

Action Aid's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS)

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It is common knowledge that the rhetoric of learning in many agencies is far from matched by what is actually practiced. Charles Owusu looks at some of the factors that contribute to, and constrains learning in organizations. Using the author's experiences and field-research work this paper attempts to describe the struggles within organizations, such as ActionAid (AA), to make systems and structures part of the solution to becoming a learning organization rather than part of the problem.

Summary

In a global context of accelerating change, learning is increasingly taking center stage. Yet, the "espoused theory" of how individual or collective learning happens, reflected in official policies, processes and formalized procedures is often not compatible with the "theory-in-use." Yet, the implications of not becoming a learning organization can be costly. Learning results in knowledge acquisition. It leads to improvements in efficiency and effectiveness. But in reality, contradictions and paradoxes abound. Steep hierarchical structures, unequal power relationships, defensive reasoning, risk aversion, and a failure to "fail forward" present deeply embedded obstacles. Questioning and modifying existing procedures, policies, structures, systems and cultural norms remain critical to double-loop learning.

Yet, few aid agencies purposefully create the time and space for this type of reflective learning to take place. Beyond single-loop-learning, the challenges of double-loop learning remain profound and the solutions radical. It entails seeking greater coherence and consistency between rhetoric and practice; constantly adjusting institutional cultures, structures and systems; and promoting context-specific language and communication forms, flexible procedures, flatter structures that thrive on horizontal, rather than hierarchical relationships. It also implies attitudinal changes, such as reducing the drudgery of lengthy written reports, in favor of creating reflective space for staff and field teams to interact more with partners, through institutionalized processes of reviews and reflections.

Introduction

Changing development context and the increasing importance of learning

In a global context of accelerating change, aid agencies are increasingly shifting their rhetoric and attention to learning. Rapid and accelerating change can be observed not only in globalization, communications and technology, but also in the awareness and aspirations of many poor people. In parallel, recent years have seen major shifts of emphasis in the policies and development paradigms of many aid agencies. Many have firmly put poverty alleviation on top of their development agenda, implying the need to build common cause with poor and marginalized people by addressing concerns around governance, human rights, advocacy and policy influence.

The balance of priorities for agencies has been moving from supporting discrete projects focused on service delivery to becoming co-players in addressing the underlying causes of poverty. At the same time, new relationships are sought, with more ownership by partner countries and organizations. Against this backdrop, aid agencies are increasingly paying attention to the concept of organizational learning in order to increase their competitive advantage, enhance innovation, and improve organizational effectiveness.

Main driver of learning in organizations

A key driver for the increased emphasis on **learning** is that the current development context is not only dynamic but also increasingly unpredictable. Consequently, paramount are timely processes by which staff, communities, and stakeholders become actively aware of progress toward planned change; identify problems and gaps; and use the learning to improve the effectiveness of work. In this sense, organizational learning is seen as an essential and integral part of good management practice, particularly in terms of understanding the variance between planned and actual change; learning improves information sharing, communication, and the quality of management decisions. Organizational learning is thus essential for improving organizational performance.

The road to becoming a learning organization starts with creating institutional systems and processes that will make learning happen and creating space for staff to interact, review and reflect annually with partners, stakeholders and poor people to learn from their experiences and those of others, and to take corrective measures. This is single-loop learning. Though single-loop learning may add to an organization's knowledge-base, field experience suggests that single-loop learning hardly results in any fundamental changes in policies, processes, structures, systems or organizational culture, including attitudes and behaviors. In other words, single-loop learning does not necessarily lead to double-loop learning, which is learning that leads to far reaching systemic changes, and which goes beyond the taking of corrective action.

The literature on learning and field research¹ suggests that double-loop learning is largely constrained by:

- Steep, hierarchical and inflexible organizational structures
- Inappropriate organizational cultures, procedures, systems, policies and structures
- Domineering personal attitudes and behaviors
- Defensive reasoning and the maintenance of the status quo

Dealing with the above constraints requires management to:

- Openly take steps to recognize and redistribute power
- Narrow the gap between rhetoric and actions
- Continually explore, adjust and align procedures, processes, policies, systems and structures
- Develop and articulate clear principles to help create a learning culture and environment
- Encourage personal and professional change- such as creating relationships of openness and greater trust with staff and stakeholders

To discuss these factors, we will organize our thoughts and experiences around the following framework of questions:

- What is organizational learning, and what role does learning play in organizational processes?
- How does individual and collective learning happen?
- What generally constrains learning in organizations?
- What steps can management take to strengthen communication and evidenced-based learning?
- What suggestions and recommendations are emerging from applied field research, from practical experience, and from discussions with peers²?

¹ The author worked for several years piloting and researching ActionAid's new and innovative Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS) in several countries; and is currently working with CCF-USA to develop a new Planning, Accountability and Learning System (PALS).

² While in London, the author met several times at IDS with commentators such as Robert Chambers and Patta Scott Villers as part of a team that was reviewing the challenges of ALPS. The work of John Gaventa was a key point of reference.

I. Definitional issues

What is organizational learning?

The concept of organizational learning has been around for a long time, and a lot has been written about it. Argyris and Schon define organizational learning as "the detection and correction of error" (1978: 2). Fiol and Lyles define learning as "the process of improving actions through better knowledge and understanding" (1985: 803). Dodgson describes organizational learning as "the way firms build and organize knowledge based on routines organized around their activities and within their cultures, which enables adaptation and the development of organizational efficiency. (1993: 377). These types of learning, discussed in detail below, are quite common. What is less common and more difficult to bring to fruition is what Huber (1991: 89) describes as the learning which occurs in an organization "if through its processing of information, it leads to changes in behaviors and ways of doing things." Huber's view hints at the importance of questioning existing organizational culture.

Learning organizations.

Dodgson (1993) points out that a "learning organization" is one that purposefully constructs **structures, systems, cultures and strategies** that enhance and maximize organizational learning to remain more adaptable to changing circumstances. In line with this view, the three types of organizational learning described by Argyris and Schon (1978) provide revealing insights about the important relationship between single-loop-learning and the realignment of existing systems, structures, and processes that is often necessary for an organization to progress to the level of double-loop learning.

Types of learning:

The three types of organizational learning described by Argyris and Schon (1978) include: **Single-loop learning; double-loop learning; and deutero-learning**. Of these, single-loop learning is the most common, and the least difficult to realize. It occurs when errors are detected and corrected. For example, projects often fail to meet expectations. When this happens, a learning organization will analyze and document the failure, thereby transforming "project failure" into a learning opportunity. However, this type of learning, described as adaptive learning or coping by Senge (1990), and non-strategic learning by Mason (1993), happens if an organization promotes a culture of "failing forward," a culture of understanding what went wrong and why instead of who was wrong and when. This requires a culture that supports and encourages staff or partners to document and share failure, as well as successes.

The second type of learning that Argyris and Schon describe is double-loop learning. This form of learning occurs when, in addition to detection and correction of errors, an organization or its staff is involved in questioning and modifying existing procedures, policies, structures, systems and goals. In other words, it involves a process of consciously adjusting and aligning policies, procedures and processes. It requires using organized knowledge to improve learning systems and organizational cultures to enable greater adaptation to changing circumstances, context, and environment. Double-loop learning is quite difficult to realize in part because it also requires changes in individual and collective behaviors and ways of doing things (culture).

Argyris and Schon describe a third type of learning, **Deutero-learning**. Deutero-learning occurs when organizations learn how to carry out both single-loop and double-loop learning. Deutero-learning requires identifying learning needs and styles of individual members of an organization, and **the facilitating factors** required to promote learning: processes, structure, systems, strategy, environment, technology, and culture. The point is that learning styles and facilitating factors differ according to context, skills and environment. This implies the need for ongoing modifications of **facilitating factors** as context, skills and environment change.

What role does learning play in organizational processes?

Needless to mention, many benefits accrue to learning organizations. They are better able to retain and improve their competitiveness, efficiency, and innovativeness, particularly in the current development context, which is increasingly becoming uncertain. And, it is generally acknowledged that the greater the uncertainties the greater the need for learning.

It is important to note that organizations are made up of individuals and groups. It is these individuals and groups that perform the task of producing learning through: knowledge acquisition, information distribution, information interpretation, and maintenance of organizational memory. The human element of learning is important. In any activity where individuals and groups are involved, attitudes, behaviors, mindsets, and “mental models and construct” inevitably come into play. How individuals and groups are assisted to learn and apply learning to effect systemic change becomes key; which leads to the important conclusion that understanding how individual and group learning happens, and the factors that facilitate or constrain this process are equally important.

II. How individual and collective learning happens, and constraints organizations face

It is true that individual or group learning is contingent upon the availability of learning systems. However, for individual or group learning to happen, organizations must:

- Consciously create an environment that fosters and supports a culture of learning
- Create supportive structures, systems, procedures, policies
- Have flexible planning and reporting systems
- Acknowledge the challenges of abolishing old procedures

In this regard, the example of Action Aid is worth noting. To create space and time for learning and reform power relationships, the INGO Action Aid devised and introduced the Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS). Key elements include:

- annual participatory review and reflection processes at all levels, with multiple stakeholders
- downward accountability, with transparency of budgets between all levels
- use of locally appropriate language and communication forms for reporting

The struggle to implement APLS provides good examples of the nature and type of challenges that organizations may face in trying to become learning organizations.

The following provides a few examples:

- **Annual reflection processes.** AA established reflection processes once a year at each level (in programs, countries, across functions and globally). The purpose of the annual reviews is to learn and share learning from achievements and failures in order to improve program quality. However, once AA institutionalized this process (of annual reviews and reflections) it soon realized that achieving honest dialogue among all stakeholders about program expenditure and project plans required more than just “space and time” for reflections.
- **Integrating financial reporting with annual review cycles.** The finance Director at headquarters, Nigel Saxby-Soffe, was required to find ways of integrating systems of financial planning and reporting with program planning and annual review cycles so that the annual review process could directly influence annual planning and budgeting. This ensured that learning fed back into planning, which in turn, led to greater transparency in financial reporting at all levels.
- **Changes at country level.** It became necessary to make changes to financial reporting schedules and templates at subsidiary levels. For example, the finance Director in Kenya at the time, Katigua, was one of the first to work with his finance team to simplify and translate budgets and financial information into Swahili. Using mainly visuals, such as pie charts and bar graphs, the team enabled partners and largely illiterate community groups to analyze, interpret and understand the relationship between program plans and budget expenditure; which meant that they (communities) could ask more informed questions.

- **Move for downward accountability.** As part of efforts to be more transparent, a new and simpler coding system was introduced. An information disclosure policy was introduced to increase financial transparency, and to compel less willing staff to share financial information more liberally. Headquarters decided not to require formal reports from countries to allow greater time for staff to interact with communities; and record progress using locally appropriate forms and language. This element was quite a radical shift, and generated a lot of debate.
- **Power dynamics.** Then came one of the most difficult challenges to deal with: AA realized the need to analyze and deal with power dynamics vis-à-vis their partners. Most partners “feared a backlash for going too far with their criticism of AA. Because of its huge (resource) power, AA felt that there was an inherent tension when it tried to ask communities and partners to “open up” honest dialogue; provide candid feedback and criticism of its work. Decision-making authority was shifted to the regions and countries closer to the point of action.
- **Decentralization and regionalization.** Within AA itself, the need was felt, not only for decentralization, regionalization and devolution of authority, but also for seeking greater synchronicity between key functions, at all levels: impact assessment, human resources, organizational development, finance, marketing and sponsorship. At the same time, the pressure to show change, respond to linear thinking on impact, the rigid adherence to “measurable indicators” was in direct contradiction with the learning agenda it was trying to promote.
- **Inflexible planning system.** Doing much to constrain learning were linear control-oriented cultures and procedures associated with Log-Frame Approach to planning and hierarchical dominance it fosters, which is sustained and reinforced by a disbursement-driven development agenda; the culture in lending organizations to prioritize the meeting of often unrealistic targets over learning; coupled with the unrelenting pressures to demonstrate impact, even in situations and context where learning would have been more appropriate as a yardstick for judging success. (discussions with Robert Chambers, 2003, IDS).
- **Consistent management support in the face of challenges.** All these challenges did not deter AA’s management. Supported by a few farsighted trustees (Ken Burnett) board members and academics (such as Patrick Mulvany and Robert Chambers) and other champions in leadership positions (such as the Ramesh and Salil) ALPS continued to receive “enforced” support from the top. For an organization that prided itself in its preference for a bottom-up approach, this was somewhat at odds with its professed philosophy. Nonetheless, management enforced ALPS from the top with clear principles and directives. More importantly, management was willing to review and update any constraining structures, systems, procedures or policies based on suggestions provided to it. For example, the Impact Assessment Unit was moved from Programs and made to report directly to the CEO, linking learning outcomes to top-level decision making.
- **Gradually, the attitude of “failing forward”** and a culture of honest reporting of failure began to emerge; country teams began to establish “learning events” aimed at highlighting “tensions and dilemmas” of ALPS; field teams received support for documentation and research; incentives such as budgets were set aside to support publications; management gave immediate feedback and responded promptly to recommendations coming from field teams; and where necessary, heads of departments **were free to propose or** construct new structures or systems, so long as these enhanced or maximized learning.

As more and more senior level staff, directors and managers visited the field, more and more varied interpretations of progress, success and failure began to emerge; new mindsets developed and previous biases began to change. The result was greater sharing and distribution of information across the entire agency. An important learning that emerged is that very often learning in an organization takes place by members sharing stories or anecdotes of actual work practice as informed by their experience of work on the ground. More than anything else, it was the visits to the field particularly by directors and managers that showed that AA’s “espoused theory” reflected in official policies and formalized procedures was not compatible with the “theory-in-use.”

This realization galvanized efforts at all levels to align rhetoric with practice. It led to determined efforts to realign procedures, processes and systems with the stated principles and values of ALPS. All said and done, it was the ability and willingness of leadership to review and address possible constraints inherent in structures, cultures or systems that holds the promise for double-loop learning. But this does not mean that everything will change overnight.

In general, the above discussion shows that many of the obstacles faced are deeply embedded in:

- Centralized (organizational) structure
- Inflexible planning and reporting systems
- Difficulties faced in abolishing old procedures

Let's look at each of these in turn.

Centralized (organizational) structure

A centralized, mechanistic structure tends to reinforce past behaviors or single-loop learning, but an organic, decentralized structure promotes double-loop learning (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). Centralization creates a more fragmented structure which does not support people's thinking for themselves. Thus, individuals do not have a comprehensive picture of the whole. This, in turn, encourages the development of a political and parochial system that stifles learning. Highly sophisticated single-loop learning mechanisms (conformance to existing norm and behavior) may in fact take the organizations on the wrong course, since people may not be able to challenge underlying assumptions. That is, single-loop learning prevents double-loop learning from occurring. Therefore, in order to encourage learning, organizations must move away from mechanistic structures and adopt a more flexible and organic structure. This requires a new philosophy of management which encourages openness, reflectivity, and the acceptance of error and uncertainty (Morgan, 1986; Balasubramanian, V.1994).

As part of the ActionAid (AA) regionalization process, AA decided to promote non-hierarchical and self managed structures and working practices, which it described as "decentralized," "matrix working" or "horizontal working," and "multiple accountability." By "decentralized", AA meant releasing power to people, closest to the point of action for faster and better-informed decision-making. By "matrix working" or "horizontal working", AA meant working across geographic, structural and functional boundaries, accessing the skills and knowledge from wherever it is in the organization in pursuit of its mission and vision. By "multiple accountability", AA meant individuals or teams holding themselves accountable to several other individuals or teams, and being more accountable externally. Multiple accountability implies simultaneously providing information on program performance, financial expenditures, and how well AA staff adheres to AA's processes, procedures and policies (AA's HR Draft Strategy document, 2004). Thus, organizational relationships were drawn and described in ways which reflect horizontal working and multiple accountabilities, rather than hierarchical structures.

Inflexible planning and reporting systems: The Log Frame Approach³ (LFA).

Log Frames are supposed to bring together a clear and concise statement of the key components of a project and to clarify how the project is expected to work and what it is going to achieve. But the extent to which the LFA constrains learning has been one the development sector's best kept secrets. This is in part because credible alternatives are still in the formative or trial stages, and in part because many are scared to "kill the goose that lays the golden eggs of this dominant funding tool. Yet, for many years, this tool has, in many ways, done more than any other to limit learning, not least, the building of trusting relationships, and honest reporting. There are many reasons why the Log Frame as a planning and reporting tool has done harm to organizational learning:

^{3 3} This section draws heavily on discussions and ideas shared by Kath Pasteur, Robert Chambers, John Gaventa, Jethro Pettit and Patta Scott-Villiers

- First, the Log Frames conceals differences in interest of the various actors; hence, it dangerously ignores potential areas of conflict as well as the potential to learn from varying perspectives and conflicting views.
- Second, we all know that the development context and operating environment are complex and constantly changing. Yet, the LF does not recognize this dynamism. Nor does it encourage a process oriented approach to social development.
- The Log Frame leads to rigidity and oversimplification. It assumes a fairly constant development context and environment, effectively diminishing any potential for organizations to learn.
- By limiting the dynamism inherent in development, the LF assumes that all project contingencies can be foreseen from the start, and that there will be a predictable, linear, logical progression from activities to outputs to purpose to goal.
- The Log Frame does not allow room for the capture of unintended or unplanned change, positive or negative, to emerge or to be reported. Once formal indicators and means of verification are set at the onset, they are unlikely to be part of a process of developing a participatory monitoring and evaluation system, which also means that they seem to be aimed less at learning.
- The Log Frame does not adequately represent or capture more complex and cross-cutting interventions, in which outcomes are less predictable and cause-and-effect attribution is less clear; rights based work, governance, policy influence, sector-wide or cross-sector work, for example.

Difficulties faced in abolishing old procedures.

Early and promising proposals are emerging from recent debates, discussions and write-ups. In a PPA⁴ discussion with DFID, AA insisted that the very idea of a universal fixed procedure like LFA conflicts with the principles of ALPS and limited creative diversity. Commendably, DFID accepted AA's argument and agreed to AA's proposal to make some modifications to the LF structure proposed by DFID. AA developed a broad framework based on its global strategy. The point here is that even major donors are often willing to accept reasoned justification based on learning. Yet, the LFA is strongly entrenched, and many are unwilling to challenge its use, despite acknowledged challenges.

III. What steps can management take to strengthen evidenced-based learning?

Appropriate organizational structures.

As discussed earlier, a centralized, mechanistic structure tends to reinforce single-loop learning, constrain double-loop learning and promote negative hierarchical behaviors; but an organic, decentralized structure promotes double-loop learning (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). In order to encourage learning, organizations must move away from mechanistic structures and adopt a more flexible and organic structure. This requires a new philosophy of management which encourages openness, reflectivity, and the acceptance of error and uncertainty (Morgan, 1986).

Field experience indicates that centralization does not encourage frontline staff, who are often the custodians of information and knowledge, to think and act for themselves and provide much needed learning. Since centralization produces fragmentation, individuals do not have a comprehensive picture of the whole. This, in turn, encourages the development of a "say nothing attitude," defensive reasoning, and risk aversion, all of which stifle learning. In consequence, people may in fact become reluctant to challenge underlying and untested assumptions.

⁴ Program Partnership Agreement is a funding mechanism operated by DFID for the UK's charities.

Leaders as champions of learning.

In a learning organization, a leader is not just a charismatic decision maker but also a teacher, a designer, and a steward of change (Senge, 1990). The essential function of leadership is to build an organization's culture and shape its evolution. But leaders must be both designers and teachers. As designers, leaders help build foundational purpose, vision and core values. As teachers, leaders should help create the environment and space for learning to happen. More importantly, leaders must be willing to remove identified constraints. In practical terms, "leaders as teachers" implies helping individuals restructure their views of reality by identifying and challenging prevailing mental models and fundamental assumptions. A key step is for leaders to encourage the exploration of multiple viewpoints at different levels to problems and concerns through dialogue and discussion. Tensions, dilemmas, and contradictions often provide clues about what needs further dialogue and debate.

Opportunities offered by new communication and information technology.

Information systems can indirectly influence organizational learning by affecting contextual factors such as structure and environment which, in turn, influence learning. They can also directly influence the organizational learning processes discussed earlier. For example, the author and Dr. Su Braden successfully used video in Sierra Leone, Malawi and Ghana to help local communities to represent their development concerns to local administrative authorities and donors. Using video as a communication and reporting tool proved extremely helpful in assisting largely illiterate community members and field staff, for whom English is a second or third language, to circumvent the language barriers posed by English as the dominant language of communication.

Coherence between theory and practice: the role of language barriers.

Many engaged in development work still seem unaware of the contradictions and paradoxes in their organizational cultures, and in their individual behavior. Seeking greater coherence and consistency between rhetoric, institutional cultures, (structures, systems) procedures, and personal attitudes and behaviors, requires the use of locally appropriate language and forms of communication, and the introduction of relevant communication and information systems. For example, audiovisual tools can help to flatten the structure of organizations, shorten communications channels, and promote greater dissemination of information to all individuals at all levels. This makes the organization more informed, flexible, and organic. Increased availability of information helps members share information thereby increasing learning. Communication systems are not only capable of generating new streams of information and expanding knowledge, but they also help to shift the locus of information from managers to teams, who are often in the best position to point to tensions and inherent challenges posed by existing systems, processes, policies or procedures within an organization.

In sum, technology provides new opportunities for learning within aid organizations. But to make the rhetoric of learning real means confronting a well-known but less reported challenge. This is: focusing attention away from individual projects to paying attention to the bigger vision. Focusing attention on organizational learning requires stepping back from the intricacies of individual projects and programs and gaining an understanding of the overall contribution of various sectors, technical areas, functions and units to our larger vision. This requires substantial political support, commitment, leadership, time, money and importantly, champions. This is because of the need to recognize and acknowledge that unequal power relations can constrain learning. It requires exploring ways through which institutional "silos" can be removed to create relationships of greater trust, transparency and mutual accountability between and within all actors.

It may mean institutionalizing a process of reflection at specified intervals. It may mean acknowledging and addressing the power wielded by organizations because of their resources. It may mean being more honest with ourselves. Being honest means acknowledging the existence of unequal power relations and not pretending that power imbalances do not exist. At the same time, reciprocities and enhanced interdependence can build more equal and effective relationships between peers.

It may mean a **genuine effort to listen to the “voiceless”** and ensuring that the voices, demands, ideas, and cultures of those with the resources do not crowd out the voices, perspectives, and needs of those without. More introspection is called for due to the powerlessness of those most affected by aid, who have no real voice in the aid system; and the lack of recognition/acceptance that there is currently a mismatch between the policies and procedures of aid, which are all about upward accountability and proving success and claiming effectiveness without regard to the hard day-to-day realities of mass poverty and the plight of the millions grappling with marginalization, exclusion, deprivation, vulnerability, conflict, illness etc. These concerns call for aid organizations to open up themselves to evaluations by the less powerful, a sort of turning the tables. In the spirit of learning, it is about time that aid agencies invite local partners to learn from them.

Avoiding a “one system fixes it all” mentality.

Given the dominance of certain planning tools (systems) such as the LF, it is fair to suggest that the mentality of “one tool fixes it all” can be deeply engrained in many organizations. However, it is important to note that there is no one system or approach that can “fix it all,” all the time. This means that the way forward lies in constantly exploring simple, practical and yet appropriate methods, systems, procedures and processes that can help open up space for greater inclusion of stakeholders. This will require, in many instances, the use of approaches and methods that are flexible and consistent with the collective experience and capacity of staff, partners, community groups, and children and involve critical but constructive internal reflection. It also requires the awareness and openness to acknowledge when a particular tool, method or system has had its day. Equally important is the need to work toward approaches that balance relationships of power, especially at local levels.

In practice this implies, among others, the need to:

- promote nonhierarchical and self-managed structures and working
- release power to people closest to the point of action for faster and better-informed decision-making
- work across geographic, structural and functional boundaries, and access skills and knowledge from wherever they are in the organization.

IV. Suggestions and emerging recommendations

We have established that double-loop learning within organizations occurs due to the interplay of various factors such as structure, culture, strategy, processes, policies, procedures, environment and technology. The implications of not becoming a learning organization are seen in many failures to reach stated developmental goals. But in reality, failure must be seen as a welcome learning opportunity and an opportunity to “fail forward.”

The way forward is to seek greater coherence and consistency among institutional rhetoric, cultures, structures, systems, procedures, personal attitudes and behaviors. Admittedly there are no easy solutions, but here is a 4-point agenda for organizations wishing to promote double-loop learning:

1. Create space and time for reviewing and reflecting on success and especially failures:

- Develop mechanisms for sharing information about success and failures, good and bad practices, internally and externally with other stakeholders
- Strengthen, promote and emphasize institutional learning about approaches, systems, processes, strategies and policies
- Create incentives for experimentation, with the full understanding that failures may occur, from which lessons can be learned
- Promote research activity, as one of the bases for continual learning about the environment, and for supporting a questioning culture

2. Bridge the gap between rhetoric and practice:

- Provide field learning experience, with time in villages and slums, for all staff, including senior management and those in finance
- develop honest relationships that acknowledge inequalities of power, and work on reciprocities to offset them
- embrace institutional, professional and personal learning, adapting to change as a way of life

3. Culture, environment, personal and professorial behaviors:

- Develop a working and questioning culture that supports curiosity, creative thinking and innovation
- Recognize the critical significance of personal behaviors and attitudes; identify desired characteristics; recruit, reward and train accordingly; and value and provide space for critical reflection and learning

4. Systems, structures, processes, policies and procedures:

- Search for, improvise and invent procedures and tools to fit and reinforce learning
- Strive to combine trust and decentralized discretion over funds with timely and honest accounting
- Continually review and adjust procedures, policies, and structures, and bring them closer into line with their stated intent

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