

A gateway for capacity development

# Capacity.ORG

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# Letter to the Editorial Board

## Local capacity developers

Having been the director of a local capacity building institute for more than a decade, I opened issue 38 of *Capacity.org* with great interest.

However, my interest quickly turned to astonished disbelief when I saw the list of contents and authors. Clearly I was naïve in thinking that the title meant that this issue would contain interesting articles written by local capacity developers (LCDs) about their perspectives on their work and current challenges, such as how they are being affected (or not) by some recent trends such as the push for more use of in-country resources and more South–South collaboration. Many local capacity developers are at the cutting edge in terms of finding creative solutions to intractable development problems, and that puts some of them light years ahead of the big bureaucracies.

Instead, this was a series of articles written predominantly from a Northern perspective, and predominantly by men! I know that the SNV study is important, but it would have been much more meaningful had it been accompanied by a selection of diverse perspectives collected from local capacity developers around the globe. The two pages about the three local capacity developers you did manage to locate had the distinct whiff of tokenism.

You commented that 'LCD support is an emerging sector and little is known about it'. Actually, quite a lot is known about it among some LCDs such as the one I used to run. Frequently, we found the Northern institutions that we worked/partnered with to be patronising and extractive, and sometimes downright unpleasant.

Overall, this issue seemed to me to be a regrettable display of the 'we in the North know all there is to know about everything that matters' paradigm.

While I'm at it – could anyone explain why all members of the editorial board of *Capacity.org* are men?

Yours in disappointment,  
Jenny Pearson  
Development practitioner

## A question of balance

Dear Jenny,

Thank you for your remarks, which we take in good spirit, and see as an expression of the (potential) importance you attach to *Capacity.org* as a professional platform. We appreciate the feedback, and assure you that we take your comments seriously.

As in many other organisations, we are struggling to achieve equal representation of men and women. Recently, we welcomed Hettie Walters (representing ICCO) as the first female member of the Editorial Board. We are currently discussing our approach to diversifying the membership of the Board, in particular to improve the regional and gender balance. We hope to demonstrate the results of these efforts in the next 18 months or so. Inputs from a wide variety of perspectives with regard to CD practice are essential if we are to enrich the quality and the relevance of *Capacity.org*.

With regard to the contents of issue 38, I agree that the statement that local capacity development is an emerging sector does indeed reflect a Northern perspective. But by devoting the entire issue to this sector, we hope that Northern agencies will extend their policy frameworks to consider the needs of local capacity developers and the opportunities they offer.

Your suggestion that we barely managed to find three Southern CD professionals is quite wide of the mark. In our network we have many hundreds, if not thousands, of people who can be called 'local capacity developers'. We find it rather inappropriate to characterise the inclusion of these three respected professionals as 'tokenism'.

I acknowledge that issue 38 featured relatively few Southern authors. Normally, we identify potential authors by searching existing printed and online resources. In this case, however, the phenomenon of an emerging Southern support sector for CD has not been well analysed, and few strategies to promote its development (beyond conventional NGO or ODA funding) have been explored. In the absence of an extensive literature on this topic, we did not have the luxury of being able to choose from a long list of potential authors.

In *Capacity.org* we wish to feature and promote the views of as many Southern capacity development professionals as possible. We will strongly welcome your support in identifying future authors, and look forward to lively discussions on this and other issues.

Jan Ubels  
On behalf of the Editorial Board



# Behaviour and facilitating change

The discourse on the practice of facilitating capacity development (CD) is mainly about knowledge, skills, methods and tools. Yet, the outcomes of interventions depend to a large extent on the way the people involved relate to each other. Especially for CD practitioners as facilitators of change, the ability to relate to clients in an appropriate way is crucial for successful outcomes.

Although no one will deny that behavioural aspects can have very real impacts on CD practice, they are rarely addressed because they are elusive, difficult to manage and very personal. Yet in other sectors such as education and health, behaviour is a significant component of training. It is high time that *Capacity.org* addresses questions such as: what aspects of behaviour are relevant in CD practice? Is it possible to change behaviour, and if so, how?

In the feature article, Ingrid Richter describes practitioners who are champions in facilitating change. They invariably demonstrate a high level of personal mastery that enables them to be very effective. Is their exemplary behaviour something that can be acquired through training? She believes it is possible, but not through training as if it involved learning a simple set of techniques. Exceptional CD practitioners demonstrate behaviours, practices, skills and ways of being that are aligned and authentic. Acquiring personal mastery means attending to the quality of doing, as well as of being.

This analysis is supported by experiences in several countries. Mohan Dhamorathan explains how in India the managers of the Integrated Community Development (ICD) programme believed that the behaviour of facilitators was crucial. But after 12 years experimenting with behavioural change, they decided that training alone did not work, and that the focus should be on the practitioner's intentions. No matter how much training deals with behaviour, their underlying intentions will always shine through the layer of techniques they have acquired. Genuine intentions are the cornerstone of any trusting relationship, but there is no quick-fix solution.

Leng Chhay describes an example of organisational capacity development in Cambodia where the facilitators' intentions were first and foremost to understand the clients' needs. They emphasised listening and putting the clients at ease. It still took about six months to gain the clients' trust to the extent that they were prepared to share the real issues that needed to be addressed in their organisations.

Jan Morgan, based on anecdotal evidence from AusAID advisers and their counterparts in

Papua New Guinea, also notes that it takes six months to build trusting relationships. In order to support the process of building such relationships, AusAID has developed a training programme for advisers and counterparts where the approach is not to teach behaviour as a preparation for practice and in isolation. Rather, both parties engage in building relationships and reflect on their behaviour and attitudes as part of the programme.

All of these authors suggest that practitioners can acquire desired behaviour, but only if it is understood to be linked to intentions and the inner self. But for every practitioner, no matter how experienced, every situation is different, and adopting behaviour that will encourage capacity development will always be a challenge. Doug Reeler and Sue Soal propose that mutual transparency should be the guiding principle.

Unequal relationships can often lead to patterns of behaviour that drive partners apart and lead to conflict. Typical examples are North–South partnerships, where Northern donors provide CD support to Southern recipients. In issue 37 of *Capacity.org*, Chris Mowles described a partnership where the Northern NGO took over the initiative because European staff were not prepared to work for local managers. The situation and initiatives of Southern staff were ignored. Although the relationship eventually improved, very few capacities had been developed. Tensions in such partnerships are not uncommon, according to the representatives of 36 NGOs from the North and South who met in Moshi, Tanzania, in 2009. Hilde van der Vegt, Mosi Kisare and Jacqueline Verhagen describe how the Moshi dialogue helped the participants to gain insights into how to build more effective capacity development relationships.

Guest columnist Jenny Pearson laments the behaviour of Northern donors who attempt to solve other people's problems based on unexamined (often wrong) assumptions. Such arrogant behaviour can be very harmful to the capacities that are already in place.

Is it possible to support capacity development within donor–recipient relationships? Are the roles of facilitators and those holding the purse strings intrinsically incompatible? Not necessarily, Alan Fowler believes, but it is certainly a difficult combination of roles that requires a healthy mix of negotiating skills and, on both sides, an understanding of the psychology of the relationship between giver and receiver.

Heinz Greijn  
editor@capacity.org  
Editor-in-Chief

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# The unfolding practitioner



**Ingrid Richter**  
ingrid@thresholdassociates.ca  
Canadian Organization Development Institute,  
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

I have met capacity development (CD) practitioners whose initiatives have a meaningful, lasting impact. Their names may never be memorialised in books, nor etched in monuments, but their behaviour inspires us. They have a unique combination of determination, courage, humility, and the ability to listen deeply. They create authentically empowering relationships and can bring people together to collaborate on complex change. We can analyse their skills and behaviours, and break down their work to identify their competencies and knowledge, but that does not tell the whole story.

Just like truly exceptional teachers, nurses, and other professionals, exceptional CD practitioners demonstrate behaviours, practices, skills and ways of being that are aligned and authentic. What separates them from competent practitioners is that they have access to the deeper layers of who they are. They consciously attend to the quality of their *doing*, as well as to their inner state of being.

## Doing and being

What is the difference between 'doing' and 'being'? In an article on authentic leadership, Galvin and O'Donnell (2005) discuss seven layers of leadership that apply equally well to CD practice. Their model (see box on page 5) offers a powerful way of seeing the unique differences between 'doing' and 'being'.

The top three layers – behaviour, practices and skills – are about 'doing'. These tend to be the focus of human resource development activity in the organisational context. They represent the skills and knowledge you have practised and bring to the job. You probably learned them in training programmes and in your day-to-day work.

The bottom layers – framing, character and alignment – are more fundamental personal 'roots'. They inform the way you see

Some practitioners demonstrate a high level of personal mastery. What do they have that the rest of us long for, and where does it come from? Is such behaviour a technique that can be acquired through training?

the world, they colour your choices, and they offer a way of understanding why you are called to do what you do. They nurture and inform the fundamental principles you believe in and the spirit of your practice. You learned these from your family and community; you have been learning and testing them your whole life.

The middle layer – self – spans the two big pieces of 'doing' and 'being'. It is a combination of the 'you' we see in your unique physical characteristics, and the unique 'you' that manifests itself in the way you express yourself: your preferences and tastes, both inward and outward.

The dominant forces in the world tend to reinforce our addiction to 'doing' and emphasise that successful or effective CD practice can be produced by concentrating on the top three layers. Various forms of behaviour and practice are assessed and it is for these that we are compensated. Development work is not highly routine, but there are many routine and technical aspects to capacity development practice, from writing reports to specific methodologies for facilitating planning and change (e.g. logframe analysis).

There is no doubt that these upper, more visible layers are important in terms of performance and effectiveness. The difficulty is that when the situations we face do not fit what we 'know', or are too complex for our skill sets, we feel threatened or unnerved. Instead of stopping to re-examine our mindsets or models, we tend to try and break down and oversimplify things; often forcing the problem into pre-existing models, or fitting ideas to the way we think things should be. This approach puts our perfectly good 'skill ladders' up against the wrong walls, and ultimately wastes time and energy.

Even after many years of working on complex change initiatives, there are times when practitioners can feel lost. I have often come up against new problems or new complexities, and feel disoriented for a while. The situation is unfamiliar; none of the old frameworks and 'recipes' work. Questions and self-doubt appear. Am I up to the task? Is it possible to make a difference here? Do I have the courage, the audacity to continue on this path? And then, I look more

deeply within myself, and find a way forward.

In talking with CD practitioners, I see they are often burdened with similar uncertainties, self-doubt and feelings of discouragement about their capacities to really make a difference. They look for courses to learn new behaviours. They ask about books and courses that could help, and sometimes they do. But layering new behaviour upon new behaviour does not truly address their fundamental concerns; the challenge is in understanding how *to be*.

## Exceptional practitioners

When we examine what truly authentic, effective and credible CD practitioners actually do, and what they and others see and say about their ways of working with people and systems, we discover a richer, more complex picture. These exceptional practitioners demonstrate several approaches and characteristics in their work, which include:

- **An innovative mindset.** They recognise that they may have some technical knowledge or expertise, but this will not be sufficient for sustainable change in a complex system. They can shift from a know-it-all, authoritative stance to one which facilitates and mobilises small experiments or innovations. Once these have been proven, they work to scale them up.

Making the shift from being perceived as a technical expert to being seen as a colleague who is working with the system to mobilise innovation, requires a deep connection with the 'being' levels of Galvin and O'Donnell's model. To realise innovation, the practitioner must authentically demonstrate humility and show a willingness to explore ways to incorporate differing, sometimes conflicting worldviews about what is 'right' and 'necessary' for change to happen.

- **An understanding that change happens through trusting, mutually supportive relationships.** Exceptional practitioners have learned that trust must be earned, and this is achieved by proving to be trustworthy. This can be done various ways. One of the most effective is to non-judgementally raise issues and questions that are perceived to be risky, and not back away when resistance surfaces. This requires more than effective

communication skills; it requires inner courage, which comes from continuously examining and testing the principles which guide your entire life, not just your work life.

- **The ability to understand resistance and treat it with compassion.** CD requires practitioners to skilfully disturb and change enduring patterns of activity. Resistance arises most strongly when actors see that changing patterns will result in direct losses (status, wealth, power, importance), competence losses ('we only knew how to do it the old way, we don't know a new way'), or loyalty losses (asking people to do things differently may subtly threaten their loyalty to their teachers, ancestors or traditions).

Treating resistance with compassion is much more than having good negotiation skills. It is about deeply understanding one's own inner resistance about threat and loss. It means being aware that positive change happens when substantive values are respected and preserved while we add new ways of being and learning to grow and change.

- **Integrative thinking.** CD theory is always changing, and there are innumerable theories and models to inform it. Unfortunately, these models can become entrenched as unhelpful 'truths,' 'recipes' or 'formulas' for change. Exceptional CD practitioners realise that their fundamental assumptions and mental models always shape what they see and call 'reality', and that these are not always the best fit for the situation. They are willing to reflect on what they see and acknowledge a profound dissatisfaction with existing models. They are willing to find or create new models or ways of moving forward, and give themselves time to test their ideas.

Most importantly, they are skilful at getting others to sit with them to explore how to do things differently and more effectively, rather than following accepted wisdom. Instead of seeking to influence people and systems towards the 'right' model, these integrative thinkers constructively face the tensions of opposing models and generate a creative

resolution, bringing the best elements of opposing models together.

### Holding the light

How do exceptional CD practitioners acquire these skills? How do they nurture and develop their 'being' so that the quality of their 'doing' will also be enhanced? Of course they can be learned, but they are more about practice. How and what to practise is worthy of a longer article, but here are a few thoughts.

Learning how to 'be' (or, more subtly, to know how to be, or *savoir être* in French), cannot be trained in the same way that we can learn how to 'do' (*savoir faire*). Similar to the development of good health, the development of our 'being' is not an outcome; it is a state that arises from healthy personal practices.

Some exceptional practitioners have learned how to 'hold the light'. They have activities or routines (such as reading poetry, practising music, or connecting with nature) that help them remember their greater purpose and stay grounded. Many consciously develop what has been called 'unconditional confidence' – a sense of kindness or gentleness towards themselves. When they make mistakes, they can forgive themselves for the fact that they are human and therefore likely to fail. They nurture their originality and independence of thought by reflecting on their actions and by practising genuine inquiry through research and writing.

With these and many other practices, they learn to 'unfold'. With this 'unfolding', they can step into new challenges, knowing that no matter how the situation turns out, they can extend again and again.

I want to unfold  
I don't want to stay folded anywhere,  
because where I am folded, there I am a lie.  
And I want my grasp of things  
true before you. I want to describe myself  
like a painting that I looked at



Tim Garney / Alamy

closely for a long time,  
like a saying that I finally understood,  
like the pitcher I use every day,  
like the face of my mother,  
like a ship  
that took me safely  
through the wildest storm of all.  
– From Rainer Maria Rilke, *I am too alone in the world* <

### Further reading

- Galvin, J. and O'Donnell, P. (2005) *Authentic Leadership: Balancing doing and being. The Systems Thinker*, 16(2).
- Intrator, S. and Scribner, M. (eds) (2007) *Leading from Within: Poetry that Sustains the Courage to Lead*. Jossey Bass.
- Palmer, P.J. (1999) *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation*. Jossey Bass.
- *Selected Poems of Rainer Maria Rilke*, edited and translated by Robert Bly, Silver Hands Press, 1981.

Seven layers of leadership. Source: Galvin and O'Donnell (2005).

	Layer	Definition	Indicators	Development
DOING	Behaviour	Directly observable actions and activity	Effort and immediate results	Look for tools, tips and practical techniques to improve your execution
	Practices	Well established, repeatable patterns of behaviour	Consistency and transferability	Look for best practices that you can adopt to improve effectiveness
	Skills	Acquired knowledge and proficiency	Competence and efficacy	Develop your abilities to increase your capacity and performance as a leader
	Self	Unique capabilities and limitations of body, mind and spirit	Personality, strengths and style	Develop a growing awareness of who you are at your best
BEING	Framing	Assumptions and mental models in use when engaging the world and others	Connection to reality and to others	Examine your worldview and engage others in thinking deeply and learning together
	Character	Internalised principles that drive choices and behaviour	Values, ethics and integrity	View your greatest challenge as becoming a more authentic person
	Alignment	Being in step with a larger purpose outside of yourself	Sense of calling, synchronicity and flow	Ask yourself, 'What is trying to happen through me?'



Mohan Dhamorathan  
mohan@gmx.net  
Freelance consultant, Germany

Strengthening the capacities of communities in Asia

## Effective behaviour through genuine interactions

By 'de-tooling' interactions, focusing on intentions and reflecting on their behaviour and its outcomes, facilitators can strengthen their own capacities to help communities.

The Asian Productivity Organization launched the Integrated Community Development (ICD) programme with the aim of sharing experiences of community development in Asia, and developing a method for strengthening the capacities of communities to plan and implement their own projects. After 12 years of experience and action research to try to trigger effective behaviour patterns, we have gained important insights into behaviour and how it relates to community capacity development (CCD) in practice.

Globalisation has had tremendous impacts on the traditional values, structures and knowledge base of many Asian communities, which are having to deal with increasing external pressures and changing internal dynamics. Government and NGO programmes create additional stress, as they often encourage a 'hand-out' mentality rather than genuine capacity development.

We have identified the following challenges of CCD in Asia:

- Many communities lack motivation and self-confidence due to their experiences with external development programmes, top-down planning by government agencies and internal conflicts. This has led to the paradoxical situation where facilitators focus on community-driven development, while the communities expect ready-made solutions.
- Communities tend to underestimate their internal resources, potential and knowledge, while overestimating the value of foreign resources, solutions and knowledge.
- Many external agencies have created situations in which development actors and communities focus on obtaining external funds, leading to internal conflicts and disparities between those who benefit and those who do not. What is often missing is a collective effort to develop a shared vision and to find ways to move towards it.
- Capacity development is now in the mainstream of development discourse, but in practice the focus is on the delivery of outputs. Many initiatives follow blueprint approaches to the transfer of knowledge and technology. Such transfers of solutions, either from the past or from

elsewhere, do not support communities in developing their own capacities.

All humans are continuously engaged in developing the capacities they need to achieve their goals. Taking action and reflecting on the outcomes, applying knowledge and mobilising resources are essential aspects of life. Even the poorest communities are rich in terms of their capacities to deal with the challenges they face.

It is not the role of external agencies to impose their own vision of development on communities, based on standardised processes, predefined solutions or well-defined tools. CCD is a collaborative process between external capacity developers and actors at the community level. In this process, the key roles of such facilitators are to encourage communities to:

- mobilise internal and external resources;
- create necessary knowledge;
- discover and mobilise internal and external resources;
- engage in communication and dialogue across generations and sections of the community, leading to consensus and legitimate decisions;
- find effective ways to deal with conflicts;
- continuously reflect on actions and outcomes; and
- collaborate regardless of the diversity that exists in every community.

### Changing facilitators' behaviour

In the initial phase, the trainers involved in the ICD programme believed that behavioural change among facilitators was crucial to supporting communities in their capacity development. This belief was influenced by the debate on participatory rural appraisal, and the observation that change agents employed by governments and NGOs often use a top-down approach, focusing on teaching communities what they should do.

Based on this understanding, we designed a series of training programmes for facilitators. The participants were trained in facilitation concepts and techniques, and encouraged to reflect on their role. The programmes focused on clarifying what attitudes are conducive to community development, and how to change them to

ensure the emergence of desired behaviour. We put considerable energy into *teaching* the facilitators how to encourage dialogue, demonstrate listening skills, etc. After these preparations in the classroom, and sharing ideas on how to build relationships of trust, we then went for the 'real application'.

The outcome was not impressive. The meetings with communities resembled formal exercises rather than authentic, relaxed human interactions. Despite our advice to relax and focus on dialogue, the facilitators' behaviour was almost the opposite. Rather than trying to develop trustful relationships with communities and encouraging them to reflect on their strengths and potential, they simply applied the tools and methods they had learned in the training.

We realised that theoretical concepts of what is appropriate behaviour may be useful in discussions among development practitioners, but they do not necessarily change their own behaviour. The facilitators who had talked so eloquently about respect and empathy during the training showed quite different behaviour in their interactions with the communities.

In this case, the facilitators' behaviour was significantly influenced by their previous experiences with the communities, and their intentions. That behaviour was not to be predefined by attitudes alone, but something that emerged in social interactions. A systemic view of the interactions between community and facilitators helped us to focus on the relational and dynamic nature of behaviour.

Since all people have the potential for diverse behaviour, we shifted our attention to creating a psycho-social environment that would provide space for desired behaviour to emerge.

This shift led to the development of the Seven D Approach, which consists of seven steps that enable facilitators and community members to develop a trustful relationship and enrich behavioural change in each other (see box on page 7). We started by clarifying the principles of the approach and the intentions at each step, and 'de-tooling' our interactions. That helped both sides to engage in genuine conversations without being fixed on tools and how to apply them. We concentrated not on

the facilitators' behaviour, but on the dynamic interactions between them and the communities.

The approach is based on the insight that both facilitators and community members are capable of showing the kind of behaviour needed for CCD without necessarily being taught, and so do not need training to adopt pre-defined 'optimal behaviour'. Instead, both can be encouraged to become aware of their intentions and to interact in a more genuine way. Continuous collective reflection can improve the ability to widen the range of behavioural options.

### Principles in practice

For example, in a programme for agricultural extension officers in Iran, we first discussed the key principles of the Seven D Approach, and asked the participants to share their experiences as CCD extension workers.

Without being taught any sophisticated tools, they visited a community. We explained that the intention was to establish relationships with the community and explore their capacities. The extension officers were encouraged to engage in dialogue with community members and ask them to reflect on those aspects of their life they were proud of. This brief introduction was sufficient to create a space for relaxed communication. By providing an avenue for behaviour conducive to bonding to emerge, both sides could develop trust and engage in a respectful, enriching way.

The extension officers arrived in their four-wheel-drive jeeps and the community, who had everything prepared, were waiting. During formal greetings, the facilitators showed confident non-verbal behaviour, while the community members stood with their heads slightly bowed, showing their respect for the visitors, and indicating that they were 'helpless' and 'happy' that these change agents had arrived to help them.

When the facilitators started asking the people what they were proud of, there was silence. But after some time, they started talking about the footpath they had laid without government support, or how peaceful their community was. They pointed to their bath house, which was so clean and better maintained than those in surrounding



villages, and invited the visitors to see with their own eyes.

We have observed similar processes in Laos, Nepal, Bangladesh, Indonesia and Fiji. Slowly, community members start to talk more confidently; they straighten their backs and seem to grow several centimetres, while the external agents start to bend, showing their respect for the people and listening to them as they talk about their achievements. Respectful behaviour emerges by exploring how they achieved all those things they are proud of. Empathy and admiration for their capacities is awakened, and appropriate behaviour follows as a simple result of social interaction.

It is important to emphasise that effective facilitators do not mimic the 'respectful behaviour' or 'careful listening' described in manuals or taught by trainers. Rather, their behaviour is authentic and appropriate to the situation, based on their new understanding of the community's achievements.

After the first interactions, we would reflect on what happened and what we observed about the community and ourselves. Such collective after-action reflections enable a person actively, with body and mind, to turn the event into an experience, and internalise it. Such internalisation – the interplay of previous experiences and present interactions – creates the foundation for new behaviour to emerge. The aim is for facilitators to develop the capability to reflect while in action and

change their behaviour in ways that will contribute to CCD.

In our experience, such reflection is a powerful way of contributing to behavioural change, in that it strengthens the facilitators' confidence to adopt appropriate behaviour in their future interactions. CCD requires a systemic approach that pays attention to both facilitators and community members. The capacity for effective behaviour is best strengthened collaboratively, through genuine interactions where desired behaviour can emerge.

Behavioural change is a continuous process. Careful, systematic reflection on behaviour and its results can help to improve the ability to adapt. Reflective practice and action learning are two essential features of learning programmes that aim to broaden behavioural options. It is not 'behavioural change' of facilitators that is needed, but the creation of avenues where they can interact with their clients, develop a common intention and reflect on their behaviour and outcomes. Such reflective practice is very effective in the collective capacity development of both facilitators and communities. <

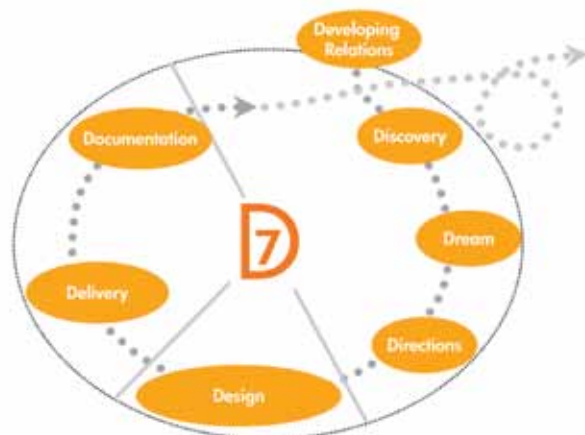
### Further reading

- Dhamotharan, M. (2009) *Handbook on Integrated Community Development*. APO. <http://tinyurl.com/APO-Handbook>

## The Seven D Approach

The Seven D Approach is a systematic process focusing on community capacity development. It is a human-centred approach that nurtures the emergence of productive relationships between facilitators and communities, and strengthens the capacities of communities to move towards their chosen vision.

The first steps focus on developing trustful, respectful relationships, and encouraging community members to imagine a desired future. This motivates them to initiate necessary actions. The next steps are intended to strengthen their ability to analyse their potential and the challenges they face, to reach consensual decisions on collective action and reflect on the outcomes. Throughout the process, behavioural change is envisaged as an incremental, collective, continuous effort by everyone involved by creating a space in which desired behavioural patterns can emerge.



# Behaviour of the boundary spanners



**Alan Fowler**  
alanfowler@compuserve.com  
Inter-Mediation International, Herbertsdale, South Africa

Alan Fowler combines many roles. He is an independent adviser on capacity development theory and practice, and currently holds academic positions at universities in Holland and South Africa. Extending over 30 years, his experience has included professional assignments with NGOs, as well as positions in foundations and the World Bank. He co-founded the International NGO Training and Research Centre (INTRAC), Oxford, UK, and was a member of the boards of the International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) and Civicus, the World Alliance for Citizen Participation. Alan has also authored numerous books and articles on many issues relevant to civil society and development.

Alan is a member of the international advisory board of PSO, an association of Dutch NGOs. In January 2010, at a PSO seminar, he presented the concept of organisational resilience as a key capacity – a subject he has been working on a lot lately. In a recent interview with *Capacity.org*, Alan talked about the issue of behaviour in capacity building.

**Capacity development support is often offered as aid, with a donor and a recipient. How does the behaviour of the people involved influence the effectiveness of such efforts?**

A critical feature of relationships within the aid system is the notion of ‘boundary spanners’. These are people who straddle the border between their own and another organisation. In a way, they represent the behaviour of their organisation rather than their own behaviour. Their role normally involves renegotiation across boundaries, and that requires flexibility, adaptability and adjustment from both sides.

On the donor side, that person is often a programme officer who represents his or her

The success of relationships between donors and recipients depends partly on the behaviour and the skills of those who work and negotiate with both sides – the ‘boundary spanners’.

organisation’s position, and who has a significant influence on whether or not any necessary adjustments will be accepted internally. They know, given the rules of the game, how much elasticity there is. They can be risk averse in their behaviour, and inclined to go back to the original contract without allowing any variation. Or they can say, ‘Well, we have moved on, now we know more and we have to adjust; we have to change the time frame within which we can expect results’.

The roles of the boundary spanners, on both sides, are much more subtle than most people realise. It is rarely the case that people who play those roles were selected on the ground that they have negotiation skills as a core competence. Within the aid system the ability to negotiate is vital, but it is one requirement you seldom see in recruitment adverts.

What is more, there is often a power disparity in aid partnerships. The boundary spanner on the donor side is often about three or four levels down their organisation’s hierarchy. Meanwhile, the counterpart on the recipient side is often far higher up their organisation’s hierarchy. You might have a permanent secretary dealing with a programme officer at GTZ, for example. So you get power disparities built into the relational system. This doesn’t help when negotiating partnerships, because it can really interfere with achieving mutual understanding. That’s where personal behaviour becomes so important, but that is something that we don’t talk about very much.

**Negotiation and partnership. Doesn’t that sound like a contradiction?**

Well, as you probably know, I don’t like the word ‘partnership’. I think it has become a something-and-nothing word. It emerged with ‘participation’, ‘empowerment’ and other fashionable terms that are actually used to hide power differences. The aid system seems to be implying that you can be partners with everybody, all the time and with regard to everything. This is not true in any other walk of life. I only have one partner and that is my wife, and I have friends and acquaintances. But not every relationship in life can be a partnership in the sense of what I call an authentic partnership of equality, of mutual respect –

basically, partners who share the consequences of success and failure.

Development programmes tend to overemphasise the need for partnerships, and they seldom deliver. By and large, partnership is a word that serves to hide tough negotiations. I think it is a stick that the aid system created, and with which the aid system will be beaten, because it doesn’t deliver.

We need to start using other words and phrases, such as ‘we are part of a coalition’, ‘we are part of an alliance’, ‘we are part of a platform or a network’. We should not say ‘we are in a partnership’ all the time. I think saying you are in a contractual relationship is perfectly acceptable, so why not be honest about it? When you negotiate an agreement with USAID based on a competitive tender to provide a service in, say, the Horn of Africa, you don’t need to say that you are in a partnership with USAID. It is a contractual relationship.

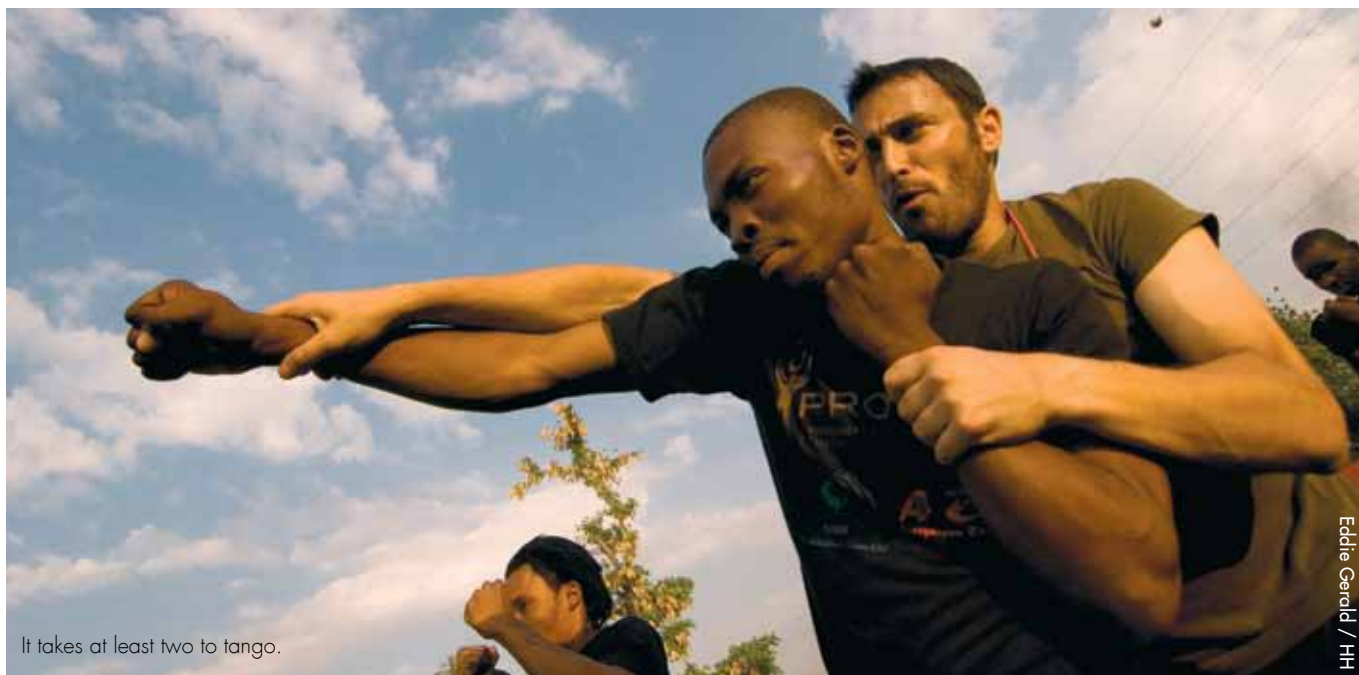
**What behavioural attributes should a facilitator have?**

Well, the answer is almost contained in the word itself. What does facilitation mean? Its Latin root means ‘to make easy’. You cannot facilitate by dominating. You have to facilitate by trying to connect. That means being able to speak multiple languages: to understand World Bank-speak on the one side, and to understand NGO-speak on the other side when negotiating a relationship.

A facilitator requires a healthy degree of empathy without an excessive degree of subservience, together with a certain critical stance in order to avoid being manipulated, but also without manipulating others. It can be described as a brokering-counselling type of role. You try to counsel the relationship, and counsellors tend to be non-directive. They try to avoid being too normative. So these are the sort of attributes you are looking for in an effective facilitator.

An important precondition for boundary spanners to consider is: who is paying you to perform this role? Someone is financing you and, rightly or wrongly, other people will see you as being in allegiance with them. How do you deal with that? How do you express and try to keep a positive neutral position when you want to be a broker or facilitator?





It takes at least two to tango.

**Would you say that it is inherently impossible to facilitate capacity development and hold the purse strings at the same time?**

I wouldn't go quite so far as to say it is inherently impossible. But I would suggest exercising caution if you can't avoid being in that situation. There is a psychological relationship between the giver and the receiver. To be given something is to be beholden to someone. It is imprinted as a mother-child relationship, but this needs to be shifted to an adult-to-adult position of mutuality. We live and work in a world permeated with situations of latent post-colonialism, latent racialism and other historical conditioning that underpins inequality. What does it take to engage in adult-adult relationships in this setting? It is very difficult. It may not be impossible, but it is tricky to achieve equity in any system based on giving.

Adult-to-adult behaviour in aid requires more than just skills. It often needs critical self-reflection, which can sometimes be helped with a bit of mentoring and professional support.

And if I look at the good facilitators I have worked with, I think many of them have a background in social work and adult education. It is partly because these professions attract a particular type of person, who learns the skills of the facilitation trade, including empathy, didactics and pedagogical skills. Teachers or social workers are already predisposed, through self-selection, to becoming facilitators, and is not difficult for them to adopt an adult-adult stance that is authentic.

**It takes two to tango. What about the behaviour of boundary spanners on the recipient side?**

Well, I would offer the usual advice. Don't play the victim. Don't, when things go wrong, simply attribute problems to forces outside of you. Try to accept co-responsibility for what has happened and don't simply say 'well, if they had funded me differently', or 'if the government had done this, that or the other'. When things go wrong, a lot of people look to displace the causes to someone else.

It is also important to respect your own sovereignty in decision making. Don't put yourself in a situation where you can't say no, because then you negotiate from a vulnerable position. You have to be careful not to be driven by your own growth as the proxy measure of performance; doing so creates a self-chosen role as a supplicant. Sovereignty often means having governing bodies that fully appreciate the quality of the work, not just quantity.

And quality speaks for itself in attracting support in an adult-to-adult way from the outset. That is a relational key for capacity development, and it is mutually respectful. Because, paradoxically, the capacity development of givers cannot properly take place outside of their relationship with recipients. Capacity, and the competencies needed to relate, are found 'between' organisations as much as within them. In capacity development, it takes at least two to tango. <

*Interview by Heinz Greijn.*

## ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES



**Capacity is Development**

In March 2010, senior programme leaders, thinkers and practitioners from the North and South gathered in Marrakech, Morocco, for 'Capacity is Development', a global event on smart strategies and capable institutions for 2015 and beyond, organised by UNDP. The participants discussed the policy choices, investment decisions and institutional reforms needed

for capacity development, as well as the successes and failures and what can be learned from them.

In preparation for the event, the UNDP Capacity Development Group, together with the Learning Network on Capacity Development (LenCD) Impact Alliance, called for experiences to be featured at the event's Knowledge Fair. They collected 175 case stories, 50 videos and

90 images showcasing the policies and programmes that have proven successful in driving human and institutional capacity development around the world.

The entries were assessed by a panel of 18 judges, and the top five finalists were awarded an expenses-paid trip to present their work in person in Marrakech. To read about the finalists and see their submissions, visit [www.capacityisdevelopment.org/knowledgefair](http://www.capacityisdevelopment.org/knowledgefair)



**Hilde van der Vegt**

vegt@pso.nl  
Communications officer, PSO, The Hague, the Netherlands

**Mosi Kisare**

mosi.kisare@easun-tz.org  
Director, East African Support Unit for NGOs (EASUN), Arusha, Tanzania

**Jacqueline Verhagen**

verhagen@pso.nl  
Facilitator of Learning, PSO, The Hague, the Netherlands

Effective capacity-building relationships

# The Moshi dialogue

In November 2009, the East African Support Unit for NGOs (EASUN) and PSO, an association of Dutch NGOs, organised a conference in Moshi, Tanzania, that brought together 36 NGOs from the North and the South.

During their preparation meeting, the African NGOs exchanged experiences about how working with Northern donors often interferes with maintaining their identity as organisations with their own autonomous ways of working. They were determined to table these issues in Moshi. In their preparations, the Northern participants focused on issues related to relationships between North and South, including relationship skills, awareness of attitudes and differences in cultural backgrounds. Case studies that resulted from the preparations set the agenda for the dialogue.

PSO and EASUN organised the Moshi conference as a platform for learning about the relationships between Northern and Southern NGOs, and to provide insights into how to develop more effective capacity-building relationships. The Southern representatives, from Tanzania, Uganda, Kenya, South Africa and Malawi, were mostly heads and senior programme officers with civil society organisations. Many of the Northern participants, from the Netherlands and Denmark, were programme officers responsible for liaising with and coordinating financial and capacity-building support for Southern NGOs.

One precondition for participation was that the NGOs from the North and South were not connected, in order to create a neutral environment in which participants would feel free to speak out, even on sensitive issues.



Reinout van den Bergh / PSO

**Partnerships**

The conference began with participants exchanging ideas about what an ideal partnership should be. As the discussion progressed, the contrast between this ideal and the reality of existing partnerships became obvious. The exchanges were candid, tense and often emotional. One Southern participant exclaimed, in exasperation, 'Do we actually need these partnerships?'

Some participants suggested a more realistic approach to partnerships. 'If it is essentially a donor-recipient relationship, we

should call it that, until we learn together how to transform it into what we want it to be'. There was support for allowing time in the pre-contract phase to assess the compatibility of organisations. A key question at that stage should be how collaboration can add value to the capacities and growth of the targeted sectors or communities. 'From the beginning, we have to define our roles. As we work together, those roles will change. But we need to be open about it. A relationship is a process, not a state of being'.

The Southern participants talked about their frustration with the behaviour of their Northern partners, as well as with the inflexibility of the aid system. Both Southern and Northern participants spoke about the 'pains' they often experience when working under less than ideal partnership relations (see box). All organisations emphasise issues that are important to them, but this may cloud their ability to see alternatives that are important priorities for their partners.

Mosi Kisare, director of EASUN Tanzania, described the Moshi conference as 'an effort to initiate a dialogue between Southern and Northern NGOs about the realities of deeply entrenched, top-down power relations in many partnerships. It is an effort that we must be proud of. The participants have demonstrated that honest and open dialogue is the way to build partnerships that will strengthen both Southern and Northern NGOs' <

**Difficulties perceived in partnerships**

**Southern NGOs:**

- Northern partners should consider how they give feedback. If a proposal needs to be adapted, for example, a question such as 'have you thought about this?' is more acceptable than an instruction.
- When Northern partners do not get what they want, they often just walk away.
- Northern partners often do not believe that we can figure out our own solutions;
- Money often comes too quickly, forcing Southern NGOs to act too soon, or move away from their core business and lose their identity.
- Northerners are only interested in immediate outputs, and don't seem to appreciate that we have to manage long-term development processes.
- Having to attend endless workshops keeps us from our work.

- The Northern aid system is too rigid, with strict standards (e.g. for reporting).
- Reporting using fixed logframes is often difficult. A situation may change over time, so it can be simply self-serving to have to report on the initial planned results.

**Northern NGOs:**

- When we work with the best of intentions, it is distressing if people ask 'who is really benefiting?', and assume it is the Northern partner.
- We are often stereotyped, and generally seen as representing all Northern organisations.
- We try to identify and address the needs of beneficiaries, but sometimes, if we touch on sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health, Southern partners don't want to hear about them.

**Link**

- For more on the Moshi dialogue, visit [www.pso.nl/en](http://www.pso.nl/en)

## PUBLICATIONS

**Capacity Development in Practice**

Jan Ubels, Naa-Aku Acquaye-Baddoo and Alan Fowler (eds), Earthscan, July 2010, 336pp. This collection of essays starts from the observation that capacity development as a form of intervention is rapidly becoming a distinct professional field. For the international development community, improving organisational capacities is now central to current thinking and practice. It has been estimated that more than a quarter of all official development assistance is now devoted to this task. The staff of many NGOs, government departments, private companies and donor agencies, as well as independent consultants, are involved with some aspect of capacity development on a daily basis. Yet the field is often dominated by donor rhetoric and lofty policy talk, while the practice of actually 'doing' capacity development is poorly understood or disregarded as a specialist domain. This book aims to ensure that capacity building efforts are better appreciated, more professional and increasingly effective in achieving local, national and international development goals.

The book's 24 chapters discuss capacity development from a variety of perspectives. The authors are all experienced practitioners – programme leaders, consultants, trainers, change managers, facilitators and activists – engaged in capacity development around the world.

Part I provides an overview of the many dimensions of capacity development, including accepted elements and approaches. Part II sets out the competencies required to establish an effective practice. Part III examines the importance of establishing connections between the various elements and actors involved in any capacity development effort. Part IV addresses the important matter of demonstrating and improving on results. Finally, Part V assesses ways to improve the quality of capacity development work and increase the number of practitioners, especially in the South.

Several chapters touch on aspects of the behaviour of practitioners involved in capacity development initiatives.

**Choosing an appropriate role**

Both external advisers and local change agents can assume different roles in the capacity development process. During an assignment or project, a competent adviser will adopt a variety of positions in relation to different people or parts of the system. This demands an awareness of the types of role they can play, and good judgement in deciding what is needed, and when.

In 'Advisers' roles', Douglas Champion, David Kiel and Jean McLendon identify the key factors that advisers or agents of change should consider when deciding which of nine possible roles to assume in a particular situation or phase of a project. Their model can help to improve the clarity of

their own and their clients' expectations. Although first published 20 years ago (in *Training and Development Journal*, 1990), for a different audience, this chapter is highly relevant for the development community, addressing questions that will be familiar to many practitioners.

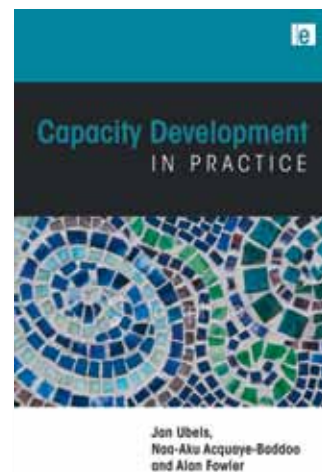
**Behaviour in complex settings**

Capacity development practitioners often find themselves working in settings where they need to deal with different forces, interests and power asymmetries. These factors are potential sources of conflict about ownership, authority and the allocation of roles and responsibilities. Such problems are seldom acknowledged, or explored in ways that are useful for practitioners.

In 'Ownership, authority and conflict', Joe McMahon draws on work in the fields of facilitation and conflict resolution to examine the power relations that are inherent in capacity development interventions. He presents practical, common-sense guidelines for practitioners to help them to define their roles, to position themselves in relation to multiple actors, and to deal constructively with (potential) conflict.

**Dialogue**

Dialogue is an essential component of any intervention that aims to bring about change. Competence in facilitating dialogue is vital for any adviser; it is not easy, but is a capability that



can be developed. Real dialogue can lead to mutual understanding, collective ownership and agreement on the direction of an effort, as well as clarity about the division of tasks and responsibilities.

In 'Dialogue', Marianne Mille Bojer reviews the factors that are critical to the success of capacity development processes that rely on dialogue. She provides a menu of tools and approaches and explains how to choose among them, together with examples of how they have been used in practice.

This book will be of interest to all capacity development practitioners, including consultants, managers, trainers, facilitators, leaders, advisers, programme staff and activists. Funding agencies and private companies providing aid and investment will also find much of value.

<http://tinyurl.com/yz8xv8h>

**Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard**

Chip Heath and Dan Heath, Broadway Books, 2010. The authors, experts on organisational behaviour, explain why change often stalls and how executives can use psychology to keep it going. Managers can be more effective in stimulating change by drawing on the enormous body of research on how the brain works. <http://heathbrothers.com/switch>

**ADKAR: A Model for Change in Business, Government and our Community**

Jeff Hiatt, Prosci Research, 2006. The ADKAR model – building

awareness, creating desire, developing knowledge, fostering ability and reinforcing changes in an organisation – for facilitating change ties together many aspects of change management, including readiness assessments, sponsorship, communications, coaching, training and resistance management. [www.change-management.com/adkar-book.htm](http://www.change-management.com/adkar-book.htm)

**The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Leaders, Trainers, and Coaches**

Roger Schwarz, Jossey Bass, 2nd edn, 2002. This book provides materials for facilitators, including simple but

effective ground rules for group interaction. It offers practical methods for handling emotions when they arise in a group and offers a diagnostic approach to identify and solve problems that can undermine the group process. <http://tinyurl.com/yjzkbms>

**Facilitation Basics**

Donald V. McCain and Deborah D. Tobey, ASTD Press, 2004. The authors explain how facilitators can guide learners and meeting participants in a safe and supportive atmosphere. They offer dozens of practical examples, worksheets, checklists and other tools, focusing on how to be an

efficient and effective facilitator of well-designed meetings and other learning events. [www.astd.org](http://www.astd.org)

**Changing Minds: In Detail**

David Straker, Syque Press, 2008. The book analyses how to change what others think, feel, believe and do. It presents a model of how the mind works, covering many motivators, and explains how we process information and formulate decisions. The model provides for a new pattern of persuasion that underlies all other methods, from negotiation to sales to business change management. <http://changingminds.org>



Doug Reeler  
doug@cdra.org.za

Sue Soal  
sue@cdra.org.za  
Community Development Resource Association (CDRA),  
Cape Town, South Africa

Lessons from CD experience in South Africa

## Mutual transparency: the antidote to many don'ts

Values and ideas about appropriate behaviour have become part of the organisational culture at the Community Development Resource Association. But living up to these standards is a constant challenge.

The Community Development Resource Association (CDRA) is a centre for organisational innovation and developmental practice. Formed at the height of South Africa's anti-Apartheid struggle and rooted in progressive and humanist approaches to social justice and change, the association has worked with over 800 organisations and individuals throughout Southern Africa and beyond.

Our collaborators and clients range from small community-based initiatives to institutions with a global reach, including NGOs, membership organisations, networks, research institutes and governments. We work with initiatives that address urban and rural development, capacity building, community development, youth development, health, welfare, the environment, HIV/Aids, policy making and research, education, children's rights, human rights and gender issues.

We share a set of values and ideas about appropriate behaviour that, we believe, make good capacity development (CD) facilitators. These values, which have evolved from our practice to become part of our organisational culture, include the following.

*Listen.* Everyone has a story; your job as a facilitator is to listen to them, and also to share your own. If that involves impossible time frames, declare this and ask: what can we do about that? See what you come up with together.

*Never stop listening.* Listening is not information gathering. Check that what you think you have heard is indeed what was said, whether you are working with individuals, groups or even communities. CD is not an information-sharing process, but it is about constructing a shared meaning.

*Ask questions.* Always ask: what next? Assume that what will follow is not obvious. You may have some ideas, but so too will the others. Together, these ideas will shape the next step. Until they come together, there is no obvious way forward – no method, no template, no prescription, no tool, no formula. All of these will become useful only later.

*Don't assume.* You may not always have anything to offer, or the people you are meeting may not need your help. Before asking for anything, declare who you are – quietly, in a measured way. There is no hurry to get anywhere else. The point, for now, is to meet people – not to have a meeting, and not to transfer any particular 'thing' or lesson.

In practice, it is often difficult to live up to these standards. The most common inappropriate behaviours we witness in others, and are guilty of ourselves, come from:

- cultural mismatches, e.g. being direct and task-driven in an indirect and relationship-driven culture (and vice versa);
- temperament mismatches, e.g. some people cannot appreciate perspectives or ways to proceed from people with different temperaments;
- mishandling power, e.g. manipulating people, or not using available power to enable others;
- second-guessing, e.g. adjusting your responses to fit what you assume other people want in order to retain or gain an advantage; and
- being defensive, e.g. trying to save face, or protect authority, territory or fragile egos.

### Transparency

One thing that can sometimes act as an antidote to some of these problems is *transparency*. Mutual transparency means revealing more about each other to each other – about ourselves as people, or about our cultures, circumstances or situations. It means revealing what we think, feel and want, and letting others know what is really happening on our side, possibly pre-empting strange behaviour. Of course, first we have to reveal this self-knowledge to ourselves, and then have the courage to reveal it to others.

But in many situations, and many cultures, building transparent relationships is hard. Indeed, we are probably talking about

more than just behaviour; often the very purpose of an intervention is to reveal and connect more to the system itself. As this is where some of the real work lies, it is useful to share how a facilitator's behaviour can bring about transparency.

In our profession, transparency comes most easily in confidential settings – in 'containers of trust'. These are the one-on-one conversations where people look each other in the eye – whether during a formal interview or over a beer in a bar. Many effective professional development approaches begin with such conversations. They are started ostensibly to gather information or build a picture. But perhaps they play a more important role as the places where the foundations for trust and transparency are laid, and where the funny, inappropriate behaviours that usually emerge in more participatory processes are pre-empted.

It is an old theme in the CD sector that we are 'over-workshopped'. Perhaps we need to invest more time in building key, intimate relationships before we stumble, unprepared, into yet more meetings. <

### Link

- Community Development Resource Association (CDRA): [www.cdra.org.za](http://www.cdra.org.za)



Roel Burgler / HH

Practical capacity building in Papua New Guinea

# Making a difference to relationships and behaviour

Effective relationships are key to capacity building. AusAID's 'Making a Difference' training programme is helping advisers and counterparts to improve their working relationships by reflecting on their behaviour and attitudes.

The Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) invests a considerable portion of its funding to Papua New Guinea (PNG) in the form of advisory support, often full-time positions lasting two or three years. Reviews of this support show that the quality of the relationship between an adviser and his or her 'counterparts' – the PNG government officials with whom the adviser works most closely – is crucial to the effectiveness of the assistance for capacity building. Anecdotal evidence from advisers and counterparts suggests it can take six months to establish an effective working relationship based on trust, respect and a common understanding of roles, objectives, expectations and values.

When recruiting advisers, agencies such as AusAID increasingly give capacity building skills and experience as much weight as technical skills. However, such advisers are still uncommon, particularly as there is still a lack of clarity over just what skills, approaches and philosophies are involved.

## The MaD programme

In recognition of this skills shortage, AusAID has funded the development and provision of a six-day programme entitled 'Making a Difference: Practical capacity building' (known as MaD). The programme is attended by advisers together with at least one, and preferably two or three, counterparts. It currently runs in PNG and the Solomon Islands, but is available to other countries on request.

The programme consists of three modules, lasting two days each, and develops practical skills for capacity building at individual, group and organisational levels. Advisers – both internal and external – and managers need these skills in managing their staff, bringing changes to their units, and improving services to internal and external customers.

An important part of the programme is developing the relationships between advisers and counterparts (and between managers and staff). This is done through sessions looking at the 'ideal adviser' and

'ideal counterpart', developing listening and coaching skills, giving and receiving feedback, and planning for and handling difficult conversations.

Listening and coaching are important aspects of capacity building. Too many advisers and managers are 'addicted' to problem-solving, wanting to be seen as the experts. The programme helps them to see the value of breaking this habit and gives them practical tools to help others solve their own problems – by connecting to their own resourcefulness and expanding it.

Each module ends with a planning session, in which the adviser-counterpart team jointly develops an action plan to implement their learning. The programme also provides informal opportunities for participants to get to know each other outside the work environment, and develop a common understanding and language relating to capacity building.

## Good practice

The programme models good capacity building practice. For instance, it is co-facilitated, thus modelling working effectively in partnership. There is little traditional training; the approach is facilitated learning – providing opportunities for participants to discover for themselves, learn from each other, and make explicit and validate what they already know. In keeping with this principle, people decide themselves how to engage with the material and approaches. Their responses depend on their prior knowledge, willingness to be open to learning, and preparedness to reflect on their own behaviour and attitudes.

This means there is variation in engagement levels. Some participants just learn practical methods and tools to apply at work. Others are prompted to reflect on their behaviour and attitudes, and realise they need to make changes to themselves. One senior adviser said he significantly changed his approach after completing the ideal adviser session, when he realised he was the 'adviser from hell'. A counterpart reported that he had started asking his staff for their

Jan Morgan

janmorgan2@me.com

Change management adviser and MaD programme manager, Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID), Canberra, Australia



REUTERS / POOL/OIA

views, rather than just telling them what to do – and discovered he had some bright people in his division.

The sessions on managing change start with reflections on feelings and emotions from individual experiences, which become the basis for developing principles of organisational change. Participants comment that they can better appreciate the impact of their work on other people, as they now recognise that effective capacity building is about change.

The last word on changes in attitude goes to the participants themselves:

'MaD was a real turning point ... I had not experienced this approach before and it truly changed my approach. In Australia, we are trained to be problem solvers and if we don't we are not doing our job well ... here I needed to change, to stay quiet.' – *Adviser*.

'Other programmes are general and theoretical about supervision, management and just talk to the brain. This course was different. MaD talks to a person's inner being and the inner being is where real change comes from.' – *Government of PNG official*. <



**Leng Chhay**  
learning@camlefa.org  
Cambodian Learning Facilitators (Camlefa),  
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

A new approach to CD in Cambodia

# Building trust, changing behaviour

Building trust between facilitators and learners is essential in capacity development. Leng Chhay, a practitioner with many years of experience in Cambodia, looks at how this trust can be established.

Capacity development (CD) is, I believe, primarily about learning, whereby the practitioners who facilitate the CD process and learners are both able to learn. Such a process starts with establishing a relationship between the facilitator and learners that is based on trust. The experiences of VBNC, a leading institute for social development in Cambodia, have shown that trust between facilitators and learners is essential for ensuring that CD interventions are effective and result in positive change.

The behaviour of practitioners is an important element in this process. One of my most significant experiences as a CD practitioner was when I worked with a team in a three-year project to improve the organisational capacities of 18 Cambodian NGOs. They were all partners of ICCO, the Dutch donor that supported the project, and the process was facilitated by a team from VBNC.

### A new approach

The traditional approach to CD depends heavily on training, but training by itself is often ineffective. In this project, the VBNC team wanted to try something new, so we opted for a combination of training, facilitation and coaching. We wanted to avoid a frequent problem in CD whereby the practitioner adopts a style of facilitation that is based on inaccurate assessments of the needs of participants.

We also wanted to avoid 'comfortable ways of learning' whereby facilitators focus on meeting the learners' wishes rather than on tackling the real issues and challenges they face. Comfortable ways of learning mean that learners may persuade the facilitators to make life easy or comfortable for them, such as by answering their questions right away instead of asking them to think for themselves, or by offering printed handouts that they do not necessarily read.

A better approach is to use 'effective ways of learning' that focus on approaches and processes that best address the challenges (learning needs) of the learners. These can include methods that require learners to think or take an active role in their own

learning. Effective ways of learning require the facilitator to be responsive to and analytical of the learner's needs, in particular by clarifying what needs are to be addressed through the CD intervention. To our knowledge, this was the first time that organisational CD had been conducted in Cambodia using such approaches. The project participants – the learners – did not always appreciate these ways of learning, however.

### Building trust

We were aware that for this approach to succeed, a relationship based on trust between the facilitators and learners was essential. The team believed that we would not be effective in facilitating the partner organisations' CD unless the learners expressed their real needs in terms of areas for improvement (weaknesses). But at the start of the project this was difficult because a relationship of trust had not yet been established. When we conducted organisational assessments to try to identify their learning needs, the participants were unwilling to express their weaknesses or areas where improvements were needed. They were worried that those weaknesses could be reported to the donors who were supporting this project, which might result in funding cuts.

In Cambodian culture, people are very reluctant to identify their weaknesses to others, since they may be seen as weak. That would create an unsafe space where they would risk losing face. Staff members are especially reluctant to admit weaknesses to the boss, as they fear being criticised.

In order to build trust, we introduced many informal activities, including social and team-building activities, to explore attitudes to learning and relationships. The team members listened to the learners' problems and concerns, and explored possible solutions with them. We explained to them that the relationship was equal, with no hierarchical or power status issues, and that we wanted to support their development, not report their weaknesses to the donor. We behaved as 'facilitators' rather than as teachers or instructors, and

expressed our desire and willingness to work with them to improve the capacities of their organisations.

The team also encouraged reflection. Rather than rush ahead with the intervention, for example, we first tried to deal with important factors such as the learners' fears and concerns, and to discuss traditional learning approaches and cultural issues. We believe that these are preconditions for success in our work.

### The rewards of trust

After about six months, the team's open and professional approach resulted in the learners developing some level of trust with us. They started to become more open and share with us their weaknesses and challenges they faced, allowing us to work with them to identify their real learning needs.

Among the many challenges they identified, the main ones concerned the leadership and boards of their organisations. The leadership had not provided sufficient direction, there were different interpretations of organisational values, different views on how organisations can learn and improve, etc. These were all seen as contributing to the poor performance of their organisations. Other leadership issues included the reluctance to delegate or to empower middle managers to take more responsibility, the lack of opportunities for staff development, etc.

The benefit of creating trust in the relationship is that it overcomes the tendency of learners to say only good and positive things, which negate any need for improvement. By behaving in a way that creates a safe space, facilitators can help learners to become more confident and provide constructive feedback that can be used for future improvement. This requires facilitators to:

- **Be patient.** In this case, it took six months before the learners felt secure enough to share their real learning needs.
- **Listen to learners.** By listening in a respectful manner, facilitators can help to clarify issues in depth and to negotiate learning needs and possible responses. This

ensures that both participants and facilitators understand the issues in the same way, and can then formulate a learning agreement with clear objectives and indicators of success.

- **Challenge learners.** Once a trustful relationship is established, it is possible to challenge learners' behaviours that are unhelpful to achieving their learning objectives. These include personal attitudes, cultural barriers and perceived traditional CD approaches.

As an example, during workshops the participants work together in small groups. One group completed the work in three minutes and asked the facilitator to give them a reward. The team reflected on this and decided not to reward them, but to recognise the other groups who took time to think and came up with better-quality outputs from the discussion. In this way, we encouraged the participants to think and play a more active role, rather than reward them for giving the answers right away, as is normal in more traditional teaching practice. We were able to challenge them in this way because of the trustful relationship we had built together. We observed that they accepted our challenges, and we could make further challenges as part of this new way of learning.

- **Practice what you preach.** Practitioners need to demonstrate good practice themselves if they are to influence learners to change. For example, I have seen trainers who teach people about time management, but who have overlapping schedules or cannot meet deadlines. They provide poor role models that discourage learners from making efforts to improve their own time management. Learners watch such behaviour closely and will place little value on what they are told if practitioners fail to practice it themselves.



Seen Sprague / Inreair



Borderlands / Alamy

It is widely recognised that role models are important in facilitating behavioural change in individuals. Rick James of INTRAC, for example, acknowledges that people are inspired to change by seeing the example of others. In capacity development, particularly in the Cambodian context, the behaviour of role models is crucial. Cambodian learners often have a tendency to 'wait and see' before being willing to change their behaviour. This means that practitioners must be able to do so themselves. As Nelson Mandela said, 'You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself.' <

**Further reading**

- James, R. (2005) 'Autocrats Anonymous': A Controversial Perspective on Leadership Development. INTRAC Praxis Note No. 14. <http://tinyurl.com/cap39chhay1>
- VBNK (2008) *Partnering for Change: Successes, Challenges and Lessons Learned*. ICCO Partners Project (2005–2008). <http://tinyurl.com/cap39chhay2>
- Peticucci, L. and Serey Phal, K. (2008) *Partnering for Change: End-of-Project Evaluation of ICCO Partners Project*. VBNK.

**Links**

- Cambodian Learning Facilitators (Camlefa): [www.camlefa.org](http://www.camlefa.org)
- VBNK – an institute to serve facilitators of development: [www.vbnk.org](http://www.vbnk.org)

**ORGANISATIONS, NETWORKS AND INITIATIVES**

**International Association of Facilitators (IAF)**



Facilitation as a profession is rapidly taking its place alongside consulting and training. The IAF was formed by a group of professionals for interchange, professional development, trend analysis and peer networking.

The association now has 1500 members in more than 63 countries. [www.iaf-world.org](http://www.iaf-world.org)

**Community Empowerment**

This website offers a wide range of materials – training modules, methodologies, as well as resources to guide policy, management and strategic planning – for practitioners and community workers involved in empowerment or development programmes. One example is the Participatory Appreciative Planning Approach (PAPA), launched in Nepal in 1999, which believes that 'development organisations should participate in community issues', but not vice versa. [www.scn.org/cmp/ahist.htm](http://www.scn.org/cmp/ahist.htm)

**Relationship Awareness Conference 2009**

The Strength Deployment Inventory (SDI) is a tool for improving team effectiveness and reducing the costs of conflict. SDI is based on 'relationship awareness' – a learning model for understanding the motives behind behaviour. People who are able to recognise motivations can communicate more effectively and handle conflict more productively, with lasting impacts within organisations. In 2009, SDI practitioners gathered at the Relationship Awareness conference to interact and share ways they are using the theory to make a positive impact on people's lives. [www.relationshipawareness.com](http://www.relationshipawareness.com)

**Communication for Change (C-Change)**



C-Change is USAID's flagship programme to improve the effectiveness of social and behaviour change communication, applied to programmes, activities and tools. C-Change works with global, regional and local partners to incorporate knowledge of the social determinants of individual behaviours, taking into account research and the lessons learned from implementing and evaluating activities. [www.c-changeprogram.org](http://www.c-changeprogram.org)

# Do no harm



**Jenny Pearson**  
jennypearson@gmail.com  
Development practitioner

**D**o no harm' is a guiding principle in many professional disciplines. Yet although development practitioners routinely intervene in other people's lives, this principle has not become one of the lodestars of development. Much of what is done in the name of development is predicated on some unexamined core assumptions, one of which is that good intentions automatically lead to beneficial results.

Assumptions, and the values on which they are based, are, arguably, the most powerful factors influencing behaviour and decision making. However, in a world driven by the logframe requirement for results, we are rarely required to consider our behaviour or acknowledge any problems that it may have created.

My concerns are in the first instance, but not exclusively, with the expatriates in the sector. They are so influential in so many ways, not least in shaping the attitudes and practices of the national staff of institutions and NGOs. Whether based in developing countries or in Northern headquarters, many expatriates don't actually think of themselves as development practitioners in the broadest sense. The majority work in development on the basis of their technical skills – economics, agriculture, education and so on.

Specialist training and professional qualifications seldom, if ever, explore sufficiently the values and assumptions embedded in practising a discipline in a development context. Thus technical specialists, both expatriate and national, tend to have a relatively narrow focus. Few know how to assess the potential for their activities, and how they implement them, to create negative impacts.

Research shows that some national community development workers, despite their stated intentions, are not facilitating empowerment and change. Instead, on the basis of unexamined assumptions about the right way to solve other people's problems, they work in ways that replicate and reinforce the social constructs and hierarchies that keep communities trapped in poverty and injustice. Given the complexity of living systems, it should be mandatory for all development practitioners to learn how to analyse their own behaviour and activities in ways that demonstrate the full impact of what they do and how they do it.

## Development values

I once attended a workshop in which some Northern practitioners were bemoaning the failure of national partners to perform as expected. Part of the problem, they concluded, was that the national partners didn't understand 'development values'. When I asked about the values to which they were referring, no one could give me an answer. They had to admit that they had never taken any time to discuss what their values were, or should be, in the context of project partnerships. It was a clear example of powerful assumptions at work. I would have loved to talk to those partners about their experience in the relationships; I imagine it would have been a very different story.

It is a form of arrogance to justify intervening in other people's lives without understanding how our assumptions will influence how we behave in our relationships with them. It is also arrogant to complain about the values and behaviour of others without scrutinising our own. We need to look beyond good intentions and assess all the implications, not only of what we do, but also of how we do it. With all that is now known about what can go wrong with development interventions, working on the basis of unacknowledged values and unexamined assumptions is no longer good enough. Without having articulated their own values and assumptions, Northern practitioners cannot address with integrity any problems or challenges arising in the ways that Southern practitioners approach their work.

There are no certainties that development interventions will be beneficial, and strong possibilities that some will be harmful. It is time for Northern development practitioners to confront the uncomfortable fact that, even in the unlikely event we do have all the right answers, there are times when our behaviour creates rather than solves problems. <

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**Editor-in-chief:** Heinz Greijn  
[heinzgreijn@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:heinzgreijn@yahoo.co.uk)

**Editorial board:** Niloy Banerjee, Volker Hauck, Jan Ubels and Hettie Walters

**Editorial board support:** Niels Keijzer and Tony Land

**Contributors to this issue:** Leng Chhay, Mohan Dhamorathan, Alan Fowler, Mosi Kisare, Jan Morgan, Jenny Pearson, Doug Reeler, Ingrid Richter, Sue Soal, Jan Ubels, Hilde van der Vegt, Jacqueline Verhagen

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