An Approach to Organizational Self Assessment

Developed for the IUCN M&E Team

by Universalia

DRAFT

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Contents

Foreword

Universalia and IDRC (the International Development Research Centre) have been working on a model and a process for organizational assessment for several years. This work is embodied in a text, ***Institutional Assessment*** (IDRC Press, 1995) and ***Évaluation institutionnelle*** (IDRC Press, 1996) which describe our conceptual framework for assessing organizational capacity through different possible interventions, such as internal self-assessments or external evaluations by a funding agency.

We have continued to develop both the concept and the process to assist organizations who are undertaking an organizational self-assessment process. The framework has been tested as a learning exercise in a variety of organizations around the world, and the result is a guide to self-assessment and a book of case studies of our experience in Africa and Asia.

IUCN has also been working on these issues and about a year ago, through IDRC, we began working with IUCN to see how our approach to institutional assessment could be melded with IUCN's approach to project and system assessment. We now see the three levels of assessment as interrelated concepts that can be useful to people interested in sustainable development (see page 3).

This document is the first draft of an attempt to integrate the Universalia-IDRC model with IUCN material. We hope that you will read it and give us feedback and let us know about your own experience in this area.

Dr. Charles Lusthaus
charles7@umg.ca

Dr. Marie-Hélène Adrien
mha@umg.ca

Part One ✦ *A Framework for Assessment*

Who this guide is for

This guide was developed for organizations that:

- want to improve their performance

- want to understand the factors that support or inhibit their performance

- want to maximize their contributions to sustainable development

Definitions

Sustainable Development

Improves and maintains the condition of the ecosystem and the well-being of people.

System Assessment

A process which assesses the well-being of human and ecological systems.

Organizational Self-Assessment

A process by which organizations or sub-units of organizations explore their performance, and the factors that support or hinder that performance, in order to maximize their contributions to the system and their impact on sustainable development.

Project Assessment

An assessment of specific activities and their results, to determine whether activities were carried out in an effective and efficient fashion – and whether or how they contributed to sustainable development.

The rationale for self-assessment

Self-assessment provides systematic feedback to an organization on how it is doing. It is a process of diagnosis and reflection that leads to action. And the more the process is planned and internalized, the more likely that the organization will act on the results.

Planned, systematic self-assessment is a self-strengthening process – it builds muscles for reflection and learning. And the more you reflect and learn and then act on your learning, the better you do it next time. Self-assessment creates a habit for continuous learning and improvement.
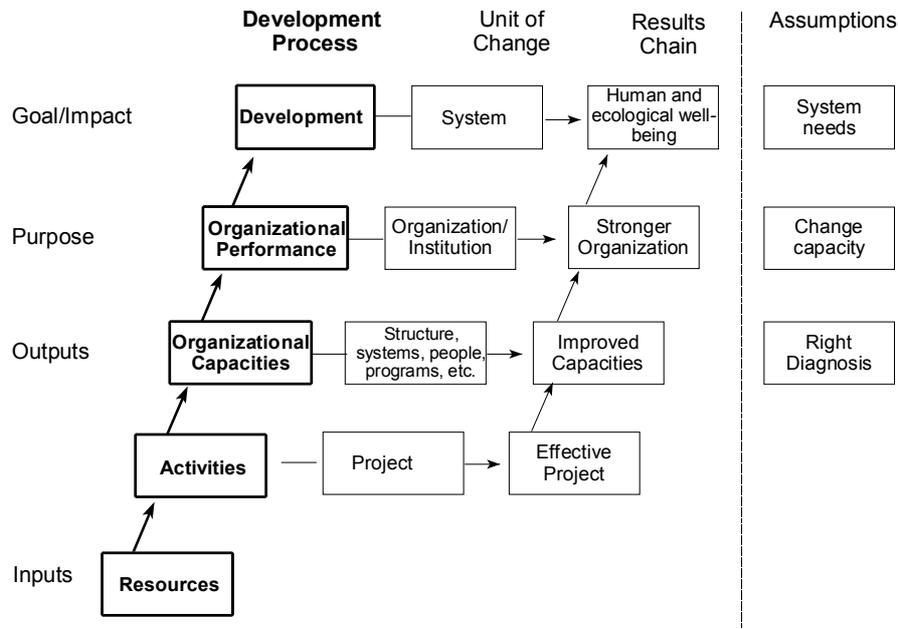
A developmental framework

The framework shown below is a way of linking the ideas associated with development activities, change, the need to focus on results, and the link to sustainable development.

In essence the diagram presents a series of development hypotheses that need to be tested and re-tested in the world of "practice":

- If you provide resources to a project, will the resources support "good activities"?

- Will the activities lead to tangible outputs?

- Will the outputs lead to improvements?

In development work we are always searching for better ways to improve the well-being of humans and ecosystems. There is no prescription in this model – just ongoing learning processes.

	Development Process	Unit of Change	Results Chain	Assumptions
Goal/Impact	**Development**	System	Human and ecological well-being	System needs
Purpose	**Organizational Performance**	Organization/ Institution	Stronger Organization	Change capacity
Outputs	**Organizational Capacities**	Structure, systems, people, programs, etc.	Improved Capacities	Right Diagnosis
	Activities	Project	Effective Project	
Inputs	**Resources**			

The Development Process

The framework is intended to show that there needs to be a conceptual link between organizational performance and development. This is not to imply that organizations are the only way to development, rather that organizations need to understand the contribution they are making to the development process. The process of development is shown in the bold chain of boxes on the left. Theoretically, if the links between inputs, outputs, purpose and impact are logical, there is a greater possibility of contributing to sustainable development.

Practically speaking, if inputs are effectively planned and utilized to build the capacities of an organization, the performance of the organization will improve and its eventual contribution to sustainable development will increase.

The Unit of Change

In any improvement process, it is essential to understand exactly what it is you are trying to change to improve performance. This "unit of change", shown in the second column of the framework, can be at three different levels.

1. At the **system level** these are the sustainable systems in a geographic area (globe, nation, village)

2. At the **organizational or institutional level** these are the organizations or sub-units of organizations, such as departments or workgroups, that seek to achieve their missions and contribute to sustainable development. When the unit of change is an organization, the intervention will focus on specific capacities of the organization that are affecting performance. These include:

    - strategies (vision, mission)
    - structural (structure, governance, relationships)
    - organizational systems (financial, communication, human resources)
    - people (skills, attitudes, knowledge)
    - programs
    - culture (norms, values)

3. At the **project level** these are the activities that contribute to the performance of the organization, that are aligned with the mandate of the organization, and that contribute to sustainable development

The focus of an organizational self-assessment is the organization or sub-unit.

The Chain of Results

The results chain, shown in the third column, illustrates the successive complexity that one finds in trying to improve system well-being. Essentially it is hypothesized (and should be tested) that effective projects contribute to improved capacities and stronger organizations. Similarly, that stronger organizations can contribute to the improved well-being of our human and ecosystems.

Assumptions

The assumptions column states the conditions that are necessary for the chain of results to work. In other words, improved capacities will lead to a stronger organization only if the right diagnosis was made about which capacities were affecting performance. Similarly, underlying the organizational assessment model is the willingness of the organization to engage in change processes. Finally, we assume that if we improve the performance of an organization, some important system needs will be addressed. Clearly, organizational improvement will not address all system needs but it should address some critical priority areas.

The role of external support in self-assessment

Some organizations or units will require support – either to get the process of self-assessment started or at some other point in the process. Effective external support will support the organization in its learning and in building its capacity for reflection. Valuable support will provide assistance with the process and the language of self-assessment, rather than the "expert" model of training organizations how to conduct assessments or actually conducting the assessment for them.

Part Two ◆ Overview of Organizational Self-Assessment (OSA)

The OSA Cycle

In process terms, organizational self-assessment (OSA) is a cyclic, participatory process. As such the OSA cycle can be summarized in four basic stages:

Stage 1: Deciding about entering into this type of process

This issue is addressed by answering two questions:

- Why would you conduct OSA ?
- Are you ready for OSA ?

Stage 2: Planning the process

If the analysis carried out at the first stage resulted in a decision to go ahead with OSA, then the following stage is planning it. Planning should include the following activities:

- Identification of the priority issues or concerns about performance (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, or financial viability).
- Analysis of the priority issues in terms of organizational capacity, organizational motivation and the external environment.
- Identification of the available resources for carrying out OSA
- Development of the assessment plan (methods, teams, schedule, resources, etc.)
- Development of the right assessment questions

Stage 3: Collecting and analyzing data

During this third stage, information and data are collected, organized and analyzed according to the plan developed in Stage 2. This will include the following activities:

- Identifying sources of data
- Choosing data collection methods
- Analyzing the data

Stage 4: Reflecting, making decisions and restarting the cycle

Based on the results generated in the previous stage, it is necessary:

- To reflect about the meaning and implications of those results

- To make the necessary decisions to solve the problems, benefit more from the potentials, strengthen what is right, etc. These decisions are one of the fundamental products of the OSA process. The others are the knowledge generated by the process, and the increased awareness and motivation of the organization's staff. These decisions will also initiate a separate planning process to implement them.

- To restart the cycle of self-assessment. This means returning to Stage 1 and deciding whether the exercise was useful, whether the organization should continue with it, if the organization is ready to continue, and so forth.

Participation and Communication

There are two cross-cutting issues that should be considered at each of the four stages discussed above: participation and communication.

Participation

Who should participate in the different stages of the process is something to be decided by the organization that is making its self-assessment. This should be a conscious and deliberate decision, bearing in mind that too little participation compromises ownership and, subsequently, implementation of results, and that too much participation implies more work and requires more resources (time and funds, basically).

As the self-assessment team is being formed, it is important to understand that there are two major roles in self-assessment: strategic and operational. In some cases this will mean two separate teams; in other cases it will mean one team with two distinct roles. The strategic team will provide guidelines and directions to the process and will oversee its overall quality. The operational team will be more involved in the data collection, analysis and reporting.

The skills required for these roles are quite different, and several factors will influence your selection of team members: team members' availability, the complexity of the assessment questions, and the purpose and scope of the self-assessment. Although the same individuals may play both strategic and operational roles on a self-assessment team, it is important to recognize that certain responsibilities will be more or less important at various stages of the process. The strategic responsibilities are more "conceptual"; the operational responsibilities are more "hands-on".

Communication

Communication will be important throughout the self-assessment process. How you will handle this will depend on who needs to obtain self-diagnosis information and how they wish to receive it. Therefore, very early in the process, you should decide with each of the various audiences how they will get information on the self-assessment, both during and after the process. The following matrix can help you keep track of this.

AUDIENCE FOR THE PROCESS	WHAT DO THEY NEED TO KNOW	HOW WILL I COMMUNICATE ABOUT THE PROCESS DURING THE PROCESS	HOW WILL I COMMUNICATE ABOUT THE PROCESS AFTER THE PROCESS
Example: Staff, Board, Funder, etc.		Examples: briefing at staff meetings; memos, progress reports, summary, verbal presentation	Examples: final written report, verbal debriefing, etc.

Communicating during the process

Specific procedures should be designed to ensure that everyone involved in the data collection is kept informed and has an opportunity to be heard. This might include:

- regularly scheduled sub-group meetings (survey team, interview team, etc.) to review progress, identify problems, develop alternatives
- specific communication mechanisms during data collection (fax, e-mail conference calls)
- periodic meetings of the entire assessment team to update everyone on progress to date
- negotiate time to communicate progress to others during formal meetings
- a final team de-briefing session

Communicating after the process

At this stage your team will likely undertake some of the following activities:

- Conduct information sessions on the results of the diagnosis
- Distribute memo on the results of the diagnosis
- Write a report, if that is what was negotiated with an external funder

Information can be conveyed in traditional and/or creative ways. The team should be prepared to go further than the diagnosis and must keep in mind the issues which you can reasonably expect action to be taken on.

Part Three ◆ The Process of OSA

Deciding about conducting a self-assessment

Why would you conduct an OSA?

Organizations usually engage in self-assessment when they are at a turning point in their history, or when decisions need to be made about particular aspects of the organization. For example:

- Strategic decisions: Should the organization grow, merge, shrink, change its mission?
- Program decision: Should programs be expanded? Should two or several programs be integrated? Should new services be offered?
- Financial viability decision: Should new investors be sought? Should funding sources be more diversified and how? Should new approaches to fundraising be identified?

✎ Exercise #1 - Identifying the Reasons

Directions: This exercise can help your organization understand why it might conduct a self-assessment. This exercise should be done in two steps.

The first step is the **reflective step**: share the following questions with people inside your organization or with individuals outside the organization whom you wish to involve. Have them reflect individually on the question.

In your organization, what are the three main reasons you believe you should undertake a self assessment?

1.

2.

3.

The second step is an **open discussion** in which you bring all the individuals identified in step one together in a group. The purpose of the discussion is to share individual views and to come up with a collective understanding of the reasons for conducting (or not) a self-assessment.

Once you have identified the main reasons for conducting a self assessment, you will then have to decide if your organization is ready for such a process.

Are you ready for OSA?

Organizations need to have a certain degree of readiness to engage in self-assessment. Although there is no set number of variables to assess, there are some signals of readiness that you will want to consider before beginning the process. Then you will be ready to make your own judgment about your organization's readiness for the process.

🖉 Exercise # 2 - Is your organization ready to engage in the OSA process?

Directions: The following exercise is designed to help you understand the readiness of your organization to engage in a self-assessment process. Share these questions with members of your organization and have them answer the questions. This can be done individually or through a group discussion facilitated by one person. There are no clear cut answers to these questions. Your organization must decide on its readiness to change.

❑ To what extent are members of your organization supportive of the change process? Does staff have confidence in the leadership of the organization to engage in change management?

❑ To what extent is there an individual (professional or manager) willing and capable of championing the process?

❑ Is the organization facing the need to make strategic decisions and would a self-assessment help in the decision-making?

❑ Does the organization have a clear vision of where it wishes to go?

❑ Are there major changes going on which might slow down the process or interfere with it?

❑ Does the organization have access to resources to carry out the process?

❑ When was the last major organizational change? To what extent was it successful? Did it energize or deflate staff?

❑ Do people inside the organization have adequate skills to undertake this process?

❑ To what extent is the leadership and staff comfortable with the use of organizational data? To what extent does organizational data exist?

❑ Is this a good time for a change activity? Would there be a better time? Are there future incentives for change to occur now?

❑ What are the positive, negative, neutral, or cultural implications of engaging in change? Are people supported if they try new things?

Planning the process

If the analysis carried out at the first stage resulted in a decision to go ahead with an organizational self-assessment, then the next step is to plan it.

Identification of the priority issues

The first step is the identification of priority issues. In organizational terms, the main fields of organizational performance are relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and financial viability. The analysis should start with a reflection about the organization's situation in these fields, and the identification of issues or concerns in each area.

Relevance is related to the context that the organization is influencing with its activities, as well as the people who benefit from and support the work of the organization. The type of questions to be addressed at this point are:

- Are our mission, programs and services still relevant to the social and environmental context that we attempt to influence ?

- Are our mission, programs and services still relevant to those who benefit from them, and to those who support them?

Effectiveness is related to the degree to which the organization moves towards its mission and achieves its goals. Some of the questions to consider about effectiveness could include:

- Are our projects and programs in line with the our mission?

- How do we know? What mechanisms do we have in place to monitor our effectiveness?

- What kind of external feedback do we have regarding our activities? What feedback mechanisms do we have in operation ?

Efficiency is considered in terms of the amount of resources you invest in your activities, in other words whether you are using your resources in the best possible way. A reflection about efficiency can be guided by questions such as:

- Are we using our resources (staff, physical facilities, funds) in the best way to fulfill our mission and goals?

- How do we know? Do we have a system to track efficiency? Do we have mechanisms to improve efficiency?

Financial viability is related to the long-term balance between the incoming and outgoing flow of financial resources. Questions about financial viability include:

- Are we financially viable or should we pursue additional sources of financing and funding?

- Do our donors still support our approach ?

- How do the short and mid-term futures look in financial terms ?

The individual answers to these questions should be recorded in a simple form, such as the one shown in Exercise #3. Later, in a workshop or meeting involving all the people involved in the analysis, individuals can share their ideas about the priority issues. Participants should review all of the issues presented and then decide jointly about the most important issues to address in the first cycle of assessment.

✎ Exercise # 3- What are the priority issues in your organization?

Directions: This exercise is designed to help your organization identify its priority performance issues:

• Ask several appropriate people inside the organization to complete this sheet by listing possible issues or concerns in the first column and the reasons they believe this is a problem in the second column.

• Compare and discuss responses

• Brainstorm the priorities until you reach a reasonable group consensus on the main issues you want to focus on

We suggest you make several copies of this for all participants in the exercise.

MAIN PERFORMANCE ISSUE	EVIDENCE OF THE ISSUE OR PROBLEM

Analysis of the Issues

Once the group has identified priority issues, it will be important to consider the possible causes or sources of these issues or concerns. This will involve looking at an issue in terms of organizational capacity, organizational motivation and the external environment. Since these aspects are at the root of most organizational performance problems, this added analysis will help to focus and orient the self-assessment.

✎ *Exercise # 4- Identifying the performance factors*

Directions: This exercise is designed to help you analyze the priority issues in terms of organizational performance factors.

PERFORMANCE ASPECT	LINKED TO PRIORITY ISSUE (YES / NO)	IF YES, QUESTIONS TO ASK IN THE ASSESSMENT
Organizational motivation History Mission Culture Incentives/Rewards		
Environment Administrative/Legal Political Social/Cultural Technological Economic Stakeholder		
Organizational capacity Leadership Human Resources Financial Resources Infrastructure Program Management Process Management Inter-institutional Linkages		

Identification of available resources

Once the priority issues have been identified, attention should be given to the resources available to do the assessment. Since time is usually the scarcest resource, the assessment team will need to identify the people who are going to facilitate the assessment and collect the data, as well as the amount of time they will need to allocate to this activity. It is also important to consider the availability of the people who will be providing the information, and include time for interviews, focus groups and meetings.

In this step it is also necessary to make a rough estimate of the budget available for materials, photocopies, communications, etc. This will give the assessment team a clear idea of the level of funding they can use, and will ensure that the administration is aware of the financial impact of the self-assessment exercise.

The assessment workplan

A self-assessment project requires some organizing to ensure that your team focuses on the right issues, uses its resources in the most efficient way throughout the process, and uses the appropriate instruments to collect and analyze the information.

You may find this easier if you develop an assessment plan. A good plan will:

- identify the **questions** to be answered by the assessment
- identify **the information required** that will tell you something about the questions you want to answer about your organization..
- identify **sources of data** to answer these questions
- identify **data collection methodologies** that are best suited to your questions and to your realities and constraints.

The starting point may be the questions related to performance factors identified in Exercise 3. These question should be analyzed thoroughly and eventually split in sub-questions that cover all the aspects to be addressed in the assessment process.

Once these questions and sub-questions are agreed, it is necessary to identify the information that will provide adequate answers to the questions, and that will guide the search for data. This step is very important because collecting information is highly time-consuming and expensive; collecting information without a clear purpose should be avoided.

Required information can take different forms; sometimes it will be narrative or descriptive, sometimes numerical, sometimes in the form of indicators or other forms.

An example will help to illustrate the process

Let us assume that an organization has identified a performance problem that is related to the organization's relevance – their stakeholders are no longer satisfied with the organization's performance. In analyzing the situation, the organization has realized that the political environment is a major contributing factor in this concern. The key question is:

- What are the changes in the Political Environment that are affecting the relevance of the organization ?

It is easier to explore the implications if the question is split into more specific sub-questions, such as:

- What were the main political changes during the last 10 years in organization's sphere of influence?

- How have these changes affected the beneficiaries, counterparts and supporters of the organization ?

- Which priorities changed in the external context of the organization as the result of these changes ?

- Were these changes perceived by the organization ? If not, why ? If yes, how and what response they sparked from the organization ?

Once you have agreed that the questions are the correct ones – the ones that will tell the organization what it needs to know in relation to the Political Environment — you will find it easier to identify the type of information required to answer the questions adequately.

For example, for the first sub-question – "What were the main political changes during the last 10 years in the organization's sphere of influence?" – the required information may be:

- Changes in the relationship between the party in power and the organization (e.g. evidence of government criticism or approval of the organization, evidence that government does or does not include organization in activities or debriefings of relevance to the organization)

- Changes in government programs and policies that are related to the organization's activities (e.g. areas previously supported no longer supported, new program areas emerging)

Once the requirements for information have been identified, you will be able to build a data collection plan that includes sources of data and the methods to collect the required information.

The plan can be organized and summarized in one or two matrixes or tables as shown below. This will simplify the planning of the data collection tasks in terms of who is going to do each task, when, what resources will be required, etc.

FIELD	FACTOR	QUESTION	SUB-QUESTION	INFORMATION REQUIRED
Relevance	Political Environment	What changes in the political environment are affecting the organization ?	What were the main political changes during the last 10 years in the sphere of influence of the organization ?	Changes in the relationship between the party in power and the organization Changes in government programs and policies that are related to the organization's activities

The last column of the previous table can now be used as the source to prepare the workplan, as follows:

INFORMATION REQUIRED	SOURCES OF DATA	METHODS TO COLLECT DATA	WHO IS GOING TO DO IT?	HOW MUCH TIME IS NEEDED?	WHEN IT WILL BE DONE ?	OTHER RESOURCES REQUIRED (TRAVEL, COPIES, MONEY)
Changes in the relationship between the party in power and the organization Changes in government programs and policies that are related to the organization's activities	Programme heads Board	Personal interviews	Bill	14 interviews of 1 hour each amounting to two full days	April 16 and 21	None

Collecting and analyzing data

Identifying sources of data

Essentially, data can be collected from two sources: documents or people. Document sources can include internal documents (i.e. financial statements, annual reports, human resources policy, program planning documents, strategic plans, promotion brochures, evaluation reports, etc.). External documents can also be sources of data: country policies, legislation, media, donor's reports, etc.). The important element here is to ensure that you review the documents that are appropriate for the strategic questions that you are exploring.

Data can also be obtained through people, either individually or in group meetings. Ideally you want to meet as many people as possible who can provide you with relevant information, but time constraints, political sensitivity, people's availability and geographical location can often limit who you can have access to.

For an organizational assessment, you will definitely need information from senior management. You may also decide to collect information from staff or non-staff (professional, support, board members, volunteers). Depending on your strategic issues, you may also want to obtain data from outside people, such as your beneficiaries, your link organizations, and your donors.

In trying to match your sources of data with the issues to be explored, you may have to make some trade offs. In seeking the best source or sources of data, you will also need to consider what is realistic, feasible, and even politically correct.

Choosing data collection methods

In selecting the method you will use for data collection you and your self-assessment team should consider the advantages and limitations of each method. You can collect data in a variety of ways, such as surveys, interviews, document reviews and focus groups. All of these will require your team to develop the appropriate instrumentation. Before selecting a method and developing instruments, however, you will want to consider:

- the type of information you're seeking (is it readily available? is it very sensitive?)

- the resources you have available to collect data (do you have the time, money, and people who are skilled in developing instruments?)

- the culture that exists both inside and outside of your organization (what level of external credibility is necessary? what rigor of data will be needed to back up findings?)Which method will we use?

-

USE A QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY WHEN:	USE INTERVIEWS WHEN:
• The target population is large (i.e. greater than 200)	• You need to incorporate the views of key people(elite interview)
• You require a large amount of categorical data	• The target population is small (e.g. 50), use elite interviews
• Your needs assessment client wants quantitative data	• Your information needs are for depth rather than breadth
• You want to see the different responses of designated sub-groups, such as male:female	• You have reason to believe that people will not return a questionnaire
• You want to clarify your team's objectives by involving them in a questionnaire development exercise	• The target population is geographically dispersed and telephone interviews are feasible (This method can be used with large groups through normative interviews and quantified responses.)
• The target population is geographically dispersed	
• You have access to people who can process and analyze this type of data accurately	
USE FOCUS GROUPS WHEN:	USE DOCUMENT REVIEWS WHEN:
• You need rich description to understand client needs	• The relevant documents exist and are accessible
• You believe that group synergy is necessary to uncover underlying feelings	• You need historical perspective on the issue
• It is feasible to assemble clients while avoiding intact groups	• You are not familiar with the organization's history
• You have access to a skilled Focus Group leader and data recorder	• You need hard data on some elements of the organization
• You want to learn what the stakeholders want through the power of group observation (one-way mirror or video)	

Analyzing the data

Sorting the data

Finally, before you try to sort the data you have collected, go back to your original issues and establish a framework for sorting the data around these issues. This is important because the actual questions you have asked may give you data for more than one issue; it is also important because it is easy to lose sight of what you were collecting the data for once you have a mass of information to deal with.

The data collection process often yields some unexpected or surprising results. What do you do with data that do not fit into any of the questions or issues in your matrix? Your first consideration should probably be the importance of the information. If it seems clear to you that this is an important issue, or one that has been raised by several different sources, you may want to add a question or a sub-question to your matrix. If, on the other hand, the information is relatively unimportant, or is the impression of only one individual, you will likely just set it aside.

Three points to keep in mind in sorting the data:

- **Look for patterns in your data**: look for information that agrees with or supports other information, look for trends, and look for information that contradicts other information. You may find patterns both within and across questions and categories.

- **Code your data** so you can review it later with original source verification. Although you may not need to return to the data, going back through un-coded data is very time

consuming. Code confidentially to respect the confidentiality you offered your interviewees; but make the codes useful to you. For example, you might code managers as M1, M2; government stakeholders as G1, G2; or some other code which helps you keep track of sources.

- **Weight your data**, taking into account how many interviewees give you the same answer, whether information is confirmed across different interest groups, and whether it is confirmed or denied by external sources. Assess the reliability of the data and the relative importance of the information to the question you are trying to answer – you will find that some data are more important than other data and should be given more weight.

Basis of Judgment

Since many interpretations could arise from the same data, it is important to take these potential differences of interpretation into account at the design stage. Three main decision-making methods are generally used to make judgments about data:

- **Criteria:** This method of judgement involves comparing organizational data with pre-set organizational criteria (objectively verifiable indicators), or against the organization's mandate, expectations or values (which may or may not be written down.)

- **Comparison:** This involves comparing present organizational data with past organizational data, accepted industry standards, or with "best practices".

- **Expert opinion:** Experts are individuals who have good insight into the organization, who are practitioners in organizational development, or who have pertinent sectoral experience.

Data sources and triangulation

In order to understand the importance of the data you are collecting, you should be clear about where the data are coming from. For example, if you are collecting data from only one group of people (e.g., senior management or line employees), then you need to take that into account in your analysis. The data will only reflect the views of that group and you have no way to know if they reflect general opinion. Ideally, you should collect data from more than one group and you should also try to collect more than one type of data. If you only collect opinion but do not compare the opinion with, for example, the organization's financial data, or project results, then you may miss some key information. If you collect data from different sources, you can triangulate your data to reduce inconsistencies and to confirm results from more than one source. You can build a much stronger case on information which comes from several different sources.

Reflecting, making decisions and restarting the cycle

How do you facilitate the use of results?

Self-assessment requires a lot of effort from your organization and yet, quite often, people are overwhelmed by the results. They either do not know how to use it or cannot use it because something internally or externally is blocking the use of the results.

The results of a self-assessment can be used for:

- Strategic decisions: Should the organization grow, merge, shrink, change its mission?

- Program decisions: Should programs be expanded? Should two or several programs be integrated? Should new services be offered?

- Financial viability decisions: Should new investors be sought? Should funding sources be more diversified and how? Should new approaches to fundraising be identified?

Results are more likely to be used when change is supported by internal or external factors. (pressure from donors, incentives for change, crisis, renewed leadership, new staff members, etc.)

Your organization can do several things to facilitate the use of the results:

1. From the beginning, ensure that there is ownership for the self-assessment process or its results (communicate throughout, inform people, make the purpose transparent).

2. Pay special attention to the questions asked so that your report answers, to the extent possible, the right questions and talks to the right audience.

3. Throughout the assessment, monitor the context of the organization so that the assessment findings continue to be relevant once the exercise is completed. This may mean that during the course of the self-assessment you may have to modify or adjust some questions.

4. Maintain the interest of those who will have to implement the change and plan, as much as possible, to have some resources for the implementation. Nothing can be more disappointing than having an excellent plan for change but no resources to support it.

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