream gender, sexual diversity or disability into their programme. These kinds of learning refer to what is called *single-loop learning* in which the practitioner improves skills, develops expertise, maintains it and learns new methods.⁴³ However, during the design (and implementation) phase of the learning instruments it became clear that in order to improve capacity development interventions more fundamental or strategic questions were at stake, often requiring double-loop learning processes. As a consequence many LWPs also refer to double-loop learning questions.

In the IOB study on the evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development it is already emphasised that 'An important line of thought on capacity development concerns the learning processes that take place at three different levels, or 'loops'. (...) In view of the realisation that development is both complicated and complex, the application of double and even triple-loop learning becomes imperative in order to respond adequately in rapidly changing contexts, to make learning an integral activity and ultimately to achieve desired results'.⁴⁴

Single, Double and Triple-Loop Learning⁴⁵

Single-loop learning - In this form of learning, the individual primarily considers their own actions. This involves doing things better based on rules of professional conduct and effective methods, guidelines and protocols. In the context of the present study this implies that 'preferred' practices with regard to capacity development at individual (Human Resource Development), organisational (Organisational Development) and institutional level (Institutional Development)⁴⁶ are adhered to. It is a continuous learning process, aimed at deepening a profession and improving the quality of work. Through systematisation of experiences, peer supervision, training and commitment to quality the practitioner continuously improves. The main learning question is:
Are we doing things right?

⁴³ Kwakman, 2003.

⁴⁴ IOB, 2011, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Parts of this explanation of the three stages of learning is based on www.thorsten.org/wiki/index.php?title=Triple_Loop_Learning.

⁴⁶ E.g. the overview that is being provided in the *IDS Bulletin* about Capacity. Reflecting Collectively on Capacities for Change, 2010. Also: the IOB report on evaluation of Dutch support to capacity development, 2011. And: Ubels et al, on capacity development in practice, 2010 and Van der Velden et al, on facilitating organisational change within development organisations, 2013 (forthcoming)

Double-loop learning – Double-loop learning leads to insights about why a solution works or why not. In this form of learning, the individual considers his or her actions in the framework of his or her operating assumptions, looking for patterns. Based on this insight the individual can change or adjust the way he or she used to work for an improved result. Through learning sessions, peer reviews, analyses of information gathered from PM&E systems and the exchange of experiences practitioners are able to reflect on their work and ask themselves questions about why they are doing what they do. The leading learning question is: ***Are we doing the right things?***

Triple-loop learning – This kind of learning goes beyond insight and patterns and includes context. As a result a shift in understanding of the context or point of view is created which produces new commitments and ways of learning. Mostly this is done by experimentation: trying new things, new approaches, new intervention models, new ways of working and by deep reflection and introspection: taking the time and creating the opportunity and especially having the courage to ask one's self questions like 'are we still adding value?', or 'what would happen to the world and the issue we are addressing if we as an organisation were no longer around?'. This form of learning challenges one to understand how problems and solutions are related. It also challenges one to understand how previous actions created the conditions that led to current problems. The relationship between organisational structure and behaviour is fundamentally changed because *the organisation learns how to learn*. The results of this learning includes enhancing ways to comprehend and change one's core identity, purpose, developing better understanding of how to respond to the environment, and deepens one's comprehension of why one chooses to do the things one does. The crucial learning question is: ***How do we decide what is right?***

Although PSO has been using the concept of single, double and triple-loop learning since 2005, it is remarkable that in most learning trajectories the focus was initially mainly on improving the capacity development capabilities of staff and that the link between single and double-loop learning was not sufficiently foreseen from the inception stage onwards. This is all the more striking because, again according to the abovementioned IOB study, 'today, (...), Dutch NGOs claim to base their overarching strategies (such as strengthening civil society) on principles of single, double and triple-loop learning'.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ IOB, 2011, p. 62.

At a conceptual level the distinction between single loop and double-loop learning may be easy to define but in practice the boundaries between these forms of learning are often diffuse. This is evident also from different learning questions, some of which can be classified as single-loop learning questions and other aspects contain a double-loop learning aspect.

Examples of Single and Double-Loop Learning Questions and Objectives

How can international and local civil society and government authority jointly strengthen governance in post-conflict areas? How do different forms of knowledge, experiences and practices inform the implementation of capacity building in Disaster Risk Reduction effectively and appropriately? (CARE)

An improved quality of the planning, monitoring and evaluation (PME) systems for NIMD and selected partners for capacity development interventions in the domain of democracy assistance in a political environment. (NIMD)

STRO would like to learn how to improve our capacity to support partners in the way they communicate the innovative approaches in their specific environment. (STRO)

To learn how to strengthen networks in the Great Lakes Region and to build capacity of organisations providing psychosocial support to local communities affected by war and conflict. (War Trauma Foundation)

How can Both ENDS and its partners effectively transmit the complex knowledge and experiences of relevant approaches to the change agents for their implementation? (Both Ends)

How to better improve network partners' capacities to strategically develop, adapt and innovate partnerships that are needed to achieve (fundamental changes towards) a sustainable future? (ETC)

How do partners and IKV Pax Christi design their lobby/advocacy paths: is it a logical line between analysis, theory of change and the results that we envisage at the level of the relevant political actors/decision makers, and how do we learn from experience, how do we reflect and conceptualise? (IKV Pax Christi)

How can NIZA most effectively support and participate in an international network such as IANRA and engage with other partners in order to co-create a well-linked programme of “learning through action and interaction” that contributes to improvements in natural resource management in Africa? (NIZA)

To better serve the interests of persons affected by leprosy, NLR would like to develop from an organisation that through seven separately operating CBOs is providing technical, organisational and logistic support to mainly cure partners into a networking organisation that has more internal coherence and has the ability to bring together actors in disease control (cure) and rehabilitation (care) by stimulating joint formulation of strategies, increased interaction, generate cooperation and coordinated complementary implementation between the partners, in order to ensure that exchange of experiences, ideas and learning become part of the networks' working practice. (NLR)

Dorkas Aid International wants to promote learning within the organisation and give DAI and partner staff opportunities to increase their knowledge. (DAI)

This Action Learning Project will help MCNV to nurture the CBOs and NGOs she works with in a way that makes MCNV itself, the NGOs and the CBOs become aware of and recognise the necessity of not only fostering actions, but also of continuously reflecting on their own role and practices, drawing lessons from that and acting on lessons drawn inter organisationally and inter-organisationally. (MCNV)

How do partner organisations and VSO itself become truly learning organisations ... (VSO)

How can we increase GIP's learning ability at all levels of the organisation? (GIP)

According to Senge (1990) the concept of *feedback* is of essential importance in double (and triple-loop) learning: a process whereby the result (output) of an action (process) is fed back (feedback) to the input in order to compare or to process (see also the paragraph on reflective practitioners on page 64). At an operational level this implies that through this kind of learning the organisation concerned should obtain more characteristics of a learning organisation such as servant leadership,

facilitating a learning culture, promoting inter-organisational learning, self-development opportunities for staff members, and staff members that scan the environment constantly.⁴⁸

Organisational Learning Coupled with Organisational Challenge

When learning is an integrated part of the daily organisational process the organisation is able to develop itself constantly. Organisational learning is not a purpose in itself. Learning should contribute to the development and improvement of an organisation. Organisational learning should always be with the ultimate purpose of achieving an organisational mission. Research on learning processes⁴⁹ indicates that learning is only worthwhile if it meets the development needs of the organisation.

Actually, that means: if an organisation does not have a *Theory of Change* in place indicating how to achieve capacity development, then it may not be clear which kind of learning is necessary. The previously cited IOB study endorses the importance of having a theory of change in place: 'In the absence of any theory of change to underpin their objectives and programmes, there is no clarity as to how Dutch NGOs expect their support for capacity development to ultimately promote the achievement of their overall development objectives – namely civil society empowerment, poverty alleviation, environmental protection and sustainable development. Since most of their Southern partners also lack theories of change, this situation is even more worrying'.⁵⁰

A lot of the learning questions for learning trajectories were ambitiously formulated, pertained for example to strategic issues – like the change in organisational focus or implementation of a new PM&E system or the improvement of partner policy – while the execution of learning activities was focused on professionalisation of staff like improving effective communication skills, facilitating multi-stakeholder processes or applying a specific method or tool. Moreover, these kinds of professionalisation were often limited to an operational level (instead of strategic), visible in for

48 See for example Van der Velden and Cummings, 2008 and Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell, 1996. Nancy Dixon – who has been invited by PSO in 2006 to deliver a few lectures and facilitate workshops – uses a similar definition: 'The intentional use of learning processes at the individual, group and system level to continuously transform the organization in a direction that is increasingly satisfying to its stakeholders', 1999.

49 Ruijters, M. (2006). *Liefde voor Leren. Over de diversiteit van leren en ontwikkelen in en van organisaties*. Deventer: Kluwer.

50 IOB, 2011, p. 61.

example insufficient commitment of management or learning taking place in an isolated way or little involvement of partners.⁵¹

Link between Learning Ambition and Learning Activities

An example of adequate linking between learning ambition and learning activities is the LWP of Light for the World. Given the strategic change within the organisation programme, managers improved their professional skills in order to fulfil their new roles as effectively as possible:

The support role of Light for the World has recently changed. Where previously programme coordinators were mainly busy with project support, the activities of the programme staff have now shifted to a focus on mainstreaming disability into the development processes by establishing and supporting multi-stakeholder processes. This change in focus entailed that staff members, as facilitators of change, needed to develop new competencies and skills. This was reflected in the formulation of the learning question: 'Which competencies do local and Dark & Light programme coordinators need to master, to what degree and how, to support and progressively learn for organisational change?' The most important changes programme coordinators for Light for the World report themselves are at individual skill level. They all have insight into their preferred learning style and can reflect on their personal growth. The sessions on Effective Communication impacted personal reflection on competencies and behaviour. They have earned a lot of important insights into the process of social change. Self-awareness is an important condition to foster social change and personal behaviour is key in being influential. Competences like effective communication and facilitation skills are crucial to coordinators to become successful agents of change. Staff and management have been able to develop competences and to use these in their work with partners. The personal capacities of Light for the World staff have been improved.

It was also found that in some learning trajectories the formulated learning question or objective turned out not to be the real organisational challenge. In some cases the learning question did not match the underlying question that the organisation was facing; in other cases the learning question did not match the mission of the organisation. Linking learning with the organisation

⁵¹ For examples on lack of strategic involvement of management, partners or other parts of the organisations reference is made to various boxes in the following chapters on Design and Implementation of Learning.

vision, mission and strategy of development NGOs is inherently more complex because under such circumstances the learning or achieved change does not only relate to one or more particular characteristics of an organisation but is related to higher, and more fundamental levels of organisational complexity. It is remarkable to see that organisations do not always seem to include themselves in organisational learning trajectories.

Based on the evidence it may be concluded that learning becomes more effective when the learning question and learning activities are properly linked. And also: learning increases when the organisational learning ambition is adequately coupled to the organisational learning challenge.

Furthermore, one should pay attention to the real drivers (the energy) behind the organisational motive to learn. What are the goals and strategy of the organisation? It is important to stress that the learning approach is highly dependent on what an organisation wants (or needs) to learn in view of its core identity, vision, mission and strategy. In practice this coupling is often absent which leads to transfer problems. Efforts are made to investigate new knowledge and generate new insights, but these are not sufficiently translated (yet) into organisational characteristics and put into practice. Therefore it is important to clarify the driver behind the learning question: why does the organisation want to learn? (See also the paragraph on Motives for Learning on page 44.)

In the literature about this subject⁵² and among learning facilitators it is a common perception that learning processes should preferably come 'from within'; it is preferably an endogenous process. Outcomes of recent action research indicate however that the endogenous – exogenous divide should be treated with caution: external stimulus may have a value in itself, as long as systems and procedures are in place to enhance ownership and commitment, organisational learning that is initiated and led internally is not intrinsically the more desired or feasible option.⁵³

The Importance of a Theory of Learning for Organisational Learning

An important question now is how to make sure to connect the learning ambition of an organisation to the organisational challenge. Key here seems to be to make assumptions explicit. Why did Light for the World assume that if they learned to be more effective facilitators of change they would contribute better to their organisational mission of mainstreaming disability in development processes by establishing and supporting multi-stakeholder processes?

52 IOB, 2011, p. 20. See also Kaplan, 2002.

53 Van der Velden & Fernando, 2011, p. 85.

To answer these questions properly, there should be a solid *Theory of Learning* in place. A good theory of learning helps handling complexity adequately. This is especially relevant for NGOs who work in the field of development cooperation in which complexity exists at various levels. It forms the basis for strategic planning, operational decisions and the measurement of progress without reverting to over-simplification.

Such a theory of learning was at best implicit in PSO learning policy and most often also implicit or even absent among PSO member organisations. This explains the difficult and lengthy process of formulating the learning questions for LWPs and TLPs and the level of effectiveness of the learning instruments to contribute to organisational learning at the level of PSO's member organisations (and partner organisations).

A Case in Point: The Conceptual Framework in the PSO Policy Plan

In the PSO Policy Plan 2011 – 2015 it is stated that 'PSO focuses on capacity development of civil society organisations in developing countries, to contribute to structural poverty alleviation'.⁵⁴

It is argued that PSO wants to focus on those organisations that '(...) want to professionalise their knowledge and skills related to capacity development'.⁵⁵

Further on in the document it is stated that 'Through promoting learning and sharing of knowledge PSO wants to contribute (...)'⁵⁶ and '(...) we focus on learning, because it is part of our accountability, but also because it supports the process of professionalisation'.⁵⁷

And: 'PSO's ambition is to support Northern NGOs in the process of professionalising capacity development in the South'. PSO considers experiential learning to be the best method to optimise capacity strengthening'.⁵⁸

It appears as if 'capacity strengthening', 'learning' and 'professionalisation' have been used interchangeably. However these are different concepts and approaches at conceptual and operational level and consequently it would have been helpful if the interrelatedness of capacity

54 PSO, 2010, p. 5.

55 Ibid, p. 8.

56 Ibid, p. 13.

57 Ibid, p. 16.

58 Ibid, p. 33.

development, professionalisation and different learning instruments would have been formulated in a comprehensive theory of learning. Now it remains a bit unclear what the primary objective is, and what the assumed cause-effect relationship and desired pathway are.

A solid theory of learning includes the following four crucial elements: (1) description of desired organisational challenge or needed organisational development; (2) explication of assumptions and preconditions underlying the theory of learning; (3) identification of major learners or 'agents of change'; (4) formulation of progress markers that will be used to measure the organisational development process.⁵⁹

These last two elements will be elaborated in the next chapter on Designing Learning.

The importance of the link with the organisational challenge has already been explained above. The next relevant question is, given the organisational challenge – like implementation of a new approach (Light for the World), the clear strategic direction (Solidaridad) – *what kind of learning is actually needed?*

In the context of this evaluation study on learning, it is relevant to ask what needs to be learned in the field of capacity development. Within the capability perspective on learning⁶⁰ there is a focus on the learning process that already exists within an organisation. Fundamental questions are: how does the organisation learn, which learning patterns are in place, where does learning take place, what is learned and what works and what does not? The underlying assumption is that every organisation learns in its own way, depending on the type of primary process, culture, structure and context. In short, the capability perspective on learning is based on the existing strengths of the organisation that is learning (the 'current learning landscape').

Organisational Development Needs to Align with Motives for Learning

Learning is not an end in itself; it is a means to a capacity development purpose, with as ultimate aim to be in a better position to achieve the mission of an organisation. For the majority of Dutch Development NGOs civil society strengthening is part of their core business and supporting capacity development of organisations in the South is one of the strategies used to that end. Strengthening capacity development processes is – in this perspective – a relevant learning objective. The question

59 Eguren, 2011.

60 Ruijters, 2006.

is to what extent organisations have the motive to learn with regard to capacity development; a conscious actual challenge which creates a need to change.

For many of the evaluated trajectories the motive of the PSO member organisations to become engaged was often the availability of financial resources, based on the PSO mandate to support learning on capacity development. In such cases these funds became available at the right moment. The organisations happened to be in a crucial organisational development phase, policies and strategies had to be revisited and staff members had to switch roles due to changed strategic choices. These member organisations were able to couple their learning needs to a strategic capacity development need. The learning activities were therefore linked to the competencies which staff had to acquire. As a consequence, the learning results were perceived as very supportive to the staff's successful adaptation to the organisational change. There was a sense of urgency, a motive, to get involved. Evidently this had positive consequences for the effectiveness and sustainability of the LWPs.

For other organisations, the availability of resources was a more artificial way of starting their own learning trajectories. Because there were resources available a learning issue was conceived.⁶¹ A joint sense of urgency was lacking and the trajectory was confronted with limited understanding, acceptance and internalisation by staff members within the organisation and became an orphan within the organisation.

Aligning Organisational Development and Learning Needs

The learning question of Solidaridad supported the organisational strategic challenge: Until 2009 Solidaridad was a centralised organisation with its headquarters in the Netherlands. HQ was in charge of managing all the projects with the regional offices as implementing partners. In 2008 it was decided that Solidaridad had to become a networked organisation with the office in the Netherlands being one player in a network of nine Regional Expertise Centres (RECs). This LWT was used to support making the transition from a centralised organisation to a networked organisation with emphasis on the knowledge management and learning aspects of the network. With this LWT Solidaridad aimed 'to develop from a network of separate entities towards a collective

61 In most cases this was related to the transition of PSO's role of funder of capacity development to promoter and facilitator of learning trajectories.

learning network by stimulating collective strategy making, increased interacting and sharing at different organisational levels to finally assure that learning, exchange of experiences and innovation become more important elements in the character of the Solidaridad network and in the execution of our programmes.' There is one main lesson that can be learned from this LWT: learning support based on internal energy, drive and commitment is very likely to be effective and sustainable. This LWT was one of the enabling factors that contributed to Solidaridad gradually evolving into a learning networked organisation.

Studying the various learning questions formulated in the LWPs it appears that the motive for learning was mainly driven by for example a need to develop a policy on partner relations or on capacity development, or a need to strengthen networking. The sense of urgency to change something was mostly not based on a reflection that a current practice or intervention strategy was not delivering the desired results.

Insights

To wrap up, the learning trajectories evaluated have shown that learning becomes more effective if there is an underlying theory of learning that addresses:

- an understanding of the actual organisational challenge (the desired organisational development or change) and a coupling of the learning motive to this challenge;
- the fact that one must build on what is already there in terms of organisational learning capabilities (preconditions for the desired organisational development or change);
- the connection of the appropriate kind of learning with the organisational challenge in terms of single, double and triple-loop learning (assumptions on learning);
- the interrelatedness between individual learning, organisational learning and inter-organisational learning (assumptions on learning).

4 Design of the Learning Path

As indicated in the previous chapter a Theory of Learning facilitates the development of a learning trajectory. At least it needs to be clear what the capacity development challenge of the organisation is in order to be able to determine which issue learning has to focus on, who the main actors are that need to be involved and what kind of learning is appropriate.

If the organisation feels a certain sense of urgency and is convinced that learning is necessary in order to achieve the needed capacity development, the case evidence shows that the effect of learning is maximised. Furthermore, it makes it easier to formulate the relevant learning objectives and questions and to determine which actors need to be involved. This is also underlined by academic research results: involvement of relevant *learners* is crucial to the success of learning.⁶² Moreover, their learning preferences should be clear in order to determine the appropriate kind of learning.

Finally, it is important to plan learning properly. One should plan learning as flexibly as possible to integrate developments along the way in the most optimal way.⁶³

Based on the evidence of the evaluated learning trajectories, it appears that in designing a learning trajectory these entry points need to be considered. This chapter explores lessons learned from the PSO practice on how to shape these design principles for learning.

Participatory Design Maximises Success of Learning

The evidence from the cases shows that the level of involvement of the learners in the development phase contributes to the success of the learning trajectory. For example, there are LWPs that have been developed mainly between the PSO contact person at the member organisation and the PSO staff member. In these cases staff at programme departments were often not fully aware of the LWP and/or were not convinced of the relevancy of the formulated learning questions and strategy and/or were not at all motivated to invest in the learning process. Other LWPs have been developed in a participatory manner within the organisation. A point of attention here is the involvement of all relevant departments in the LWP's design phase and not only, for example, the policy department.

62 Reference can be made to Rondeel. M. (2012). *Het Ontwerpboek. Leertrajecten ontwerpen voor vakmanschap en vernieuwing*. Utrecht: Kessels & Smit.

63 Reference can be made to Kessels. J.W.M. (1993). *Towards design standards for curriculum consistency in corporate education*. Dissertation. Education University of Twente.

Examples of Participatory Development of the LWPs

LWP Foel, De Verre Naasten and Leprazending – one of the most recent LWPs adopted a new approach, combining elements of the previous LWP approach and the CLT approach. This LWP involved three PSO member organisations that formulated their own specific learning questions but that were also committed to sharing experiences and lessons learned between them. New feature was the emphasis put on the organisational commitment before starting the trajectory. Senior staff and managers participated in the LWP, ensuring applicability.

Between September 2011 and December 2011 the LWP was prepared by the three participating organisations. Joint workshops were organised in which, among other things, a baseline instrument was introduced to analyse the capacity of the organisation with regard to their policy and practice on capacity development (based on the 5C model as also was used in the CLT The Basic). During this preparatory activities participants shared experiences, gained additional knowledge on and insights into capacity development and reflected on how capacity development was made operational in their own organisations. Based on these results the respective learning questions were formulated. As far as De Verre Naasten is concerned it appeared that through these preparatory activities two other departments also became actively interested in the LWP.

LWP FPU – The LWP of one of the predecessors of Free Press Unlimited (Free Voice) was primarily initiated by the management of Free Voice and hence a joint sense of urgency was lacking and the trajectory was not sufficiently owned by staff members of the organisation. Free Press Unlimited eventually discontinued the LWP after the merger because the LWP activities did not match with the activities of the new organisation and hence there was no basis for continuation.

Participatory and inclusive development of the LWPs has been particularly challenging for organisations that are part of an international alliance and interrelate with head offices and field offices. Involvement of the field offices in the development phase was in most cases crucial to the effective implementation of the learning working path. Here it was helpful if a shared learning agenda already existed within the alliance and the learning question of the LWP could be aligned to this learning agenda.

The majority of the LWPs and TLPs were executed in close collaboration with partner organisations through pilot projects or action research. Evidence shows that this involvement varies from

requesting the partner to participate in implementation and a genuine involvement of the partner in all phases of the learning trajectories. Objectives and approaches have hardly been discussed nor shared with the partner organisations. However during implementation, the presence of partners became more apparent and in some learning trajectories this resulted in a reformulation of the learning questions and strategy.

Involvement of Southern Partners

LWP Rutgers WPF – Rutgers WPF works in the Netherlands and in developing countries in Africa and Asia. The overall LWP objective was: ‘Rutgers WPF and her network of intermediary partner organisations/field offices show increased capacity to effectively and sustainably deliver evidence-based Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights interventions’. The three field offices and partners had a strong voice in deciding the learning questions and agenda. Specific learning questions were formulated by the Head Office and the Field Offices. From reflection on these separate learning questions a common area appeared namely ‘SRHR movement building’ and a central learning question was formulated ‘How to build and capacitate a SRHR movement of Rutgers WPF and partner organisations to be able to collectively respond to SRHR needs?’ The LWP agenda was developed by country platforms in which partners and Rutgers WPF field offices participated. Additionally regional learning forums were established to increase coherence among all partners and develop joint objectives and contents for SRHR movement building. In these regional learning forums a common understanding was created on the learning question and how the learning environment needed to be constructed, shared values and the perspective of a global movement were discussed and action plans developed.

TLP Gender – The outline of the second phase of the TLP called ‘Gender Learning in Action Community’ was prepared by PSO incorporating the lessons learned from the first phase of the TLP. But in the effective development of the TLP (second phase) Southern partners were also involved through visits by the three participating PSO members TIE, IICD and DAI. This was also needed as PSO experienced that even though different member organisations may apply similar gender jargon, there remain numerous ways of contextualising and interpreting gender equality.

Need for a Diagnosis on How the Organisation Learns

As stated before, it is important to know which kind of learning is appropriate, given the organisational need and organisational characteristics. Learners and their organisations must be enabled to learn, in terms of motives, means and opportunities.⁶⁴ There must be a motive: an understanding of why learning is important, given the actual development need. There must be means in terms of models, concepts and tools for learning but also competences and financial resources need to be in place. There must be the opportunity to learn: learners need space to reflect upon their work, they need to be exposed to new ideas and to enjoy the possibility of testing new approaches in practice.⁶⁵

Besides, learning requires a specific 'learning mindset'. Learners and their organisations must be able to learn in terms of capability: are they capable of learning? A learner is able to do something when he or she has the necessary knowledge, the skills and the willingness to do so, which arises from their personality and is manifested in attitude and behaviour. In other words: a learning mindset is the attitude and belief in the ability to learn new things. Learning not only concerns a formal learning plan with focus on training and knowledge transfer but calls for the transformation of the workplace into a learning and working environment. Several learning functions or abilities to learn need to be in place:⁶⁶

- the ability of acquiring specific knowledge;
- the ability of using this acquired knowledge to solve problems;
- stimulating double and triple-loop learning processes to reflect on current practice, explore new knowledge and approaches, and apply these in practice;
- communicative and social competencies;
- the ability to regulate motivation of staff for learning;
- the ability to create stability and momentum;
- the ability to foster creativity.

In the design of a learning plan attention should be paid to how to enable organisations to create the appropriate environment for learning, for example by taking into account the 7 abovementioned learning abilities.

64 Britton, B. (2005). *Organisational Learning in NGOs: Creating the Motive, Means and Opportunity*. Practice Paper No. 3. Oxford: INTRAC.

65 Ibid.

66 Reference is made to Kessels, J.W.M. (1996). *Het corporate Curriculum*. Oratie. Leiden: Rijksuniversiteit.

During the development phase of the LWPs not much attention was paid to the learning characteristics of the organisations, the extent to which an organisation was in a process of creating an effective learning and working environment and how staff and organisations were learning. As a consequence many LWPs were not only orphaned in the organisation but also islands in the organisation.

Diagnosis of the Learning Environment

LWP GIP – The Federation Global Initiative on Psychiatry (GIP) is an international federation with offices in the Netherlands and 6 other countries (Bulgaria, Georgia, Lithuania, UK, USA and Tajikistan and works with partners in more than 30 countries. The learning question was defined as: How can we increase GIP's learning ability at all levels of the organisation? The original LWP project document was first rejected by PSO as it was considered too unfocused. Instead, a project planning sheet was developed mentioning the key activities of the LWP and this was consequently approved by PSO and GIP. One of the first activities of this project plan was an analysis of the organisational learning culture at all GIP offices, using the questionnaire 'profile plotting' developed by Bruce Britton. The results showed that apparently all the offices struggled with the same challenges around learning in the organisation. It was agreed to experiment further with a number of reflection tools to find out how to give learning and reflection a place in daily working processes of GIP. During implementation of the LWP each federation partner has developed a learning style that fits with their culture and sits well with the on-going priorities of the individual federation partner.

LWP Mensen met een Missie – The LWP aimed at achieving a mutual and shared understanding of the concept, principles and strategies of capacity development among all programme staff and technical assistants working in the South. This objective has only been partially achieved mainly because a learning strategy that took into account how the organisation was actually learning was lacking. Apparently most learning in the organisation was implicit (at individual but also at a collective level). During the design of the LWP this learning environment was not sufficiently acknowledged. The experiences with the LWP have later on inspired Mensen met een Missie to review its PM&E cycle and to anchor learning therein.

CLT The Basic – In this CLT a baseline instrument was introduced to assess the current capacity of the participating organisation with regard to the capacity development of Southern partners. This baseline instrument is based on the framework of 5 Core Capabilities⁶⁷. One of these core capabilities addresses the capability to adapt and self-renew. Some pointers have been included that address the learning culture and environment in the organisation as such inviting the participating organisation to reflect on this issue.

Discussions between PSO and its member organisations during the design phase of the learning trajectories were mainly organised around the concepts and principles of capacity development, and learning, in order to gain a mutual understanding. A diagnosis of the learning characteristics of PSO member organisations has hardly been addressed. The implicit differences in opinion on the concepts and principles between PSO and their member organisations also led to a delay in the start of the learning trajectory, to miscommunications and seems to have affected the quality of the collaboration and the relationship between facilitator and learners. The absence of a shared espoused theory of action led to, what Argyris calls 'theory-in-use', 'to which we resort in moments of stress' with characteristics such as trying to obtain unilateral control, defining a dialogue into win – lose options and 'trying to be as rational as possible'.⁶⁸

Implicit Differences on Learning Concepts and Principles

LWP War Child – There were some critical reflections with regard to the planning of the process. One of these concerned the fact that the LWP had a slow start. This was partly explained by the fact that it took some time before War Child and PSO spoke the same language.

LWP Netherlands Red Cross – NLRC has a long relationship with PSO. Accustomed to previous experiences with PSO (financing capacity development projects in the South) the introduction of the LWP concept in 2009 with its emphasis on organisational learning was difficult to understand by staff members of NLRC and its partners, the Partner

67 Baser, H., & Morgan, P. (2008). *Capacity, Change and Performance; Study Report*. Maastricht: ECDPM.

68 Argyris, 1999.

National Societies. As a result, the LWP plans for 2010 and 2011–2012 were in many ways a continuation of the previous capacity building approach with learning introduced as an add-on element. During implementation it also became apparent that the approach to learning as proposed by PSO did not match with the reality and learning style of the practitioners. This mismatch between PSO's theoretical approach and support to learning and the NLRC's learning-by-doing attitude and culture restrained the full learning potential of the programme. The value of learning and an appropriate way to learn were discovered internally during reflection meetings with NLRC staff. The value of PSO's support lies not so much in giving the theoretical framework, but in creating space for learning in line with the NLRC's own culture and practices.

This observation asks for a reflection whether a collaborative, self-diagnosis at the beginning of the learning trajectory which goes beyond formulating a learning question and objective might be useful. Experiences during some LWPs supports this reflection.

As a result of their own learning experiences in some evaluated trajectories PSO succeeded in aligning the learning with the need and possibilities within the organisation.

The evidence that has been collected through the case studies indicates that it greatly varies to what degree these preferred learning practices have been honoured and in which case the double-loop learning question 'are we doing the right thing?' has clearly been put forward. In some cases the learning trajectory was properly embedded in a self-diagnosis and organisational and often institutional change process that paid attention to tacit issues and the learning trajectory modality might have been the 'right thing to do'. There was a sense of urgency, an actual motive, to get involved.

In other examples a joint self-diagnosis was virtually absent and hence a joint sense of urgency was lacking. The learning trajectory was confronted with limited understanding, acceptance and internalisation by staff members within the organisation and became orphaned within the organisation.

In this context it is important to acknowledge that organisations are complex, changing, dynamic 'living' organisms, each with their own unique identity and that attention needs to be paid

to formal and informal, visible and invisible, hard and soft dimensions in order to discover the 'hidden connections'.⁶⁹

Flexibility Needs to be Integrated into the Design and Planning of Learning Trajectories

Learning develops over time. Flexibility is necessary both in the designing and planning of learning. One should take into account unexpected events or external developments that influence the learning process. Another aspect is the iterative process of learning. In the design and planning phase measures must be foreseen to enable the flexible implementation of the learning plan. The assumption that learning is an iterative process has been made explicit in several LWPs and TLPs resulting in spaces created for reflection and adaptation along the road. An instrument that was helpful to this end seems to be the Dynamic Learning Agenda as applied in the TLP on mainstreaming disabilities.

The Dynamic Learning Agenda

In the TLP on Mainstreaming Disability participants decided to use the Dynamic Learning Agenda. This is a pre-eminent way to value the fact that learning questions change during the learning process, especially of organisations aiming for systems change. The dynamic learning agenda is constructed in a participative way. The agenda is used as a tool during project meetings to help in the structuring of issues on the basis of the learning questions. It should also be used to make connections between the current situation and the long-term challenges. Some questions persist and remain on the agenda, while provisional answers are formulated for other questions, often in terms of activities. Yet others disappear from the agenda because asking the question already provides sufficient insight to act effectively. At each subsequent meeting the project team discusses the dynamic learning agenda and revises it. Questions that remain on the agenda for longer periods of time (months) often relate to persistent problems, which require further analysis, attention and intervention.

In order to enable a flexible implementation of a learning path, the ultimate goals of the learning trajectory need to be clear and accepted by all actors involved and some general guidelines on how

69 Capra, 2002.

to reach this goal need to be in place. For example, no learning plan was developed for the second part of the LWP of Care. The results of the second phase were less effective compared to the results of the first phase which had been well planned. It can help to define milestones or targets that will enable periodical reflection on the question: are we still on the rights track? Relevant adjustments can be made along the way.

Monitoring of the learning process and provisional learning results is important. Effective monitoring needs to be planned and the presence of progress markers can be helpful in monitoring progress. The cases evaluated show a mixed pattern of monitoring. There are LWPs that have not been monitored at all which resulted in less effective trajectories. There are LWPs that have been well developed with a whole set of indicators. Often these indicators have not been used for monitoring or evaluations. Or these indicators seemed not to have been the most relevant to guide the learning process. The most successful monitoring seemed to have happened in TLPs and LWPs that used progress markers based on the outcome mapping methodology.

Using Progress Markers to Monitor the Learning Path

LWP Tear – The central learning question of the LWP was about strengthening partnership relations and strengthening the learning capacity of partners. To monitor progress of the LWP 9 outcome challenges were identified (based on the methodology of outcome mapping). Some of these outcome challenges were very concrete (e.g. Tear personnel share their feedback from field visits with partners as well as in their annual reports) others more abstract (e.g. Tear and its partners should interact regularly and show continuous interest in each other's well-being as an organisation). Activities were linked to specific outcome challenges. The team involved in the LWP regularly met to discuss progress for the outcome challenges. This appeared to be a good approach as this kept the focus on the implementation of the LWP whereas previous experiences had shown that staff easily returned to business as usual. Staff commented that the more concrete the outcome challenges the better they could be used for monitoring progress. Furthermore it appeared that SMART progress markers were helpful and that outcome challenges only make sense if an appropriate plan with a set of activities has been developed that necessitates a contribution to the outcome challenge. This was not always the case in Tear's LWP and apparently only minor adjustments were made during the course of the LWP.

TLP PME – During this TLP monitoring was at the heart of the learning programme. A comprehensive M&E approach was also developed to monitor the progress of the TLP. Several participating organisations wanted to experiment with outcome mapping during the TLP. As such this approach was also used to monitor the progress of the TLP itself. Outcome challenges and progress markers were formulated that were applicable to all participating organisations.

- The progress markers at the level of expect to see refer mainly to the progress of implementing the action research within the organisation: time and resources allocated to conduct the action research; involvement of Southern partners, documenting concrete examples and lessons learned; sharing insights from the pilots within the own organisation and with other TLP members (focus on individual learning processes)
- The progress markers at the level of what you like to see refer to the possibility to organise periodic reflection within the organisation and to ensure that reflection is documented systematically; involvement of management and the level of implementation of lessons learned (focus on organisational learning)
- The progress markers at the level of love to see refer to policy changes in line with the lessons learned from the action research, the scaling up of the results into other programmes and claiming space for methodological diversity towards back donors (focus on organisational and sector learning)

Insights

To conclude, evidence has shown that learning becomes more effective if during the design and planning phase of the learning trajectories attention is paid to:

- an inclusive and participatory process (relevant staff, departments and learners in the North and the South) to enhance ownership of the learning trajectory;
- properly balancing what needs to be learned, who needs to learn and how that can best be done; and
- tailoring the learning paths and aligning these to the existing abilities to learn through a self-diagnosis of the learning and working environment.

5 Implementation of Learning Trajectories

A proper design of the learning path, as described in the previous chapter, is one aspect of a successful learning trajectory. This learning path needs to be aligned to the learning culture and learning style of the organisations involved in the learning trajectories. A mix of learning activities, approaches and tools can be used to stimulate learning and these must create space for formal and informal learning to take place. Learning is part of a social process and evidently issues of power intervene in the learning process. During the implementation process these and other factors influence the effectiveness of the learning trajectories. This chapter will show that learning requires a variety of skills and competencies and that facilitating learning is a demanding professional discipline.

A Clear, Tailor-Made Learning Plan Leaves Room for Informal Learning

As described in the previous chapters a clear, tailor-made learning plan based on a sound Theory of Learning is a contributing factor for a successful learning process. Firstly, a clear learning path is helpful for setting the ambition (e.g. in terms of single, double or triple-loop learning), focus, directions and monitoring progress but this does not mean that the whole trajectory must be planned in advance. Secondly, this learning path must be tailor-made.

During almost all LWPs learning questions have been translated into outcomes and outputs and often also indicators and a range of activities such as pilot projects and action research to enhance learning. However, many strategies suffered from a meagre adaptation to the learning style and culture of the member organisation.

During some LWPs, a set of activities had been planned but because of an often partially developed or even absent Theory of Learning and underdeveloped learning practice, none or only parts of these activities were carried out. In other LWPs a very linear and rather technocratic approach to learning was adopted, assuming a direct correlation between inputs, outputs and outcomes or between enhanced individual and organisational capacities and outcomes, while the correlation between the two is much more dynamic and/or complex in reality.⁷⁰ This linear approach usually resulted in not providing sufficient space for iterative learning processes. Some LWPs adopted a more flexible approach and mainly elaborated general guidelines or formulated – inspired by outcome mapping – some progress markers. This approach clearly appeared to be more successful.

⁷⁰ Baser & Morgan, 2008, pp. 16 –17.

Examples of Planning of Learning Trajectories

IKV Pax Christi – the second phase of the LWP was a logical follow-up to the first phase. Whereas the first phase developed a series of instruments, the second investigated how these instruments could be made use of when collaborating with partners. The chosen approach was to work directly with partners in elaborating the learning questions. Clear learning questions and results were formulated but these results must rather be seen as general guidelines for the learning process. For example result 3 ‘the real result is a shared and deeper understanding of mediation/facilitation of the dialogue and the roles we take[sic] in it. This was taken to a conceptual level, the result being the design of a manual, a living document on this theme and the documentation of the learning cycle that can be repeated with other partners’. Programme leaders received an explicit learning assignment (including time to reflect and learn) and for two themes (advocacy and lobbying, and mediation and facilitation of partner dialogue) learning cycles have been created. The activity plan was organised in such a way that it provided room for these learning cycles to take place. These learning cycles consisted of experimenting, reflecting and documenting experiences and adapting the approaches. Partner reflection events were organised to jointly exchange the lessons learned. The results of these reflection events guided the further learning trajectory.

The learning path must be tailor made, however some learning trajectories showed limited awareness of the learning preferences and styles of staff members at member organisations which eventually hampered the effectiveness of learning. Many different theories of learning exist which all have different assumptions and orientations. There are basically four different approaches: focus on behavioural change, cognitive learning, social learning, experiential learning.⁷¹ The approach of PSO is very much based on the experiential learning cycle of Kolb⁷², which has been applied by PSO staff as a guiding principle for the learning trajectories.⁷³ However before deciding on which actions to take and how to learn from these actions, in practice PSO staff members in a number of cases entered into more theoretical, abstract and sometimes rather cognitive debates with member organisations (exploring the learning question, discussions on achieving a mutual understanding

71 See e.g. Hargreaves, P. & Jarvis, P. (1998). *The human resource development book*. London: Kogan and Page. pp. 39 – 40.

72 Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc.

73 Changes of behaviour are, according to Kolb more likely to occur where learners go through a variety of learning experiences, in various combinations of action, reflection, conceptualisation and testing.

of capacity development) instead of analysing and tuning into the preferred learning approach and style of the member organisation concerned.

Colliding Learning Preferences

In the evaluation concerning the Netherlands Red Cross it is mentioned that 'the experiences in this LWP seem to suggest that the learning style of practitioners may require a different approach than the steps described in the PSO business plan'.

Staff members of AMREF experienced the initial formulation of their LWP as 'too abstract and too broad'.

The SOMO LWP is also a case in point: PSO staff members seem to have insisted on a more conceptual and general organisational and institutional development process, while SOMO staff had a preference for concrete experimentation at programme level with partner organisations. In this particular case these implicit differences of opinion led to a delay in the start of the learning trajectory, miscommunications and also seem to have affected the quality of the collaboration and the relationship.

There seemed to be an understanding that the learning cycle had to start with concrete actions or pilots although Kolb identifies four learning styles (accommodators, convergers, assimilators and divergers) each of them emphasising one or two of the learning cycle's phases. Learning does not need to start with action. It also can start with experimenting or with conceptualising. None of the LWPs completed all four stages of the learning cycle, most probably as the time in which to do so was short and because the approach was not adapted to the learning competencies of the people involved. Some people like to observe and imitate, others learn by acquiring knowledge, some are real participatory learners and need interaction with colleagues. The way people learn also might differ between the Northern and the Southern partners. For example, there may be a preference for top-down learning and knowledge transfer in formal training at the expense of collective reflection.

Customising Concepts

MCNV wanted to facilitate its partners in becoming totally independent in their 'capacity to adapt and self-renew'. The question was: how? One of the main challenges appeared to be the 'translation' of terms and concepts that in 'our' learning language are entirely self-evident – such as reflection, or learning capability – but proved to be incomprehensible in its partners' contexts. This went beyond mere translation, it affected the entire conceptual framework. Only when the partners discovered they had not just learned to learn but actually benefited from it, did it become relevant and motivating to them.

A number of authors have challenged certain aspects of Kolb's learning theory.⁷⁴ Eraut⁷⁵ points out that the social nature of a situation complicates the individual presentation of learning from experience. The same author also argues that Kolb's learning theory excludes a significant portion of informal, implicit and unintended learning. All LWPs have organised a series of formal learning-oriented events like training sessions, workshops, conferences and assessments most of which were implemented successfully and were positively assessed by participants. However, much less attention was paid to what happened in between these formal events and less opportunities were created to foster informal learning, such as mentoring, shadowing, doing things together, etc. Eraut⁷⁶ describes nine work processes that account for a very high proportion of implicit learning: participation in group processes, working alongside others, consultation inside and outside the working group or organisation, tackling challenging tasks and roles, problem solving, trying things out, consolidating, extending and refining skills, and working with clients.

A Reflective Practitioner is Prerequisite

Reflection played an important role in the learning activities, although the use of this learning method did reach its full potential. Reflection is a difficult process and demands a great deal from a professional who wants to be a 'reflective practitioner'.⁷⁷ According to the founding father of the

74 Huyse, H. (2011a). *Workplace and organisational learning in development Aid. A Case Study of a Belgian Development Agency*. Unpublished PhD thesis. University of Sussex School of Education and Social Work, Brighton, England, UK. p. 35.

75 Eraut, M. (2000). Non-formal learning and tacit knowledge in professional work. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, 70 (1), 113–136.

76 Huyse, 2011a, p. 35

77 Schön, D.A. (1983). *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*. London: Temple Smith.

concept of reflection John Dewey⁷⁸, three attitudes are prerequisite for reflective thinking: open mindedness (open to different views and supportive of the principle that beliefs can be based on misconceptions), responsibility (continuously ask: why do we act as we act?) and wholeheartedness (willingness to examine one's own, even the most precious beliefs). In order to learn from reflection a professional needs to learn to be reflective.

From the evidence it appears that the learning instruments (LWP, CLT and TLP) were based on the assumption that this reflective capacity would be eventually mastered by the staff of PSO (the learning facilitators) and of the member organisations. However, in general this seems not to have been the case. In the evaluated learning trajectories only limited attention was paid to reflection as a learning method and the annual reflection sessions between PSO and the organisations concerned seem not to suffice, in view of the results achieved.

Learning is a Indivisible and Social Process

Efficiency and effectiveness of learning improves when learning is recognised as being part of a social process. Thus much learning takes place in the interaction between individuals and between organisations.⁷⁹

At the start of many learning trajectories it appeared that member organisations did not acknowledge the multi-actor involvement in learning trajectories and the indivisible social character of the learning processes taking place during these trajectories. There was a clear recognition at PSO and among its members of the importance of involvement and ownership of Southern partners in learning trajectories; however empirical evidence shows that it requires consistent creative efforts to achieve this fully. This includes acknowledgment of the respective competencies, capabilities and organisational capacities of all the actors involved in the learning trajectory. The fact that several member organisations were still in a process of developing their partner policies and reflecting on their partner relations may have been a contributing factor to the lack of a sound strategy for the genuine involvement of partners in many learning trajectories.

During the implementation phase, several LWPs turned into a process of cooperation among all the partners involved through experiments with inter-country visits, peer-to-peer exchange,

78 Van Woerkom, M. (2012). Reflectie – John Dewey. In M. Ruijters & R. Simons (Red.). *Canon van het leren. 50 Concepten en hun grondleggers*. (pp. 469 – 478). Deventer: Kluwer.

79 Ref e.g. Wals, A.E.J. (2007). *Social learning; towards a sustainable world; Principles, perspective, and praxis*. Wageningen: Wageningen Academic Publishers. Among others the introduction by Fritjof Capra (pp. 13–15).

face-to-face meetings, and developing joint learning agendas. The evidence shows that the genuine involvement of partners in the learning trajectories has strengthened and changed partner relationships.

Joint Learning Strengthens the Partner Relationship

LWP Rutgers WPF – ‘An eye-opener for us was that, as a coordinating Northern organisation, to be able to learn, you sometimes have to be bold enough to let go, to learn from Southern partners and become equal partners. We initially clung to old habits too much and lacked the flexibility to learn and change our practice for fear of losing thematic quality. Moreover, you can only jointly learn, when from time to time you step back, give space to your partners and put them at the front’.

LWP Leprastichting – The power of physically bringing people together during the inter-country visits seems to have become the glue that started giving real meaning to learning by seeing and experiencing with each other, reflecting on similarities as well as the diversities of each country setting. The meeting of people also created moments for informal reflection and exchanges. That created a more open environment, confidence and trust between head office, country offices and partners.

Social learning for example through peer-to-peer learning or inter-organisational learning is not self-evident and requires proper preparation, facilitation and follow-up. The level of equal commitment to learning by all partners involved remains a challenge. Studies on inter-organisational learning in the commercial sector show this is a rather common dynamic affecting the effectiveness of these processes. Larsson et al⁸⁰ point out the inter-organisational learning dilemma that (1) being a good partner invites exploitation by partners attempting to maximise their individual appropriation of the joint learning, and (2) such opportunistic learning strategies undercut the collective knowledge development in the strategic alliance.’

80 Larsson, R., Bengtsson, L., Henriksson, K., & Sparks, J. (1998). The Interorganizational Learning Dilemma: Collective Knowledge Development in Strategic Alliances. *Organization Science*, 9 (3), 285-305.

Inter-Organisational Learning

LWP Leprastichting – Netherlands Leprosy Relief supports national health authorities in over twenty countries and collaborates with international partners in leprosy control. Since its decision to expand its focus towards rehabilitation a large variety of new, local organisations have come into view. The LWP aimed to contribute to the process of evolving into a network organisation. The organisation works through a head office, regional offices and a variety of partners. The core element of the second LWP consisted of four inter-country visits during which the participating regional offices became better acquainted with their own local settings and with each other. These visits provided ample opportunities for discussion with local partners and to reflect on each other's work. The first visits were met with less enthusiasm by the regional offices but from the second visit onwards momentum started to change. A significant learning result happened after it was decided to link each inter-country visit to a management team meeting where the observations reported were discussed as a follow-up. This helped elevate the significance of the inter-country visits for all those involved, including the management.

LWP NIZA – The learning question of the LWP concerned strengthening the learning capacity of an international network (IANRA). The self-assessment of the LWP, carried out by the network partners showed that face-to-face meetings that build relationships between individual (network) members are energising and that continuity between face-to-face meetings that comes from implementing the outcomes of these meetings is a key energy booster. It was recommended that attention should be paid to how to maintain meaningful contact between network members in-between face-to-face meetings. Time between these meetings should be kept to a minimum. Additionally placing people at the centre of everything the network does, including an exploration of how people are affected and involved in every aspect of the work the network carries out, with a focus on the vibrancy of their experience within the network would also contribute to a more vibrant learning experience.

TLP on Remittances, Migration and Development – Inter-organisational learning requires the trust and commitment of all participants. Participants became demotivated if they felt that others only joined the process to acquire knowledge and information.

Another challenge is to lift inter-personal learning up to inter-organisational learning, ensuring more sustainability and impact of the learning process. It was mentioned in the PSO workshop on action research⁸¹ that during several TLPs it was a challenge to gain the strategic interest and support of organisations beyond the individuals participating in the TLPs.

From Inter-Personal Learning to Inter-Organisational Learning

LWP Waste – WASTE aimed at collaboratively setting up an active learning group with its partners to improve mutual learning and to improve product and capability marketing to generate funding. To this end, WASTE and five of its partners formed a Learning Group. As a group they made proposals for joint activities to be implemented under the LWP. One of these activities was a writeshop. Three of the five Learning Group members informed the evaluator that the writing workshop made them realise that there are no ideal solutions for technical issues and that the knowledge they have is as good as that of others. They started without much self-confidence, not having shared their ideas in this kind of peer group before. However this writeshop made them realise their own expertise, made them more self-assured which resulted in them now easily sharing information with others in their organisation and outside. Sharing information makes you richer.

Peer-to-peer learning requires good facilitation in order to move beyond exchanging experiences and to give meaning to what has been exchanged. Peer exchange via digital platforms proves to be difficult.⁸² This is also confirmed by member organisations involved in learning trajectories emphasising the importance of face-to-face meetings in order to really learn from each other.

Issues of Power Influence Learning

As described in the chapter on results, changes have been reported in the relationship with partners. Several LWPs and TLPs helped open new perspectives in the traditional donor-Southern partner relationship which is certainly not a neutral process.

81 Huyse, H. (2011b). *Documenting PSO's experiences with action research*. Results from an action research workshop in March 2011.

82 Huyse, 2011b.

Changes in the Relationships With Partners

LWP SOMO – Staff members of SOMO reported that the LWP has led to qualitatively different relationships with partner organisations: more joint collaboration, more mutuality and more reciprocity.

LWP IICD – The LWP workshops, and the experience they provided, allowed IICD and its partners to reflect on their experiences from a different angle, focusing not on the impact on end-users, but on the capacities needed at individual, organisational and institutional level to continue their ICT-enabled work independently in future. This contributed to a more open atmosphere of learning together from experience, transgressing hierarchical and organisational boundaries.

TLP on Organisational Assessment – four organisations experimented with tools to conduct organisational assessments and to learn how these tools can be developed and used in such a way that they facilitate on-going and endogenous organisational and institutional development (of both Northern and Southern organisations) and make the processes transparent. Insights were shared with a wider audience of Dutch NGOs.

One of the external facilitators noticed: 'Some members have noted that the OA process has empowered their partners. As a result they have felt able to stand back and let go of control. Control is substantively an issue of power and Northern agencies traditionally hold a great deal of it in funding relationships. Letting go can create some feelings of discomfort and confusion as power dynamics shift (Jenny Pearson)'.

Power has a great influence on the learning processes and the effectiveness of the learning trajectories. Power is the ability to influence, control people or events; is about energy that makes change or the energy that prevents change from happening; it deals with authority, capacity and strength.⁸³ Questions like who decides what to learn and how to learn, who has access to information, means and opportunities to invest in learning, and the motivation to participate in learning processes have not always been addressed properly in the design phase or taken into account during implementation.

83 Extracted from the TLP on Multi-Stakeholder Processes. Generally a distinction is being made in: power over (the ability to influence), power to (the ability to act), power with (increased power from collective action and access to decision making), power within (individual consciousness, self-dignity and awareness).

Power is always present in partnership relations. Clear examples of how power relations intervene in learning processes can be found in the LWPs that focused on introducing new instruments and methodologies to partners. Often these instruments and methodologies were very new to the partners. The different levels of effective application of these instruments are mostly also influenced by the manner in which these instruments have been introduced and the extent power has been taken into account.

Addressing Power Issues

Several LWTs and TLPs were about developing and experimenting with new tools (e.g. tools for organisational capacity assessments, PME tools, tools for conflict analysis, tools for power analysis, tools to analyse networks, etc.). These tools were generally developed in the North involving Southern partners and/or researchers only during the testing phase. The way power can intervene in these processes can be illustrated by the TLP on Power in Multi-Stakeholder Processes. The convener group, consisting of Dutch NGOs, developed tools to analyse power in multi-stakeholder processes. Each of the participating NGOs contracted researchers in the South to implement action research on this power question. The toolbox was supposed to support the researchers.

However, at the final international conference it became apparent that several researchers had understood their assignment differently. It appeared not to be clear how this toolbox needed to be used (obligation to use these tools, needed to use and test all the tools, flexibility in adapting the tool) and several researchers felt obliged to test all proposed tools. During that meeting the group realised that power was also present in the relations between the Dutch NGOs, the researchers and their partners. It must be noted that power issues play a role in all LWPs and TLPs. Due to the fact that this TLP focused on power it was in a favourable position to detect and analyse power dynamics.

Power is also at stake in the relationship between PSO and its member organisations. For example, several learning trajectories were delayed because a shared understanding of learning, capacity development or of the instrument itself did not exist between the member organisation and PSO, between the member organisation and partners or between head offices and field offices.

Codifying and Packaging Knowledge to Optimise a Wider Use of Learning Outcomes

In particular the TLPs aimed at developing knowledge and/or sharing lessons learned and insights with a wider audience. All TLPs show how difficult it is to learn from concrete cases and how much more difficult it is to extract lessons from the cross-case analyses.

Codifying of Knowledge

TLP on Remittances, Migration and Development – One important step still to be undertaken for this TLP to be successful includes eliciting the knowledge from the network and packaging it in a way that the various target audiences can easily access, understand and use it to improve their policies and practices. Codifying knowledge is hard and what it takes to perform this step successfully is often underestimated. Also the Facilitating Team has become aware that codifying knowledge is not easy and to facilitate this process the team introduced the appreciative inquiry method in combination with a tool called the 'reverse tree of knowledge'.

In most of the TLPs in the design or implementation stage no analytical framework for the collective part of the action research was developed that strengthened the joint understanding of the issues at stake and guaranteed that data would be collected and documented in one way or the other on all the important dimensions of the TLPs. The TLPs on PME and OA have good experiences with developing such an analytical framework and were more successful in this cross-case analysis. The TLP on Fragile States had started to develop a theoretical framework but eventually decided that this was not useful (to abstract and conceptual).

Developing knowledge based on cross-case analysis is not evident as described in the HIVA paper⁸⁴ on documenting PSO's experiences with action research. The authors refer to the balance between the collective interest or collective research questions and the interests of individual organisations or organisational research questions. In most of the TLPs it was very difficult to formulate collective research questions and hardly any of these have been answered. The main interest was in the individual organisational questions. A clear strategy and appropriate facilitation of this cross-case analysis was lacking in most of the TLP's (except the TLP on PME and OA).

84 Huyse, 2011a.

Cross-case analysis

TLP PME – A systematic approach was developed to analyse the cases (action research executed by the participating PSO member organisations and their partners) in order to formulate an answer to the central learning question. Crucial to the TLP approach was the joint identification of four intersecting themes to make the central learning question more operational. As such, it was clear right from the beginning which themes would be used to analyse cases. An external consultant was responsible for managing this cross-case analysis. During collective learning events reflection was organised on these intersecting themes.

TLP Gender – Four intersecting issues were identified which were seen as contributing to the central learning questions. However, most learning took place at individual organisational level. During the evaluation one interviewee stated that she experienced the TLP more as a group of individual projects than an overall shared theme. It is not clear from the interviews and documents to what extent the TLP has helped lift the gender agenda up to a higher collective level within the sector. One interviewee felt that the method of action learning was at times applied a bit too flexibly. She wondered whether more time should have been invested by the convener group and reference group to achieve more rigour earlier on in the process to enable collective sharing of results later on. In that way organisations would have had more clear of an idea of how research design may influence the ability to compare data across organisations.

A sound cross-case analysis and/or synthesis of the results of the learning trajectory might deliver relevant or new knowledge. However, a peer review to check whether the results are valuable has not taken place yet with regard to the TLPs.

Codifying knowledge is one thing, packaging it is quite another. The challenge is to find appropriate means of communication to make knowledge easily accessible. A theoretical document of more than 80 pages may seem to be interesting for academic use but is less attractive for over-loaded practitioners. Interesting communication media include videos, policy briefs, hand-outs, etc. ETC, for example, made a video on the results of the action learning trajectory that was shared amongst all participating partners. Amref has experimented with participative video monitoring (as part of the LWP). This approach seemed to be an interesting way to share lessons learned in the international Amref network. Sharing existing and acquired knowledge demands a lot of

communicative competences from individuals and organisations. Strengthening these competences should receive more attention during learning trajectories.

Facilitation Roles and Competencies Differ Depending on the Kind of Learning Needed

A mixed pattern of facilitation of the learning trajectories can be found in the evidence, from limited facilitation of the learning trajectory to very hands-on facilitation. There is no clearly superior method of facilitation of the learning processes; it highly depends on the context and the sense of urgency of the learning needed.

Who Performs the Role of Facilitator?

From the experiences in the TLP on Organisational Assessment, which included exploring the implementation and facilitation of organisational capacity assessments, four broad facilitation options present themselves that are equally present in the different LWPs and TLPs that have been evaluated.

1 Facilitation of the learning trajectory by an outsider with limited or no knowledge of the organisation. Several organisations engaged external consultants or PSO staff to facilitate learning events, workshops, conferences, to assist in tool development, etc. It was a deliberate choice of PSO to not become involved in a very hands-on facilitation of the LWPs. However, in practice some PSO staff became more intensively engaged in facilitating the learning process in the organisation which was appreciated a lot and which contributed to interesting results. In the TLPs on the other hand, external consultants or PSO staff were much more involved in accompanying and facilitating the learning trajectory, often taking up the role of a coach or a mentor. The advantage of these outsiders is their ability to confront organisations, to identify blind spots, to bring in competencies that are lacking within the team, for example reflective competences. Disadvantages identified in the evidence are that consultants are often the ones that acquire most of the new knowledge and subsequently leave the organisations with little or no follow-up on events; and limited ownership of the process when not properly facilitated.

Facilitation by an outsider

LWP GIP – The PSO staff member was actively involved in the learning trajectory, right from the beginning. The nature and quality of support from the PSO staff member was assessed by GIP as very appropriate. PSO took its time to get to know GIP and also connected GIP to other learning groups. PSO's support at the beginning of the LWP, through facilitation of a session on learning, turned out to be very useful in that it unintentionally helped to confront existing mental models within GIP that normally get in the way of learning. The fact that PSO was an external party made it possible for GIP to accept this confrontation, something which an internal staff member could not have done. The evaluator further stated that there is a fine line between encouraging people to learn, pushing people to learn and making it possible for people to learn. In this case, PSO walked the fine line well.

TLP Gender – from the TLP on gender some cases showed how important the selection of the external facilitator is. For example, during the first internal meeting on gender which included training sessions facilitated by external experts for DAI partners, ownership was viewed as quite limited. One of the external trainers was not able to connect with the audience and this resulted in further distancing by participants.

2 Facilitation of learning trajectories activities or processes at partner organisation level by a staff member from the PSO member organisation. This is external because the PSO member organisation remains a donor, but is also partly internal because the member organisation is likely to have some affinity with the Southern organisation, though the power relations should not be underestimated either. Issues such as ownership, power and participation were particularly important as many LWPs were about introducing tools, concepts, new approaches that often had been developed in the North.

Facilitation of learning processes with partners

LWP MCNV – The MCNV case shows how effective facilitation carried out by the PSO member organisation can be in case the staff of the PSO member organisation have the right attitude, knowledge and skills and are accountable to both the partner organisation in a Southern country (i.e. Vietnam) and the Dutch NGO. Moreover in this particular case mentoring and coaching of the MCNV staff member was done in a formal and informal manner by senior leaders from both sides (the Netherlands and Vietnam.)

The advantage is the affinity with the organisation, often being part of the same family, combined with a somewhat external perspective on the organisation. If done well, this facilitation by a PSO member organisation increases interrelations and strengthens the partnership.

3 Peer facilitation of learning trajectories by Southern network partner or partners from the same international alliance/organisation. This model is less likely to entail power issues and may create more trust from the start. Moreover, peers may have more thematic regional knowledge to use during the learning trajectory. In most TLPs and in the LWPs this kind of peer facilitation seems underexplored. The majority of the LWPs and TLPs organised joint workshops and conferences where several partners met and exchanged experiences with the objective of fostering peer-to-peer learning, which is not the same as facilitating.

Peer Facilitation

LWP SOMO – One of the results of the LWP was the acknowledgement of SOMO that it needed to evolve from a knowledge building organisation into an organisation that has the ambition to make capacity building something of a mutual exchange between partners. A quote: 'What was fun about the South-South exchange was that partners continued coaching each other. Before, SOMO had a strong emphasis on training, this shifted and coaching became the starting point'.

4 Facilitation of the learning trajectory by a respected member of internal staff: as far as the LWPs are concerned, a staff member of the PSO member organisation was usually assigned to coordinate the learning trajectory internally. The place, space and opportunities given to this person and their facilitation abilities are factors that contribute to the effectiveness of the learning

trajectory. The PSO programme evaluation⁸⁵ revealed that because of the presence of the PSO learning trajectories the learning coordinators felt supported and gained more legitimacy to implement and facilitate the internal learning agenda. This approach ensures lots of factual knowledge by the facilitator and acceptance. However, this may prevent the 'external eyes' and the surprising questions and challenges introduced by an outsider who is not part of internal politics and who may therefore enjoy more freedom to ensure critical analysis. On the negative side, when the internal person is not recognised by colleagues or given legitimacy to lead the PSO trajectory, this can also seriously bounce back into less effective processes than if facilitated by an outsider.

A combination of the different options will most probably generate the most useful results, as long as the underlying dynamics are recognised and dealt with in advance in a transparent manner; taking into account four key factors as identified by the TLP on Organisational Assessment, participation, ownership, accountability and power which may in combination lead to transparency.

Facilitation Competencies Include Content, People, Process and Results

With a nod to the typology of Schein⁸⁶ with regard to process facilitation, a distinction can be made between types of facilitation. Three archetypes of styles can be distinguished: 'pure' facilitation: taking only responsibility for the process; exploratory facilitation: the facilitator is more active and gets involved in how issues on content are being analysed and being dealt with but does not insert ideas, suggestions, advice, or options); confrontational facilitation: the facilitator has own ideas and reactions and is pro-actively involved in providing direction.

In all options in terms of position and styles, the facilitator needs to be able to facilitate learning processes requiring a number of interrelated competencies in the realm of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Inspired by literature about change management it may be argued that while facilitating learning trajectories, competent attention should be paid to three to four interrelated critical components: content; people; process; and results.⁸⁷

85 IOB. (2010). *Evaluation of Dutch Support to Capacity Development. The PSO case. Synthesis report on the evaluation of the PSO programme 2007-2010*. The Hague: Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

86 Schein, E.H. (1999). *Process consultation revisited; Building the helping relationship*. Reading: Addison – Wesley Publishing Company. pp. 42 – 48.

87 The first three dimensions – content, people, process – may be extracted from the work of Anderson, D., & Ackerman Anderson, L. (2001). *Beyond change management; Advanced strategies for today's transformational leaders*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer. The fourth dimension – benefits – has been added by Context in view of the increased results orientation within the development sector. (Ref. Leenknecht, A., & Van der Velden, F. (2006) *Facilitating organisational change; beyond organisational and institutional development*. Contextual No. 5. Utrecht: Context, international cooperation.)

Competencies for Facilitating Learning

'Content' refers to 'what' about the organisation needs to learn or change. About what is happening in the external domain, a specific 'market' in terms of dynamics with regard to hard and software and how this is reflected within organisations and institutions in terms of issues such as strategy, structure, systems, process, technology, work practices etc. Within the context of the PSO Association these domains are quite diverse and range from facilitating learning in fragile states, to basic social service sectors and research with regard to multinational corporations.

'People' refers to behaviours, emotions, minds and spirits of the human beings who are designing, implementing, supporting, or being impacted by the learning and change (in this particular case the staff of member organisations of PSO; the staff of partner organisations).

'Process' refers to how 'content' and 'people' learning need to be planned, designed and implemented. There are many different definitions and meanings of the term process, but in the present context process may be defined as 'The natural or intentional unfolding of continuous events towards a desired outcome'.⁸⁸ Process denotes the actions that produce both the external (content) and internal (people) changes. Process is, as Schein puts it succinctly, 'how things are done between people and in groups'.⁸⁹ Within the context of PSO it refers to how the LWP, TLPs and CLAs have been planned and implemented.

'Results' refers to output, outcome and impact of a learning process at individual, organisational and institutional level in financial and non-financial returns.⁹⁰

All these areas must be integrated into a single unified learning effort that enables individuals, organisations and institutions to learn and where they choose to be in the future. Anderson and Ackerman Anderson⁹¹ argue that '... organisations that take a piecemeal approach and separate their organisational and technical changes (content) from their human and cultural changes

88 Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001, pp. 136–137.

89 Schein, 1999, p. 146.

90 Reference can be made to the Chapter on Results of this publication.

91 Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001

(people) fail dramatically'. They state that a conscious design of a process is a key factor for success and that process, ultimately, determines the success of the change implementation.⁹²

The above observation has implications for the multiple roles and functions that need to be performed by learning facilitators from an organisation such as PSO and the multiple competencies that are required. From the evidence that has been collected within the scope of the present study, a diverse picture in terms of competencies, capabilities and capacities of PSO emerges.

It is obvious that PSO as an organisation has been struggling with the question to what degree the 'learning facilitators' should have ample knowledge, skills and experiences with regard to the 'market' in which they are facilitating change.

Different Appreciations of PSO Facilitating

Some member organisations indicate that it was not always possible for PSO staff members to understand the intricacies of the market in which they are operating or that '... little or no reference was made to other [than funding] contributions to the trajectory (Netherlands Red Cross)' and that it was sometimes difficult to tune in with somewhat different learning cultures and styles, which has had a negative influence on the ability to support the member organisations (in the HealthNet TPO LWP evaluation report it is reported that 'the role of PSO in this LWP has been small'). Others appreciate primarily the process facilitation skills and the ability of PSO to 'enable'. From the case studies it also becomes clear that some of the learning facilitators were not been able to support learning trajectories both at organisational and strategic level (e.g. SOM0).

To Further Learning Personal Commitment of Leadership is Crucial

From the body of literature about capacity development it may be learned that if leaders are not involved in organisational capacity development processes 'not much will happen'.⁹³ In a recent study about capacity development it is argued that capacity development is a rather personal issue

⁹² Ibid, pp. 6-7.

⁹³ James, R. (1998). *Demystifying organisational development; practical capacity-building experiences of African NGOs*. Oxford: INTRAC.

and first and foremost concerns 'people': individuals are the key; their behaviour, confidence and trust: 'Development starts with self'.⁹⁴

Ever since the publications of Peter Senge's *The fifth discipline* it is now generally accepted that the role of leaders in organisational learning is crucial.⁹⁵ Senge argues that in a learning organisation leaders have to perform the role of designer, teacher and steward. Organisational design relates to vision, mission strategy and the core values of an organisations; both the spoken and the unspoken. The leader as teacher implies helping everyone in an organisation, themselves included, to gain more insightful views of reality (leaders as coaches, guides or facilitators). The leader as a steward is basically about attitudes; it is about servant leadership.⁹⁶ In the evidence that has emerged from the case studies there are remarkable stories of leaders who have taken the responsibility for the continuation of LWP, the re-designing of their organisation and who have acted as teachers and coaches vis-à-vis their colleagues.

Role of Leadership

LWP Edukans – Edukans took as a point of entry a single-loop learning question about 'fundraising', evolved from there to the broader issue of 'resource mobilisation' and subsequently led to a change in organisational structure, the manner staff members of Edukans work together, instruments and procedures and the LWP contributed to a change in culture within the organisation (e.g. more emphasis on joint collaboration within departments, more ownership among all staff members with regard to the need to engage in resource mobilisation).

Circumstantial evidence indicates that the Edukans leadership played an important facilitating role in this process; responsibility was taken for redesigning the organisation, challenging existing mental models and coaching vis-à-vis colleagues. Internal reflection became an important integral part of the LWP and lessons learned were applied in the next stage of the learning trajectory.

94 Van der Velden & Fernando, 2011. At the same time there is the realisation that complex multi-faceted problems of poverty, marginalisation and violation of human rights require complex multi-actor responses in order to contribute to sustainable solutions.

95 Senge, 1994a; for an abridged version: Senge, P. (1994b). The leader's new work: building learning organizations. In C. Mabey & P. Iles. *Managing learning*. (pp. 5 – 22). London: The Open University.

96 Ref. among others Senge, 1994a.

At IICD a crucial factor in the learning process was the stimulation of the managing director. Her active support made it possible for organisational learning to be put on the agenda, being institutionalised and becoming a driving force for IICD's performance improvements. For example, a key moment in the shift from in-country learning towards organisation-wide learning was a reflective meeting on Social Innovation in March 2012. The intention was to share in-country experiences with the objective to further clarify the IICD intervention strategy. Because of the prevailing culture 'each country is different and each country manager can do the work differently' this agenda item was initially cancelled by middle-management. The managing director intervened and the topic was put back on the agenda. The reflection and discussion was a success, brought new energy and helped to change the 'island' mindset.

In hindsight it may be observed that greater satisfaction could have been obtained if more systematic and conscious attention, for instance through a leadership development programme, would have been paid to the functions, roles and related competencies of leaders with regard to capacity development in general and fostering learning in organisations in particular.

In management literature a distinction is made between leaders and managers (often labelled as 'bosses'). Leaders provide direction, are sources of inspiration, build teams and live by example.⁹⁷ Managing entails the proper and efficient use of resources – good administration. When this process delivers good results, it can be a trigger to convince management to invest (more) in organisational learning.

97 Ref for instance Adair, J. (1997). *Not bosses but leaders; how to lead the way to success*. (revised edition). London: Kogan and Page; and the functions that are attributed by Senge (1990) to leaders.

Managers versus Leaders

LWP IKV Pax Christi – Organisational learning in a professional organisation like IKV-PC is to start from the practitioners, who are working and learning on peace processes on a daily basis. Even though theory claims that changes in organisational culture are to be initiated from the top, in this case the top was not actively involved. It was important that the top did not 'block' learning, but created space for learning from the bottom, without having a clear indication at the outset of results of the learning processes. Design of learning processes and their possible use in bridging 'strategic gaps' in the organisation was new, and the top allowed experiments with learning paths (supported by PSO) that gradually took shape while running these paths. A rather risky investment from a manager's perspective. Later, when the need for learning and linking became clearer, and the first results of the learning paths were showing (links among practitioners, and contributions to strategy formulation on core themes of IKV Pax Christi), the top was prepared to invest more staff time and money into the learning paths: 'Now both top and bottom have a pretty good idea how learning can efficiently assist in improving organisational performance.'

Insights

In conclusion, evidence has shown that learning becomes more effective when during implementation attention is paid to:

- flexibly following the learning path agreed upon and deviating from it if the dynamics require such;
- intelligently mixing different approaches and learning processes, building upon different learning preferences that appear present in the organisation;
- inclusion of leaders during crucial moments in the process;
- continuously realising that learning is a social process and that most learning takes place on the job and through multiple formal and informal interactions;
- close monitoring of genuine involvement of all stakeholders, including partner organisations during the process;
- proper and adequate facilitation when issues of power and ownership surface during the process, especially where inter-organisational learning is concerned;
- timely development of strategies to codify knowledge and of appropriate communication media;
- adequately acknowledging the various options and styles for facilitation and carefully choosing the right one for the specific (stages of) learning trajectory;
- inviting 'the right' facilitator and realising that facilitating learning is a 'profession' and requires specific skills, knowledge and the appropriate attitude.

Summary of insights

Evidence has shown that learning becomes more effective when there is an underlying theory of learning that addresses:

- an understanding of the actual organisational challenge (the desired organisational development or change) and a coupling of the learning motive with this challenge;
- the fact that one must build on what is already there in terms of organisational learning capabilities (preconditions for the desired organisational development or change);
- the connection of the appropriate kind of learning to the organisational challenge in terms of single, double and triple-loop learning (assumptions of learning);
- the interrelatedness between individual learning, organisational learning and inter-organisational learning (assumptions of learning).

Evidence has shown that learning becomes more effective when during the design and planning phase of the learning trajectories attention is paid to:

- firmly coupling and embedding the learning motive with and in an (urgently felt) strategic need to adapt and change;
- an inclusive and participatory process (relevant staff, departments and learners in the North and the South) to enhance ownership of the learning trajectory;
- properly balancing what needs to be learned, who needs to learn and how that can best be done;
- tailoring the learning paths and aligning these to the existing abilities to learn through a self-diagnosis of the learning and working environment.

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Epilogue – Some Final Considerations

*'As the present now
Will later be past
The order is
Rapidly fadin'*

*And the first one now
Will later be last
For the times they are a-changin'
(Dylan, 1964)*

The Bigger Picture and Learning to Learn from Success and Failure

In 1993 Fukuyama announced the end of history and argued that the worldwide spread of liberal democracies and free market capitalism of the West and its lifestyle may signal the end point of humanity's sociocultural evolution and become the final form of human government. At the same time, development organisations continued their fight against poverty, believing it was the last and final battlefield of human development.

Well indeed, 'the times are a-changin'. The past couple of years have not seen the end of history nor for that matter 'the end of poverty', on the contrary. It appears that we are currently facing the most fundamental of crises the world has ever faced: warming of the planet, nine billion mouths to feed in 2050, foreseeable shortages in fossil energy sources and fresh water in the near future, massive land-grabbing and global migration just to mention a few. Crises that have all the traits of a system in crisis as global financial markets seem to increase the problems instead of helping to solve them. A system in crisis as the current governance dynamics seem inadequate to even begin to address the issues in a comprehensive manner. A system in crisis as the old economic mantra of 'growing ourselves out of misery' may this time create even bigger problems as the world can no longer support more deforestation, depletion and bio-degradation.

The past decade has seen more fundamental changes. Brazil, Russia, India and China are rapidly evolving into fully-fledged market economies and claiming their share of global resources. The balance of power is slowly but steadily shifting from West to East. And although many developing countries have shown impressive growth figures and the establishment of middle-class

societies in their midst over the past decade, poverty itself is has not been alleviated. On the contrary, it is as widespread as ever.

Faced by these massive challenges 'doing things better' may no longer seem to suffice. 'The capitalist system in under siege', report Porter and Kramer in the Harvard Business Review.⁹⁸ Instead of focusing on 'parts' the 'whole' needs to be taken into consideration: a change of system is inevitable. There is – as the Prime Minister of Bhutan, a small Himalayan state that promotes Gross National Happiness instead of Gross National Product, has argued – 'a need for reinterpretation and recasting concepts of good life and good economy'.⁹⁹

Development organisations, especially those that function on the basis of government subsidies and the development sector at large seem to urgently 'need to do better things'. More fundamentally: there is a need to rethink the ways in which the sector defines 'what is right to do' in the first place. Real and continued learning and action on such type of questions seems not an additional and luxury add-on, but a contribution in order to remain relevant in view of the challenges ahead.

Development theory and policy is at a deadlock; many development organisations are increasingly searching for their *raison d'être*; partnerships with organisations in low and middle income countries are under pressure; there are challenges in the field of result measurement and communication; in some countries (including the Netherlands) the budgets for international cooperation are rapidly decreasing. In addition, more and more civil society organisations, government agencies and corporate sector entities in countries such as the Netherlands are undertaking activities in the field of international (development) cooperation; international solidarity is therefore no longer the exclusive privilege and domain of development organisations. The moral authority and legitimacy of 'traditional' development organisations is decreasing; at the same time new actors and new forms of international cooperation are emerging.

Development organisations themselves 'have' – as Mahatma Gandhi would say – 'to become the change they want to see'. In many cases it is time to reflect about what organisations bring to the world and to revisit visions, missions and strategies; to reposition within the broader landscape in which the boundaries between civil society, corporate sector and the state have become quite fluid; to learn to operate in a situation where access to government funding has become a competitive business and grants a scarce commodity ... and learning to learn from success and failure an important prerequisite.

98 Porter, M., & Kramer, M. (2011) The Big Idea: Creating Shared Value. *Harvard Business Review*, January–February (1), 1–17.

99 Thinley, J.Y. Prime Minister of Bhutan. (2010). *Well-being, Happiness and Leadership*. World Leaders Forum Columbia University, September 15, 2010. Retrieved from <http://www.worldleaders.columbia.edu/events/prime-minister-kingdom-bhutan-jigmi-y-thinley-1>

The motto 'to become the change we want to see' can also be applied to development organisations that focus on capacity development. Twenty years after the publication of Elliot J. Berg's 'Rethinking Technical Cooperation' the radical he called for is unfortunately still needed. There is a need for deep reflections about *raison d'être*, efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability.

There is a sector-wide necessity for professionalisation and organisational and institutional development. This need is however not always recognised by relevant stakeholders such as employers, employees, partner organisations and governments. This need extends beyond learning on capacity development; it is not only about improving the quality of and developing daily working practice ('doing things better') but also about stimulating innovation and discovering new ways of working ('doing better things').

In view of the above in the present epilogue the members of the evaluation team take the liberty to share some more strategic considerations with regard to the past and offer some suggestions for the future.

Need and Complexity of Transformational Change; a Case in Point

The current challenges the world bestows upon development organisations require transitional¹⁰⁰ and transformational¹⁰¹ change which needs to come 'from within'. Capacity development is about people, movements, organisations and society at large, but first and foremost, it concerns people. Individuals are the key; their behaviour, their confidence and their trust. Learning and change starts with the 'self'.¹⁰²

Top-quality external facilitation can help development organisations, their professionals and their leaders, in creating clarity on the challenges of this day and era, in bringing them in-house and in taking them deep inside one's self. Good leadership can create safe conditions for this and can facilitate and lead the process of reinventing oneself. Outsider's eyes can help and support by raising questions only an outsider often dares raising, by bringing in new ideas and unclogging often clogged-up settings.

100 The present situation is replaced with something entirely different, from 'old' to a more or less defined 'new state'.

101 Radical shift from one state of being, 'identity' to another yet to be defined. (Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2001, pp. 31 – 50.)

102 Van der Velden & Fernando, 2011, p. 84 – 85.

If one single insight has emerged from the individual evaluations and the present synthesis, it is that facilitation of organisational learning is a complex, dynamic non-linear process that requires the right competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude), collective capabilities and capacity. Moreover facilitating learning in an international context is still an emerging, quite demanding, relatively new professional discipline.

PSO is a case in point; many more development organisations have to – or try to – engage in transitional or even transformational change due to (a combination of) internal and external actors and factors. PSO deserves compliments and respect for the attempt to make such a radical change. At the same time it needs to be acknowledged that there might have been too much optimism about the ins and outs of such a radical organisational change process in general and the timeframe in particular. What it requires to obtain a shift in culture, behaviour, mindsets and other organisational dimensions and to sustain such changes over time should not be underestimated.

It is therefore a simple, as well as powerful, insight that in the event an organisation wants to survive and move to the next stage of organisational evolution, it needs to create sufficient space (time, resources and room to manoeuvre) and it needs to muster sufficient courage to translate fundamental changes in its 'persona' into strategic positioning (external), organisational characteristics (internal) and relationships (with primary, secondary and tertiary stakeholders) in order to be able to function in an efficient and effective manner.

Future Outlook

Up to now the function of organisational learning with regard to organisational and capacity development within the Dutch development sector was organised along various lines. Of course there was PSO, the learning and practice centre for Dutch Development NGOs and their partners where they could learn about capacity development financed by the Dutch government. Then there are the so-called commercial service providers and research and knowledge institutes that offer training, workshops and learning courses on all kinds of skills, tools, approaches and instruments in order to do the development work better. Also the branch association for international development Partos facilitates learning initiatives.

Now that PSO will cease to exist and the average service providers are limited to aiding professionalisation it may be concluded that within the development sector there is no opportunity to systematically learn not at an organisational nor at an institutional level. The crucial question arises: if there is such a great and urgent need to learn and develop and innovate how can that be organised best? Which actors should be involved, how should that be achieved and who will pay?

In this final part of this epilogue we would like to take the opportunity to outline two possible future scenarios in which we indicate two possible answers to this question. We are convinced that (organisational) development and (systemic) change only will happen if organisations join forces and learn how to develop and change together. Organisations need to jointly discover what is needed in order to remain relevant in a continuously changing environment. Moreover as Einstein once said: 'no problem can be solved from the same consciousness that has created it'; there is a need for partners from different domains and professional disciplines to come together, to learn and develop 'the better things' together: new ways of thinking and working in order to radically change our consciousness.

An Innovation Fund for International Development

In other public or social sectors – health, education, welfare, culture, housing – in the Netherlands, the government funded training and development until a few years ago. Drastic budget cuts however changed the availability of public funding. Nowadays there are different arrangements around the organising, managing and financing of training and development; all basically private structures.¹⁰³

In the Dutch business sector there are an estimated 30 industry-related knowledge and training institutions responsible for the education and training of staff in order to professionalise and develop ('qualified professionals'). The functionality of these institutions is often prescribed by Dutch law. In addition, these institutions also take care of the connection between (vocational) education and the labour market. The financing of these institutions is twofold: public (for the execution of public tasks) and private (for services such as training and education). There are also industries that organise training and development for themselves ('self-regulation'), such as stock brokers or psychologists. This is usually organised and financed by a branch association or professional association on the basis of contribution. Sometimes the branch association organises training and development programmes for its members through market providers (and controls access and collective discounts).

There are business sectors, including social sectors that have what is called an O&O fund¹⁰⁴, often linked to a sector-wide collective labour agreement (CAO).¹⁰⁵ In this additional part of a CAO employers and employees commit to pay a certain (usually 0.02 to 1) percentage of the wage bill or a percentage of gross salary for the financing of sector-wide training and development facilities.

103 Incidentally, most sectors in the transition to a private construction, agreed with the public financier to (co) finance a start-up.

104 O&O stands for: Organisation and Development [in Dutch: Organisatie & Ontwikkeling].

105 It is estimated that there are circa 140 of those funds in the Netherlands. The Agentschap SZW recognises 125 O&O funds, see: http://www.agentschapszw.nl/subsidies/esf_d/lijst-erkende-o-en-o-fondsen.

These funds are also managed jointly. (In some sectors this additional part of the CAO is prescribed by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment and therefore paid by non-members.) Often these O&O funds are also responsible for the connection with the (sector specific) labour market. This means taking care of both employment creation and the promotion of good labour relations as well as health and safety related issues, policy on mobility and connection between education and labour market.

Such arrangements are considered 'typical civil society' because both employers and employees are represented and sometimes even the government is involved (usually as a funder and if the fund also executes a public task, for example in the case of healthcare, where some professions must meet legal requirements).

The legal form of these funds is usually a foundation in which all relevant stakeholders are represented. In most sectors this foundation is closely linked to the branch association, assuming that the association can perform independently on behalf of all its members and assuming that the sector-wide perspective on the role of the association follows the regular functions of branch associations as described in relevant literature, especially the function of being responsible for making internally binding agreements in order to regulate the sector.¹⁰⁶

A possible disadvantage of this particular way of organising is that the control may be conservative, in the sense of risk-averse because one of the parties can operate as a hindrance.¹⁰⁷

The establishment of an Innovation Fund for International Development – in which probably also actors from outside the sector may participate – could be a way to organise learning, development and innovation at an organisational and institutional level. It would also provide an opportunity to address for example the growing problem of immobility within the sector. Again, we can learn from experiences in other social sectors like healthcare where the O&O fund increasingly focuses on sustainable employability and diversity policy. In other words, an Innovation Fund could provide support for various sector-wide, development challenges and could also explore possibilities in working together with other actors who either encounter similar challenges or are engaged in international development and from their – for the sector – innovative perspective can contribute

106 Van Munster, O., Van den Berg, E.J.T., & Van der Veer, A. (1996). *De Toekomst van het Middenveld*. Den Haag: Delwel; Tack, P., & Beusmans P. (Eds.) (2001). *Professioneel Verenigingsmanagement voor Besturen en Directeuren van Branche- en Beroepsverenigingen: Theorie en Praktijk*. Amsterdam: VU; Schmidt, P.J., Van den Toren, J.P., & De Wal, M.I. (2002). *Ondernemende Brancheorganisaties. Balanceren tussen Belangen*. Assen: Van Gorcum.

107 A positive exception is for example the Dutch Municipalities Fund, which is known for its progressive approach: they focus not only on training and development but especially on detecting and boosting new initiatives in order to encourage innovation.

to innovative development and – ultimately – transformative change of the discipline of international development.

A Social Business Promoting Organisational Learning

A different scenario to continue facilitating organisational learning is to organise this function in one or more social enterprise(s). Recently the concept of a social entrepreneurial way to change processes has gained more recognition with the international and Dutch development community. Such a business-like approach to change has the potential to become a new organisational form for organisations working in international cooperation.

In a social entrepreneurial approach, it is not shareholder value that comes first, but creating multiple ('blended') values that are relevant to society at large ('impact versus profits').¹⁰⁸ Some call this 'business for the common good'. This implies that enough financial profit is made to continue the business in a sustainable way.

Blended value creation could mean work and income for the poorest, change in power relations, an improved environment, access to basic social services such as health services and education, and enhancing the capacity of change agents to adapt and self-renew as well. Therefore, a social enterprise is primarily committed to creating societal rather than financial value. Furthermore a 'genuine' social enterprise is characterised by operating through the market (real products and services at real prices), financial sustainability (working with loans on which interest is paid in lieu of subsidies), and the active involvement of stakeholders in all stages of a business process. A social enterprise should be led by a social entrepreneur, not a social worker. Capital is provided by a social investor, who is satisfied with a lower dividend and a longer repayment period and who receives a verifiable financial and social return ('slow capital'). (This is calculated using the Social Return on Investment methodology.)

A social business in the realm of the present publication will have as its core purpose to perform organisational functions that enhance the learning and adaptive capacity of its client organisations. This will be done by offering products and services (such as organising and facilitating learning trajectories, coaching, counselling, supervision of organisations, as well as support with regard to organisational change for those organisations that want to engage in transitional or transformational change) for which there is a demand on the market.

108 Van der Velden, F. (2011). Social business: a novel approach to socio-political change. In F. van der Velden (Ed.), *New approaches to international development cooperation*. (pp. 69 – 89). Utrecht: Context, international cooperation.

The organisation needs a sound business plan (in which among other things attention is paid to the product market combination) as it will need to recover its costs in order to be financially sustainable. The leadership of the organisation will have the traits of an entrepreneur who knows the market in which the organisation is operating, and who is able to engage in relationships with multiple stakeholders (client organisations, subcontractors, academic institutions, practitioners and policy makers).

A social investor who provides 'slow' capital needs to be identified. This may be the clients of the organisation, the government¹⁰⁹, or foundations. The organisation will have a sound Management Information System which delivers data with regard both the Return on Investment (financial) and the Social Return on Investment (what is the Return on Investment, to what extent has the learning and adaptive capacity of the client organisations improved and to what extent has that improved their efficiency, effectiveness and sustainability).

It speaks for itself that those entrepreneurs who want to start such a social enterprise will go through all the stages of preparing a blueprint (business plan), road testing ideas (validation), actual preparation (including building its own capacity) and then go to scale, can make optimum use of the rich legacy of PSO.

¹⁰⁹ Hence within this scenario the role of government will change from grant maker to social investor.

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ANNEX 1

Summary: Generic Terms of Reference¹¹⁰

Introduction

The PSO evaluation is composed of two stages. A first stage that will focus on the evaluation of a series of specific learning trajectories, and a second stage that will consist of the formulation of more general findings based upon these specific evaluations.

Context of the evaluation

Between June and October 2012 all of the more than 60 'Learning Working Paths' (LWP), 'Collective Learning Trajectories' (CLT) and 'Thematic Learning Programmes' (TLP) supported by PSO will come to an end. The focus of the evaluation will be on learning from the past with a forward looking eye: to collect and review the experiences and lessons of the learning trajectories to further the process of exploration and reflection on a sustainable integration of learning practices and improved learning capacity within the organisations concerned.

Objective of the entire exercise

The objective of both the end-evaluation of the PSO programme, of its instruments as well as of the underlying learning trajectories is to formulate and share the lessons that PSO and participating member organisations learned during the past few years on the effectiveness of the learning trajectories supported and undertaken and on the appropriateness of the instruments developed.

The end-product of the first stage of the exercise (the evaluations of the various learning trajectories) will, per learning trajectory reviewed, be:

- a shared understanding (PSO, member organisations concerned and evaluator) of the changes that occurred as a result of the learning trajectory and of the underlying factors that influenced these;
- a brief and crisp document that will include an appreciation of the learning trajectory and the changes that occurred as a result, as well as a series of lessons learned and recommendations based thereon on furthering the learning process within and amongst the organisations concerned.

¹¹⁰ The extended generic terms of reference for both the LWP and TLP, as well as the CLT and outreach programme evaluations are available digitally on <https://www.partos.nl/content/facilitating-organisational-learning>.

The end-product of the second stage of the exercise will be:

- a general appreciation of the effectiveness of the various learning instruments and the underlying factors that influenced this;
- a series of revealing lessons learned and inspiring recommendations (do's and don'ts) on the various learning instruments aimed at the participating organisations themselves, as well as at all those parties that are, in one way or another, interested in launching and furthering their practice in 'learning for development'.
- a presentation and booklet on the above to be delivered at the PSO conference foreseen on the 23rd of November 2012.

ANNEX 2

Overview of Reports

Primary data

Learning Working Paths

- Balk, C. (2012). LWT-32 Simavi Evaluation Report.
- Balk, C. (2012). LWT-33 ZOA Evaluation Report.
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Colophon

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The PSO Association (an umbrella organisation of the major Dutch Development Organisations) has been a leading institution with regard to capacity development in general and organisational learning in particular. From 2007 onwards, PSO has been supporting organisational learning through a variety of instruments and approaches that all aim at improving the quality and effectiveness of Dutch international cooperation. The current study presents a general overview of results achieved along the way and shares insights and lessons that can be learned from experiences with these instruments and approaches.

