Measuring Effectiveness Conference 2007: Communities and Development

*"An answer is always in the stretch of the road behind you.*

*Only a question can point the way forward"* Jostein Gaarder, 1997

THINK.
CHANGE.
DO

Institute for
**Sustainable
Futures**

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# Learning about learning:
# Critical for improving development outcomes

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# Clearing up expectations: this presentation…

> Explores learning in the development sector

  – In M&E

  – In planning project designs

> Has in-built "PAUSES" to help you relate what is being said to **your** work context, with some with feedback to your neighbour, but not the whole group

> Provides some guidance based on examples and learning theories but no silver-bullet answers!

# Do we all agree that learning is a good thing?

> Yes?

> And why is it a good thing?

> We assume that:

| learning | ⟹ | improved action | ⟹ | greater effectiveness |

> But why is it sometimes so hard to learn or to enable others to learn?

# PAUSE…the challenges to learning

What are some <u>challenges</u> to learning that you have personally experienced… either as a learner, or as someone trying to enable learning?

# Some common challenges…

1. We're too busy 'doing' to learn
2. Lessons are too generic
3. Lessons are too specific
4. Difficulty in extrapolating individual learning to organisational-level learning
5. We think we 'know' already and are unaware of our own assumptions
6. Organisational cultures that promotes success and not failure
7. Don't know *how* to learn?

**Lessons learnt – too generic**

1. We should have planned better
2. Planning should have been more participatory
3. We should have considered the gender implications of our actions
4. We should have collected performance information from the outset
5. …

**Lessons learnt – too specific**

1. The technical skills of the trainer were insufficient
2. Spare parts for Yamaha motorbikes are hard to get
3. …

To overcome these challenges we need to learn about learning and **build-in** supports to make it happen

# An example of a missed learning opportunity

> **Cambodia**: second-phase farmer-to-farmer extension project
  – Successful…but not working!

# Why no learning?

> No pause

> Organisational culture that didn't value 'failure'

> No clear role/responsibility for 'learning facilitator'

# An example of effective learning

> **Philippines**: capacity building and small-grants for CBOs initiating community development projects

> Instituted an 'annual quality audit' process that found evidence of poor stakeholder engagement and process management

> In three years exceeded performance targets and improved processes by a factor of 3.5



Average time taken from first submission to signing of grant agreement
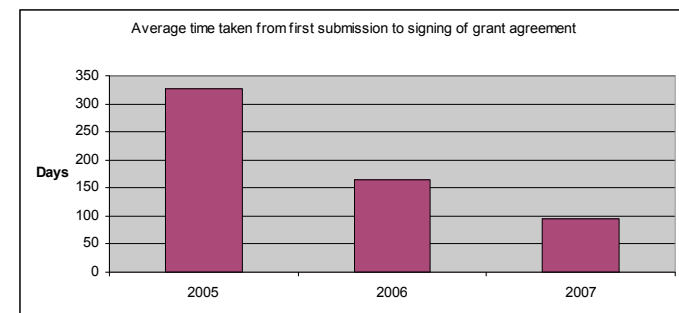
# Why was the learning effective?

> Annual quality audit institutionalised 'pause'
> Collected & interpreted relevant performance information
> Team accepted 'failure' as valuable information
> Dedicated M&E role formalised 'learning facilitator' function
  – Didn't just 'preach' performance information
  – Posed probing questions and asked for suggested actions
  – Team recognised inadequacy of simplistic approaches; emphasised teamwork and integrated solutions

# Another ingredient?

> An 'X-factor' in learning?

**CURIOSITY**

> Test the 'theory of change' implicit in the project design…engage all stakeholders with the 'experiment'

> Rise above the pragmatics of implementation

# Theories of learning: levels of conceptions of learning

Non-learning

Surface

Deep

Transformative

- No change

- A quantitative increase in knowledge

- Memorising

- The acquisition, and utilisation of facts or methods

- The abstraction of meaning

- An interpretative process aims at understanding reality (Marton and Saljo, 1997)

- Changing as a person (Marton et al., 1993)

Deep or transformative learning are the only kinds that lead to lasting change, the kind of change sought in development practice

# Theories of learning: levels of learning –characteristics and motivations of learners

**Non-learning**

**Surface**

**Deep**

**Transformative**

Learner ignores the learning situation through presumption, non-consideration or rejection

- See learning tasks as external impositions,
- Are instrumentally and pragmatically motivated to meet requirements
- Are involved in study without reflection on purpose or strategy

Motivated to understand ideas and seek meaning, adopt strategies to satisfy their curiosity

Open to shifts in perspective and world-view

The learner and their outlook markedly affects what gets learnt or not, and whether the learning is deep or surface

# PAUSE... deep learning

> Think about a time when you or others learnt at what you'd call a <u>deep</u> level...

> What do you believe to be the reasons or explanations for why that deep learning took place?

# Interaction of the learner, the learning context and its facilitator

Characteristics of the learner

(eg previous experiences, current understanding)

Learner's perception of the context

(eg expectation of what the learning activity will offer)

Learner's approach to learning

(eg how they learn, surface/deep)

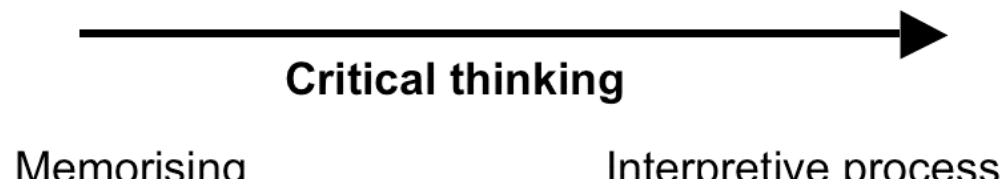Learner's learning outcomes

(eg what they learn, quality/ quantity)

Learning context and its facilitator

(eg design of the learning activity)

Adapted from Trigwell and Prosser, 1999

# Designing learning outcomes- what do you want the learner to be able to do?

| List | Apply | Analyse | Synthesise |
|---|---|---|---|
| Describe | Adapt | Compare | Reflect |
| Summarise | Relate | Distinguish | Evaluate |
| Identify | Illustrate | | |

**Critical thinking** →

(Cynthia Mitchell, 2005)

Memorising                    Interpretive process

Thinking through the desired learning outcome helps clarify what sort of learning context will be most effective

# Variations in learning styles…

> **Linguistic**: uses reading, writing and telling stories to learn

> **Logical-mathematical**: understands things in a causal or numerical way

> **Spatial**: understands things visually and spatially

> **Interpersonal**: learning through understanding other people well

> **Intrapersonal**: learning through understanding the self well

> **Naturalist**: ability to discriminate between species and

Knowledge of the learner's style(s) helps you design learning contexts that will work for them

# PAUSE: What <u>could</u> you do differently tomorrow?

> **Reflect on 3 things you could change in your role or organisation to better enable learning**

## Some more ideas on what you could do differently tomorrow…

> Plan in '**pauses**' into your processes – both alone and to allow reflective time in groups

> Expand the M&E role to include a **learning facilitator** function; plan learning activities and actively trigger others to question, shift and change their practice

> Design projects around **learning outcomes** and how to achieve them…make the 'theory of change' explicit and engage the curiosity of all stakeholders

> **Ask more and deeper questions…more often!**

# PAUSE: What will you <u>commit</u> to do differently tomorrow and <u>how</u>?

> **Take 5 mins to actually think through and plan these changes to your work practice based on your own ideas or these ideas… what would it take to make them happen?**

> Plan in '**pauses**' into your processes – both alone and to allow reflective time in groups

> Expand the M&E role to include a **learning facilitator** function; plan learning activities and actively trigger others to question, shift and change their practice

> Design projects around **learning outcomes** and how to achieve them…make the 'theory of change' explicit and engage the curiosity of all stakeholders

> **Ask more and deeper questions…more often!**

# Thankyou and reflection

1. What will you take away with you from today's presentation?

2. What questions remain unanswered?

3. What could be improved about the presentation?

Feel free to contact either of us:

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A publication on this topic will follow, please contact us to know

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# References

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