



Creating the (organisational) conditions for an OM-based M&E and learning practice

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1. Institutionalising the M&E and learning practice

Through its particular design, Outcome Mapping is generally acknowledged as a learning-oriented planning and M&E approach. However, we all know that a method or an approach alone will not do the trick. Even though a programme invests in a carefully designed OM-based programme framework and respective M&E system, there is often a large gap between the principles and design of the monitoring process and the actual monitoring practice. Acknowledging that this involves more than having good intentions – and that, at the end, real people in the real world have to ‘translate’ the good intentions into action – it is recommended that a development programme also invests in creating the necessary (organisational) conditions to implement and maintain the learning-oriented M&E system. In fact, one could argue that it should be included in every M&E design process. This resource presents a possible approach to analyse the existing (organisational) conditions and plan for the institutionalisation of a learning-oriented M&E practice.

The structure and logic of the approach is derived from the theory and practice of organisational learning and is mainly based on the concepts presented in Britton’s publication on organisational learning in NGOs². It is based on the idea that an organisation can develop a practical strategy for learning if it creates the right *motives, means and opportunities* to do so. Senge³ presents three similar elements in developing learning disciplines within an organisation, i.e., *guiding ideas; theory, methods and tools; and innovations in the infrastructure*. Both models highlight three interlinked elements which highlight similar aspects related to organisational conditions. *Guiding ideas* resonate with *motives; theory, methods and tools* with *means; and innovations in infrastructures* with *opportunities* respectively. The three elements generate a synergy which will not occur when attention is paid to only one of the elements alone. If there are no guiding ideas, there is no sense of direction or purpose. If there are no theories, methods and tools, people cannot develop the new skills and capabilities required for monitoring and learning. If there are no innovations in infrastructure, people will not have the opportunities or the resources to pursue their aspirations or apply the tools. These elements form the backbone for the approach presented below.

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² Britton, B. (2005). *Organisational learning in NGOs: Creating the motive, means and opportunity* (INTRAC Praxis Paper 3). Oxford: INTRAC.

³ Senge, P., Kleiner A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organisation*. New York: Doubleday.



2. Creating the motives, means and opportunities

(Britton's model contextualised for an OM-based or other learning-oriented M&E systems adapted with ideas from Senge⁴, IFAD⁵, Guijt⁶ and personal experience)

2.1 Creating motives

Guiding Ideas

Formulating aspirations, establishing guiding ideas and creating the motives for the development and implementation of a learning-oriented M&E system are fundamental and should therefore be developed and articulated deliberately. Programme managers, programme officers and (boundary) partners will not contribute to and participate adequately in an M&E process unless they have an understanding of what it is, why it is important and what is expected.

Support from management

Support from leadership is vital for an organisation or programme to encourage and value a learning-oriented M&E system. Support from leadership can be detected, among other factors, by communication about the initiative, its prioritisation on the agenda, living by example and recognition for contributions by staff.

Culture of learning

The M&E system will be positively influenced by an organisational culture supportive of learning, i.e., a culture that enables, encourages, values, rewards and uses the learning of its members both individually and collectively. Organisations with a learning culture demonstrate that learning is legitimate, that it is seen as an integral part of staff's work, and that space and time for learning within the M&E process are provided. Learning culture is enhanced by programme managers with an open-minded, transparent, innovative and inclusive mindset.

Incentives

Providing incentives (for programme staff, (boundary) partners, programme beneficiaries, ...) means offering stimuli to perceive monitoring as opportunities to discuss, critically reflect and learn in order to improve the programme. For the organisation's staff, it involves introducing sources of encouragement, such as clear job descriptions, financial rewards, activity support, recognition, feedback and transparency regarding the collected data. Furthermore, it entails removing disincentives such as ambiguous job descriptions, not making it clear how data is to be used, and the marginalisation of M&E in the organisation. For (boundary) partners involved in the monitoring process, it is recommended to properly negotiate expectations, provide targeted support for operationalising monitoring events and

⁴ Senge, P., Kleiner A., Roberts, C., Ross, R., & Smith, B. (1994). *The fifth discipline fieldbook: Strategies and tools for building a learning organisation*. New York: Doubleday.

⁵ International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) (2002). *Managing for impact in rural development. A guide for project M&E*. IFAD Office for Evaluation & Study.

⁶ Guijt, I. (2008). *Seeking Surprise: Rethinking monitoring for collective learning in rural resource management*. Published doctoral dissertation, Wageningen University, Wageningen, The Netherlands.



processes, hold joint monitoring training events with programme staff, and maintain a positive spirit of collaboration. Beneficiaries (e.g. local communities, farmers, teachers, ...) can only be expected to invest valuable time in data collection and sense-making activities when the returns are of value to them, in forms such as financial compensation, training opportunities, covering transport and accommodation costs, public recognition of participation, and regular feedback on M&E results.

2.2 Creating means

In order for people to contribute to and participate adequately in the M&E system, the programme needs more than motives and guiding ideas; it also requires the means to operationalise it.

Human capacity

M&E and learning processes require sufficient human capacity on the part of the people involved. One cannot assume that everybody has the capacity to adequately contribute to, participate in or manage the different stages of the M&E system. There are specific technical knowledge and skills required related to data collection, data storage, synthesis, documentation and communication. In addition, for participatory M&E, face-to-face events for sense-making require good analytical and facilitation skills. It is also necessary for programme staff to understand why the views of (boundary) partners and beneficiaries matter and to develop a self-critical look at their own attitudes and behaviours vis-à-vis (boundary) partners and beneficiaries. Strategies to ensure sufficient M&E capacity imply hiring the best possible people for each position and providing training, although in many cases most M&E capacity is developed through work experience. Focused inputs by consultants might be necessary but do not contribute much to internal or local capacity building.

Specialist support

Many organisations install specialist support and champions whose job is to coordinate monitoring and evaluation processes, help the people and the organisation learn, develop competencies to learn, facilitate analyses and develop appropriate tools and methods. Especially in new programmes, staff are under much pressure to perform, assemble teams, design basic information and management systems, and so on, which leaves little time for anything else. Therefore, it is advisable to shift parts of the monitoring and learning process to other actors in the organisation or even sub-contractors. These can be individuals or teams, depending on the size and scope of the learning initiatives.

Concepts and methods

It is important to discuss and choose appropriate conceptual models for the development and implementation of a learning-oriented M&E system. It is believed that understanding and exposure to new and challenging conceptual models can help people think and act differently in the way they plan, monitor and learn in the context of the programme. Methods and tools – for data collection, storage, sense-making and communication – based on underlying concepts bridge the gap between theory and practice. It is the synergy



between theory, methods and tools that lies at the heart of any field of human endeavour that truly builds knowledge.

Financial resources

Developing and implementing a learning-oriented M&E system not only requires staff but also adequate financial resources. M&E processes and systems cost money. Especially learning-oriented and participatory M&E processes require more investments in time, meetings and human capacity. Therefore the organisation has to ensure that adequate financial resources for all the stages of the M&E process are available and that an indicative budget is incorporated into the overall financial planning. M&E costs can be categorised into labour costs, operational costs, M&E events, training & study on M&E, equipment and external consultancy costs. Many M&E functions and activities overlap with implementation and management activities. It is recommended not to budget the M&E costs as programme management costs as this makes it unclear what is available. In general, M&E budgets range from 2% to 15% of all costs (IFAD). A general rule of thumb is that the M&E budget should not be so small as to compromise the accuracy and credibility of results, but neither should it divert programme resources to the extent that programming is impaired.

2.3 Creating opportunities

Creating motives and means alone are not sufficient for people to contribute to and participate adequately in the learning-oriented M&E process as long as the organisation is not creating opportunities for good implementation of the M&E process.

Integration into management and operations

For successful implementation, learning and M&E processes are integrated into the existing programme management and operational procedures and processes. This entails the creation of the necessary time and space for the M&E process to take off and unfold and an emphasis on face-to-face sense-making activities. By doing so, adjustments to existing management mechanisms, procedures, work processes, reports, schedules and agendas might be required.

Structures, responsibilities and plans

To avoid communication bottlenecks, conflicts of interests, task duplication and inefficient efforts, one needs to carefully consider the location of M&E functions and responsibilities in the organisational structure as well as develop clear and transparent M&E plans, including procedures and timeframes. It is often argued that M&E and learning is the job of everybody in the organisation. This idea is based on the belief that monitoring and learning is a daily and spontaneous activity and that everybody informally or formally monitors their daily operational activities. However, experience shows that the location of those responsible for M&E is critical for performance. Incorporating M&E positions into programme management and decision-making levels is recommended to facilitate the efficient use of information by management. For staff to participate in any activity not considered 'core business' will require additional efforts. Clarity about M&E responsibilities at the programme staff level involves developing clear job descriptions, allocating clear levels of authority and giving sufficient recognition to M&E related staff. As mentioned before, it is also essential to clearly spell out the M&E responsibilities of (boundary) partners and beneficiaries.



Information management infrastructure

The M&E system will generate data and information, synthesised information, analyses and lessons learned. Therefore it is recommended to invest in a well-designed and responsive information management (IM) system. In bigger programmes, handwritten notes and reports alone will not be sufficient for the management of the M&E process. Storage and documentation provide the foundation for interactive communication, transparency, consensus-building and continuity. Computerised information systems can make a critical contribution to tracking and using data, but should be carefully developed in order to avoid data being computerised but never used. Crucial aspects for the design of the IM system are to: investigate which information needs to be stored and made accessible, how data and information are to be stored (logic) and how and by whom they can be retrieved. The IM system should be in line with, and not divorced from the management’s information needs and should ideally be an integral part of the learning mechanisms in the organisation.

Relationships of trust

The quality and the nature of the relationships among programme staff or within a partnership will heavily affect monitoring, learning and negotiation processes. Interpersonal relationships are a key factor in organisational/social learning processes and are qualified by the level of trust and respect involved. Building relationships of trust between staff and (boundary) partners is essential because it guides and determines who people talk to and share experiences with, whether people challenge one another, and whether their own weaknesses and strengths can be expressed.

3. Self-assessment approach

The twelve elements mentioned above can be used to structure a self-assessment on the organisational conditions. Through *individual questionnaires* (annex 1 presents a sample questionnaire), *semi-structured interviews* or *focus group discussions*, a programme can analyse the organisational conditions and based on the results develop plans to improve the necessary conditions. Table 1 provides possible guiding questions for analysis for each of the twelve elements.

	Guiding questions	Possible further probing questions
1. Creating Motives	1.1 Do programme staff and partners have a common understanding of the purpose, aspiration and expectations of the M&E system?	<i>Which aspects of the M&E system are not yet clear?</i> ...
	1.2 Is there sufficient support from management staff for the development and implementation of the M&E system?	<i>What kind of support is provided by management?</i> <i>What extra support is required?</i> ...
	1.3 Does the organisation have an organisational culture that encourages, values and uses learning?	<i>Provide examples that show elements of a learning culture?</i> <i>What could be improved?</i> <i>What are the factors hindering a learning culture? ...</i>
	1.4 Does the programme have sufficient incentives, stimuli or sources of encouragement in	<i>What kinds of incentives are in place?</i>



	place for its staff to participate and carry out the different processes of the M&E system?	<i>What should be improved?</i> ...
2. Creating Means	2.1 Do programme staff and partners have sufficient human capacities to participate in, manage and contribute adequately to the M&E system?	<i>Which M&E capacities are well developed?</i> <i>Which capacities need to be enhanced?</i> ...
	2.2 Does the organisation have sufficient specialist support available to coordinate and assist the M&E process	<i>Who is providing specialist support in the organisation?</i> <i>What further support is missing?</i> ...
	2.3 Is the M&E system built on appropriate conceptual models and are the right methods and tools available to support/facilitate the M&E system?	<i>Which concepts/models are underpinning the M&E system?</i> <i>Which methods/tools are used and well developed?</i> <i>What needs to be improved?</i> ...
	2.4 Are there adequate financial resources available for the different processes of the M&E system?	<i>Is the M&E budget known to the staff coordinating the M&E process?</i> <i>Are the costs for M&E budgeted for separately? How much is the total M&E budget + % of total budget?</i> ...
3. Creating Opportunities	3.1 Is the M&E system well integrated into the management and operational process of the organisation and the programme?	<i>Which procedural changes or adjustments of work processes have assisted the integration of the M&E system?</i> <i>Which aspects of the M&E system could be further integrated?</i> ...
	3.2 Does the organisation have an appropriate organisational structure for M&E with sufficient clarity on the M&E responsibilities?	<i>Where and how are M&E functions structured in the organisation?</i> <i>Are the M&E plans clear and transparent?</i> <i>Are the roles and responsibilities clear to all staff?</i> ...
	3.3 Does the organisation have an operational and useful information management system in place to support the M&E system?	<i>Which information management systems are in place?</i> <i>What needs to be further developed?</i> ...
	3.4 Is there a sufficient level of trust and respect among the programme staff and partner staff?	<i>Do programme staff feel free to speak out, challenge each other and share experiences? Why? Why not?</i> <i>Do staff from partner organisations feel free to speak out, challenge the implementing team, provide feedback and share experiences? Why? Why not? ...</i>

Table 1: Guiding questions for a self-assessment on the organisational conditions



4. Example of use (VECO Indonesia)

For the development of its OM-based M&E system, VECO Indonesia used a seven step design process: identify the purpose and scope, identify the organisational spaces and rhythms, define the information needs, plan for data collection and synthesis, plan for sense-making, plan for documentation and communication and the final step, plan how the necessary organisational conditions and capacities will be established in support of the M&E system. For this step, VECO programme staff engaged in a facilitated self-assessment. An *individual questionnaire* (annex 1) was filled out by 11 respondents (management and programme staff) followed by a *focus group interview (4 hours)* with the same group of respondents to further analyse the twelve elements. The individual questionnaire only focused on a ‘scoring’ of the different elements guided by twelve questions. Respondents indicated their score without prior knowledge of the conceptual background of the organisational conditions. The focus group interview included a presentation of each of the twelve elements followed by a group scoring and a further in-depth analysis of each element. Individual *semi-structured face-to-face interviews* (3 people) provided additional insights on the organisational conditions and triangulated the data obtained during the focus group interview.

Figure 1 presents the outcomes (scoring) of both the individual questionnaire and the focus group discussion making use of a bar diagramme.

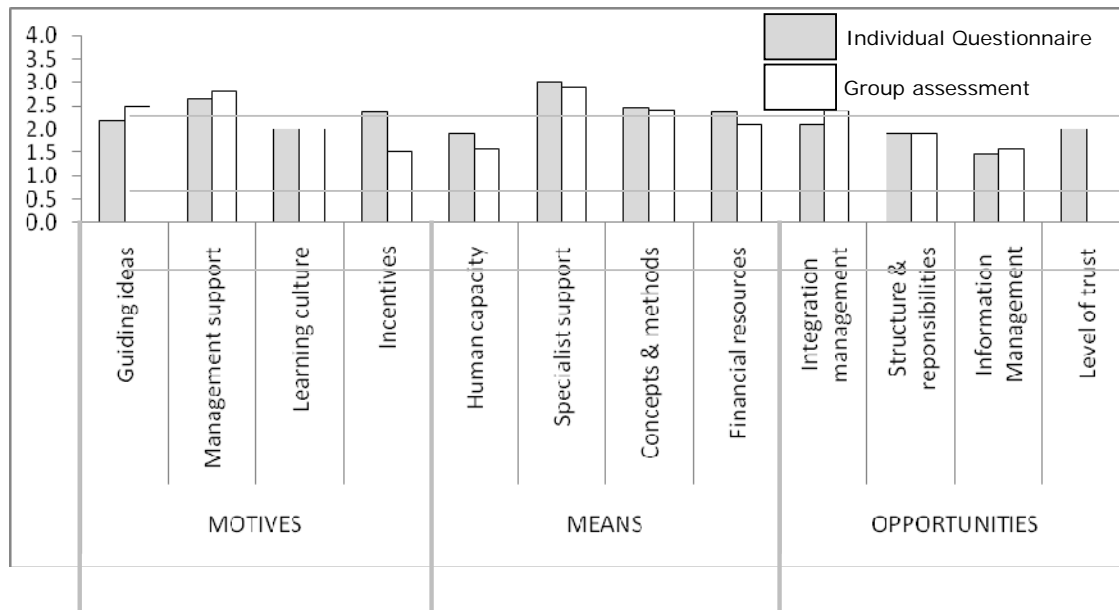







Figure 1: Result assessment organisational conditions VECO Indonesia (per element)

Not so much attention was given to the absolute results of each of the elements. However, it turned out to be a useful trigger for a further reflection during the facilitated focus group discussions and the individual semi-structured interview. For each of the elements, participants shared their opinions, analysed the current situation and formulated suggestions for future action. The outcomes of this exercise resulted in concrete actions to improve some of the conditions.



Annex

QUESTIONNAIRE					
ORGANISATIONAL CONDITIONS FOR A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF A LEARNING-ORIENTED M&E SYSTEM					
NAME (optional):			SECTION:		
<i>Please read through each of the following statements and place an 'x' in the box that best describes the current situation in your organisation/programme.</i>					
STATEMENTS	Not true 	Barely true 	Somewhat true 	Largely true 	Very true 
Programme staff and partners have a common understanding of the purpose, aspiration and expectations of the M&E system					
Programme staff and partners have sufficient human capacities to participate in, manage and contribute adequately to the M&E system.					
The M&E system is well integrated into the management and operational process of the organisation and the programme.					
The organisation has an appropriate organisational structure for M&E with sufficient clarity on the M&E responsibilities.					
The organisation has sufficient specialist support available to coordinate and assist the M&E process.					
There is sufficient support from management staff for the development and implementation of the M&E system.					
The organisation has an organisational culture that encourages, values and uses learning.					
The M&E system is built on appropriate conceptual models and has the right methods and tools available to support/facilitate the M&E system.					
The organisation has an operational and useful information management system in place to support the M&E system.					
There is a sufficient level of trust and respect among programme staff and partner staff.					
There are adequate financial resources available for the different processes of the M&E system.					
The organisation has sufficient incentives, stimuli or sources of encouragement in place for its staff to participate and carry out the different processes of the M&E system.					