Praxis Paper No. 12

Learning from Capacity Building Practice:

Adapting the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Approach to Evaluate Capacity Building Provision by CABUNGO in Malawi

By Rebecca Wrigley

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Executive Summary

This paper provides a reflection on a pilot experience of using the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) methodology to evaluate the capacity building services of CABUNGO, a local capacity building support provider in Malawi. MSC is a story-based, qualitative and participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). INTRAC and CABUNGO worked collaboratively to adapt and implement the MSC approach to capture the complex and often intangible change resulting from capacity building, as well as to enhance CABUNGO's learning and performance.

The key findings of the evaluation are that:

- CABUNGO has achieved significant impacts on the sustainability and effectiveness of the NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) with which it has worked.
- The most significant changes in organisational capacity involved shifts in attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour, but changes were also seen in relationships and power dynamics.
- Of the 23 stories, 21 described shifts or improvements to the relationships within the organisation, and of these, 12 also described improved external relationships with the wider community and donors.
- Achieving the impacts described depends on preserving the time, resources and expertise that quality capacity building interventions require.
- Capacity building providers like CABUNGO face specific challenges in maintaining both the quality of their practice and their long-term financial sustainability.

Overall, it is felt that MSC did provide an effective approach to evaluating capacity. Participants in the evaluation process felt that using a story-based approach was very useful in helping CABUNGO to understand the impact that it is having on the organisational capacity of its clients and how its services could be improved. The key advantages of using MSC were its ability to capture and consolidate the different perspectives of stakeholders, to aid understanding and conceptualisation of complex change, and to enhance organisational learning. The potential constraints of using MSC as an approach to evaluating capacity building lay in meeting the needs of externally driven evaluation processes and dealing with subjectivity and bias.

Acknowledgements

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1   Introduction

Evaluating impact is a complicated process. Complex and often intangible processes such as organisational capacity building are particularly resistant to this kind of evaluation. The search for quantifiable results is understandable, especially where donors need reassurance that their money has been well spent and has made a measurable difference. However, this emphasis on results may not contribute towards insights into impact. It also supports the impression that evaluations are externally imposed processes which extract knowledge rather than facilitating local reflection and learning.

By contrast, there is growing recognition of the need to take a multi-stakeholder approach to evaluation, which promotes local ownership and builds capacity for reflection, learning, improved performance and ultimately self determination. There is also the view that 'to capture the changes that are of most importance to developmental practitioners we cannot reduce things of quality to quantities and little boxes. We end up considering only that part of what is important that is easily measured' (Taylor 2003).

As a story based technique the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) approach can help to identify and give value to changes that were unintended or unexpected but were nevertheless significant impacts for those involved. In INTRAC's Praxis Paper 2 *Rising to the Challenges: Assessing the Impacts of Organisational Capacity Building* (Hailey, James and Wrigley 2005) the authors concluded that there is a need to explore different approaches which can capture and assess the multidimensional and dynamic nature of organisational change with simplicity, clarity and flexibility. In rising to its own challenge, INTRAC has worked collaboratively with CABUNGO, a local capacity building support provider in Malawi, to pilot the use of MSC as a reflective process to evaluate the impacts of CABUNGO's capacity building services. The aim was to catalyse a creative and reflective link between evaluation and organisational learning rather than fulfil the requirements of external stakeholders.

> This Praxis Paper describes both the process of adapting the MSC approach to evaluate capacity building and the insights gained.

This Praxis Paper describes both the process of adapting the MSC approach to evaluate capacity building provision and the insights gained. It is recognised that the main challenge of using MSC was the short amount of time available to carry out the evaluation.[1] As a result, only certain elements of the technique were applied in depth. Section 2 of this paper provides a brief overview of the MSC approach. Sections 3 and 4 describe how MSC was adapted to evaluate the capacity building services of CABUNGO in the form of a case study and the findings of the evaluation. Section 5 reviews the insights gained from using MSC to evaluate CABUNGO's services, the limitations experienced and how it might be further adapted and revised.

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[1] The in-country activities of the evaluation took place in Malawi during two weeks in March 2006.

2   The MSC Approach

The MSC approach is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation (M&E). It was originally developed by Rick Davies in 1994[2] as a response to the challenges associated with carrying out M&E of a complex participatory rural development programme in Bangladesh. It has subsequently been used in, and adapted to, many different contexts. These include different geographical regions across the world, such as Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Australia,[3] as well as different types of programme, organisation etc.

> MSC is a 'story' approach which involves the participation of stakeholders at different levels in discussing and agreeing on the sorts of change to be evaluated.

MSC is a 'story' approach which involves the participation of stakeholders at different levels in discussing and agreeing on the sorts of change to be recorded and in analysing the data collected. It is a form of monitoring because it can occur throughout the programme cycle and provides information to help people to manage the programme. As in the experience described, MSC can also contribute towards evaluation by providing data on impact and outcomes that can be used to help assess the performance of a programme. It is not based on pre-defined indicators but instead involves a systematic process of selecting the most significant stories, collected as chosen by a panel of designated stakeholders. One metaphor which can help to explain the MSC approach is that of a newspaper:

MSC as a Newspaper[4]

A newspaper does not summarise yesterday's important events via pages and pages of 'indicators' (though they can be found in some sections) but by using news stories about interesting events. Papers are structured into different subject areas (foreign news, domestic news, sport, leisure) in the same way that MSC uses domains. The most important stories go on the front page and the most important of these is usually at the top of the front page.

The approach used in this document is based on *The Most Significant Change (MSC) Technique: A Guide to its Use* (Davies and Dart, 2005). In this section we will:

- provide an overview of the ten steps involved in implementing MSC,
- discuss the validity of MSC as an approach,
- review the suitability of applying MSC to evaluate capacity building.

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[2] Davies, R. J. (1996).
[3] Dart, J. (2000).
[4] Davies, R. J. and Dart, J. (2005).

2.1 Ten Steps to Implementing MSC

In their recent guide to the use of MSC, Davies and Dart (2005) explain that a 'full' implementation of MSC might involve the following ten steps:

Step 1: Capturing and raising interest. This involves introducing a range of stakeholders to MSC and fostering interest and commitment to participate.

Step 2: Establishing domains of change. Selected stakeholders identifying broad domains. Unlike performance indicators these 'domains', or types, of change are broad categories of possible areas of change e.g. 'changes in people's lives'. These help organisations to group and analyse the stories that emerge from the evaluation process. Unlike indicators they are deliberately 'fuzzy' to allow people to have different interpretations of what constitutes the change they find important.

Step 3: Defining the reporting period. The frequency of monitoring changes taking place in these domains must be established.

Step 4: Collecting Significant Change stories. Significant change stories are collected from those most directly involved, such as participants and field staff. The stories are collected by asking a simple question such as: *'During the last month, in your opinion, what was the most significant change that took place for participants in the program?'* It is initially up to respondents to allocate their stories to a domain category. In addition to this, respondents are encouraged to report why they consider a particular change to be the most significant one.

Step 5: Selecting the most significant of the stories. The stories are analysed and filtered up through the levels of authority found within an organisation or programme. Each level reviews a series of stories sent to them by the level below and selects the single most significant account of change within each of the domains. The selected stories are then sent up to the next level. The number of stories is whittled down through a systematic and transparent process. Every time stories are selected, the criteria used to select them are recorded and fed back to all interested stakeholders. Each subsequent round of story collection and selection is therefore informed by feedback from previous rounds. The organisation is effectively recording and adjusting the direction of its attention — and the criteria it uses for valuing the events it sees there.

Step 6: Feeding back the results of the selection process. After this process has been used for some time, such as a year, a document is produced with all stories selected at the uppermost organisational level over that period in each domain of change. The stories are accompanied by the reasons the stories were selected. Programme funders can also be asked to assess the stories in this document and select those that best represent the sort of outcomes they wish to fund. They are also asked to document the reasons for their choice. This information is fed back to project managers.

Step 7: Verification of stories. The selected stories can be verified by visiting the sites where the described events took place. The purpose of this is twofold: to check that stories have been reported accurately and honestly, and to provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information about events seen as particularly significant.

Step 8: Quantification. This can take place at two stages. When an account of change is first described, it is possible to include quantitative information as well as qualitative information. It is also possible to quantify the extent to which the most significant changes identified in one location have taken place in other locations within a specific period.

Step 9: Secondary analysis and meta-monitoring. This involves monitoring the monitoring system itself, which can include looking at who participated and how they affected the contents, and analysing how often different types of changes are reported.

Step 10: Revising the system. This involves reviewing the design of the MSC process to take into account what has been learned as a direct result of using it and from analysing its use.

Whilst some of these steps are discretionary, the authors stress that the three steps which fundamentally define the process, and which should always be included are:

1. collection of MSC stories (Step 4),

2. selection of the most significant of those stories by at least one group of stakeholders (Step 5),

3. feedback to relevant stakeholders concerning which Significant Change stories were selected and why (Step 6).

Whether the other steps are included depends on the organisational context and reason for implementing the MSC.

2.2 Validity of MSC as an Approach

Some concerns have been expressed about the validity of MSC as a qualitative approach to M&E, on the grounds that it is not based on conventional measures of validity such as statistical tests to determine the significance of difference. Those who developed and have worked most with the approach believe the following mechanisms ensure that MSC can be considered a valid way of drawing conclusions:

- **Thick description.** Presenting solid descriptive data can ensure that there is enough internally coherent information, accompanied by the reasons for selection, for a reviewer to attach their own interpretations to a story.

- **Systematic process of selection.** All stories are analysed by a panel of designated stakeholders, who attach there own interpretations to the story, which are then passed on to another group for selection. This can be more systematic and inclusive than the way most information is captured in organisations.

- **Transparency.** Unlike, for example, case studies, the MSC approach foregrounds transparency by systematically recording the interpretations made, the criteria for success used and the reasons for deciding which information is presented.

- **Verification.** This can occur at various levels: 1) many stories are collected by fieldworkers who regularly observe what is happening and can judge whether there are inaccuracies; 2) the origins and names of those telling the stories are transparent; 3) all stories are vetted by stakeholders with in-depth knowledge of the project who can cross-check for accuracy; and 4) the stories selected at the highest level can be externally verified.

- **Participation.** External evaluations based on outside values about what constitutes success may not be appropriate for projects based on the participation and empowerment of participants. MSC allows stakeholders and beneficiaries to state and discuss their views about which changes are important and which should be measured.

- **Member checking.** This involves allowing the original storyteller to cross-check the documented version of their story by sharing the notes taken and encouraging the teller to edit and re-word the story until they are happy with it.

These factors form a basis for the validity of MSC as an approach, but it is also recognised that there are inherent biases. There is a tendency for MSC to favour success rather than 'bad news'. This can be overcome by designating a specific domain to capture negative stories, as was done in the case study described in this paper. Also, the selection of the most significant stories is inherently an expression of the values of the people on the selection panel. The tendency could be for those selecting to choose the stories which they most want to hear. Careful attention therefore needs to be paid to who is, and who is not, represented on the panel. To avoid the potential bias caused by the subjectivity of the selection panel, it is important to ensure that their decisions are transparent by discussing and documenting their interpretations and the criteria used. Other criticisms of the approach are that harsh or unpopular views may be silenced by the majority vote and that there is a bias towards those who are good at telling stories.

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[5] Taken from Davies, R. J. and Dart, J. (2005).

2.3 Applying MSC to Evaluate Capacity Building

According to Davies and Dart (2005) there are several reasons why a wide range of organisations have found MSC useful, including:

1. It is a good means of identifying unexpected changes.
2. It is a good way to clearly identify the values that prevail in an organisation. This happens when people think through and discuss which of the changes is the most significant.
3. It requires no special professional skills. Compared to other approaches, it is easy to communicate across cultures. There is no need to explain what an indicator is. Everyone can tell stories about events they think were important.
4. It encourages analysis as well as data collection because people have to explain why they believe one change is more important than another.
5. It can build staff capacity in analysing data and conceptualising impact.
6. It can deliver a rich 'picture' of what is happening, by capturing the complex set of changes that occur in the process of organisational, social and economic development.
7. It can be used to monitor and evaluate bottom-up initiatives that do not have predefined outcomes against which to evaluate.

> Using a narrative stories-based approach could help to explore the depth and complexity of human, relational and organisational change.

For the purposes of evaluating the impacts of capacity building it was felt that using a narrative stories-based approach could help to explore the depth and complexity of human, relational and organisational change. Capacity building processes can produce diverse, unpredictable and emergent outcomes which cannot always be catered for using conventional approaches based on pre-established indicators of success. What is also attractive about MSC as an approach is that, as is expressed in the reasons given above, it can also facilitate organisational learning by helping staff to make sense of and conceptualise the impacts of their work, and generate new ideas and innovative practice.

3 Using MSC to Evaluate CABUNGO's Capacity Building Services

CABUNGO is a Malawian NGO which provides capacity building and organisational development (OD) services to a range of development organisations and largely NGOs and community based organisations (CBOs) in Malawi. INTRAC and CABUNGO have worked collaboratively over the last 10 years. Both organisations decided to pilot the use of MSC as a reflective process to evaluate the impacts of CABUNGO's capacity building services. In this section, we provide a background to CABUNGO and its work. We then go on to describe the process used to adapt and implement MSC to evaluate CABUNGO's services.

3.1 CABUNGO: A Malawian Capacity Building Provider

CABUNGO was initially established within the context of an NGO Capacity Building Project funded by DFID[6] and managed by Concern Universal. This project started in February 1997 and since then CABUNGO has worked with over 60 local and international organisations. This is within a context of a relatively young civil society sector comprising around 300 organisations, mostly established in the 1990s.

There was initially a limited awareness of the need for OD in Malawi. However, demand for OD services within the NGO sector has continued to grow as a result of the significant impacts that HIV/AIDS is having on organisations and their staff in the sector and the wider community.

CABUNGO's purpose is:

> 'to enhance the contribution of development organisations to poverty alleviation by enabling them to become aware of their strengths and needs and facilitating their planning and resourcing of ways to improve their practice.'

The range of interventions that CABUNGO has provided includes:

- organisational assessments,
- strategic planning and reviews,
- reviewing systems/procedures/policies/constitutions,
- team building,
- structure reviews
- governance training and board inductions,
- training (e.g. in project management),
- supporting gender and HIV/AIDS mainstreaming,
- leadership counselling and training.

3.2 Process of Using MSC to Evaluate CABUNGO's Services

As organisations which provide capacity building and OD services, CABUNGO and INTRAC have been working together since CABUNGO was established in 1997. Through discussions, the idea emerged that INTRAC might support CABUNGO to evaluate its services using an adaptation of the MSC approach as a small-scale pilot. The theory and practice of MSC was introduced, along with the role it might play within the overall objective developed by CABUNGO for the evaluation:

'to enhance CABUNGO's learning and therefore improve our performance'

The MSC process was designed as a self-evaluation process to enable CABUNGO to reflect on, learn from and make improvements to the capacity building services it provides. It was not a requirement for donor accountability purposes. The insights gained have not been used to make an overall judgement of the success of CABUNGO's services but as a means of gathering and analysing the views of different stakeholders. It was recognised that, as only a short amount of time was available to carry out the evaluation,[7] only certain elements of the MSC technique could be applied in depth. It was therefore decided to concentrate on the three steps that are fundamental to the MSC process, and one additional step (Step 2):

> The evaluation was designed as a self-evaluation process for CABUNGO to reflect on, learn from and make improvements to its capacity building services.

1. Establishing Domains of Change (Step 2)
2. Collecting Significant Change Stories (Step 4)
3. Selecting and Analysing the Most Significant Stories (Step 5)
4. Feeding back to stakeholders the results of the selection process (Step 6).

At the end of the evaluation the design of the MSC process was also reviewed (Step 10) to reflect on what worked well and what could be revised to improve the process. The outcomes of this reflection can be found in section 3.1.

3.2.1 Establishing Domains of Change

Domains are relatively broad and 'fuzzy' categories used within an evaluation to help: 1) define the areas of change that are important to stakeholders; 2) provide some guidance to those collecting stories as to what kinds of change they are searching for; and 3) group a large number of stories into more manageable lots that can then be analysed.

Initial discussions were held between CABUNGO staff in Malawi and INTRAC staff in both Malawi and the UK by email and through face-to-face discussions to start to define the expectations and parameters of the evaluation. One key person was

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[7] The main activities of the evaluation took place in Malawi between 13 and 24 March 2006.

assigned from each organisation to coordinate and implement the process. From these discussions a number of evaluation questions were generated:

1. What changes have occurred in client organisations that can be linked to CABUNGO interventions?
2. How relevant and appropriate have CABUNGO's interventions been for the clients?
3. What is the quality of CABUNGO OD practitioners' facilitation and outputs?
4. To what extent is CABUNGO building effective and sustained relations with clients?
5. What main recommendations can be made to improve CABUNGO's performance and better achieve its mission?

An INTRAC staff member then travelled to Malawi for a two-week field visit in March 2006. A meeting was held between INTRAC and CABUNGO staff to discuss and become familiar with MSC as an approach and to finalise the arrangements for the evaluation process. Based on the initial evaluation questions the 'domains' of change were defined and agreed. It was decided that the first domain should reflect CABUNGO's overall purpose; that is:

First Domain: Changes in the organisational capacity of local organisations

Further discussion revolved around the fact that MSC tends to elicit stories about positive change to the detriment of negative change. It was therefore decided to include a domain of change that explicitly requested stories which reflect areas which could be improved; that is:

Second Domain: Changes to improve the quality of CABUNGO's practice

3.2.2 Collecting SC Stories

Interviews were carried out by one INTRAC and one CABUNGO member of staff to collect information and MSC stories from as wide a range of stakeholders as possible. In total, 32 stakeholders were interviewed through individual or group discussions. The stakeholders comprised:

- nine staff members of CABUNGO,
- four board members of CABUNGO,
- nine people from clients organisations (local NGOs and CBOs),
- seven from donors which fund CABUNGO to provide services for local NGOs/CBOs
- three from other Malawian OD service providers.

All those involved were contacted in advance to explain the purpose of the evaluation and the reason for interviews. A review of relevant internal documentation

was also made to gain an understanding of the historical evolution of CABUNGO, including previous evaluations and existing monitoring information — in particular client feedback from monitoring questionnaires sent out in late 2005.

During the interviews, the purpose of and approach to the evaluation were explained and outline questions were used to guide the discussions.[8] Each storyteller was told how the story would be used and asked whether they were happy for their name, and that of their organisation or of third parties to be used. Comprehensive notes were written by hand to capture:

1) information about who collected the story and when the events occurred,
2) a description of the story itself,
3) the significance of the events to the storyteller.

On completion of the interviews, an initial review was made by the interview team in preparation for carrying out a secondary analysis with a number of stakeholders. This involved collating the stories relating to changes in organisational capacity (first domain) and identifying the key themes emerging from the suggestions of what change would make the most significant difference to the quality of future practice (second domain). The frequency with which these themes were mentioned was also recorded.

3.2.3 Selecting and Analysing the Most Significant Stories

The MSC approach involves a hierarchical process of selecting and analysing the most significant stories collected. Within this pilot experience of MSC only one level of selection was used. An 'Evaluation Summit' was organised at the end of the second week of the Malawi field visit to select and analyse the most significant stories of change. Those participating in the summit were six CABUNGO staff members, three board members and one representative of a donor capacity building programme. Some invited stakeholders were unable to attend due to busy schedules.

An 'Evaluation Summit' was organised to select and analyse the most significant stories of change.

Participants were initially asked to divide into two groups and to each review half of the 23 stories of change in organisational capacity building (first domain). They were given time to read and think about all the stories, discuss their reactions and decide which three stories best represented the most significant change that CABUNGO has achieved in organisational capacity through its interventions. The selection criteria were not decided in advance but emerged from in-depth discussions about the stories. An explanation of the criteria, or reasons for the group's choices, were documented.

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[8] An outline of the interview process can be found in Appendix 1.

During the interview process, the discussions relating to changes to improve the quality of CABUNGO's practice (second domain) seemed to take the form of a series of 'mini' stories rather than one individual story of change. These were wide ranging and related to many aspects of CABUNGO's work. Because more than one 'mini' story was collected in each interview, we were unable to follow the 'summary-by-selection' process that is a key part of MSC. Instead, the process of selection for the second domain used a 'summary-by-inclusion' approach whereby all the stories were reviewed by the interview team and then grouped and categorised in advance of the summit.[9] In relevance to CABUNGO's organisational interests the stories were categorised according to three areas of organisational capacity: internal organisation; performance of OD practice; and external relations.[10]

The two groups were asked to prioritise the stories; that is, to decide what changes would make the most significant difference to CABUNGO's OD practice. They then made some initial suggestions about how this change could be achieved, within what timeframe and by whom. In conclusion, it was agreed that there would be a commitment to take initial steps on the plans agreed. This progress and the findings of the evaluation would then be reviewed during a retreat with staff and board members to be held two months later and fed into CABUNGO's own strategic planning process.

Owing to time constraints, it wasn't possible to verify that the changes described accurately reflected the reality of the situation descibed and weren't isolated or exaggerated perceptions by individual stakeholders. However, the participants in the Evaluation Summit all had a background knowledge of the events described and could check their accuracy to some degree. Further verification could have been carried out by checking the stories with a wider range of stakeholders, such as staff members at different levels within the organisations who received capacity building services, and community members where CBOs operate.

3.2.4 Feeding Back Results to Stakeholders

On completion of the process, an evaluation report was produced, which described the process and outcomes of using MSC to evaluate the capacity building services of CABUNGO. The report included a description of all the stories selected for each domain of change and the reasons why those stories were selected. It was shared with CABUNGO staff and board members and all those stakeholders who participated in the evaluation process.

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[9] This divergence of the MSC process was highlighted by Rick Davies in personal communication and is explored in more detail in Section 5.

[10] Based on INTRAC's Three Circle Model of organisational capacity building.

4 Findings: Insights into CABUNGO's Capacity Building Practice

In this section we provide an overview of the findings from using MSC to evaluate the capacity building services of CABUNGO. Within the section there is a summary of the key findings of the evaluation. This is followed by an analysis of the specific findings from each domain, 'changes in capacity of local organisations' and 'changes to improve the quality of practice'. Within each domain there is a content analysis of all the stories and a discussion of the individual stories selected.

4.1 Summary of Key Findings

From the pilot experience of using MSC to evaluate capacity building, it is evident that, through providing capacity building support, CABUNGO has achieved significant impacts on the sustainability and effectiveness of local NGOs and CBOs. However, it was also recognised that the change described has only been achieved for the small number of organisations that CABUNGO has been able to support. There are still many gaps in organisational capacity to be addressed in Malawi.

> The most significant changes in organisational capacity involved shifts in attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour, as well as in relationships and power dynamics.

The selection of the stories emphasised that the most significant changes in organisational capacity involved positive shifts in attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour, as well as in relationships and power dynamics. This led to the adoption of new internal practices in the organisations involved. The interventions also achieved impacts in relation to the interactions, relationships and ways of working of those organisations externally, such as with the wider community, donors, government etc.

The insights gained also emphasised that capacity building providers like CABUNGO face specific challenges in achieving and maintaining the quality of their practice in the longer term. They operate on a not-for-profit basis and have developmental aims in a similar way to most NGOs. However, they also provide consultancy services and therefore operate like a consultancy company. This creates an occasionally contradictory dynamic between proactively seeking '*to enhance the contribution of development organisations to poverty alleviation*[11] and reactively responding to the needs of consultancy clients as they emerge. A dependence on consultancy income can make it difficult to cover both the true costs of providing capacity building services (including management costs, internal learning and reflection, staff development etc.) and to provide services to those organisations least able to pay.

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[11] As is described in CABUNGO's purpose.

The dynamic is made more complex where the client; that is, the organisation receiving the intervention, is not the one contracting or paying for the services. It is important for the organisation involved to have ownership of the process if OD interventions are to lead to meaningful change. In cases where the motivation for entering into an OD process comes from a donor, it is questionable whether the client has genuine ownership or has agreed to the intervention for other reasons.

> Does the development community place enough value on the impacts that capacity building providers like CABUNGO can have on local organisations to ensure their long-term survival?

In order to achieve their developmental aims alongside financial sustainability in the longer term, CABUNGO would benefit significantly from developing a more diverse funding base. This raises the question of whether the development community places enough value on the impacts that capacity building providers like CABUNGO can have on local organisations to ensure their long-term survival in the sector. If any value is attributed to this, there is a need to explore more flexible funding mechanisms which cover the true costs of providing ongoing quality capacity building services to local NGOs and CBOs.

4.2 First Domain: Changes in Capacity of Local Organisations

On reviewing the 23 stories of change, collected participants in the Evaluation Summit felt that the stories clearly showed that CABUNGO's interventions were having significant impacts on the capacity of local organisations. There appeared to be more awareness generally within the civil society sector of the importance of OD and of new ways of doing things within organisations. This involved moving beyond more 'traditional' approaches to managing organisations to become more participatory and to increase the engagement and ownership of staff. To those telling the stories, there was a clear link between the interventions and the organisational change they described. CABUNGO's Organisational Development Practitioners (ODPs) felt encouraged to learn that beyond the OD processes they had facilitated, which required a lot of energy and often brought to light considerable tensions, clients perceived that the process had led to the 'bearing of fruits'. CABUNGO's impact also seems to be relevant across a diversity of clients — from larger, well-established organisations to very small, young CBOs.

During the Evaluation Summit, participants selected the six most significant stories they felt captured the change that CABUNGO has been able to achieve through its capacity building interventions.[12] After discussing the individual stories and the reasons for their selection, participants analysed the overall content to see if this could help shed light on the 'essence' of organisational change achieved.

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[12] The transcripts of the selected interviews can be found in full in Appendix 2.

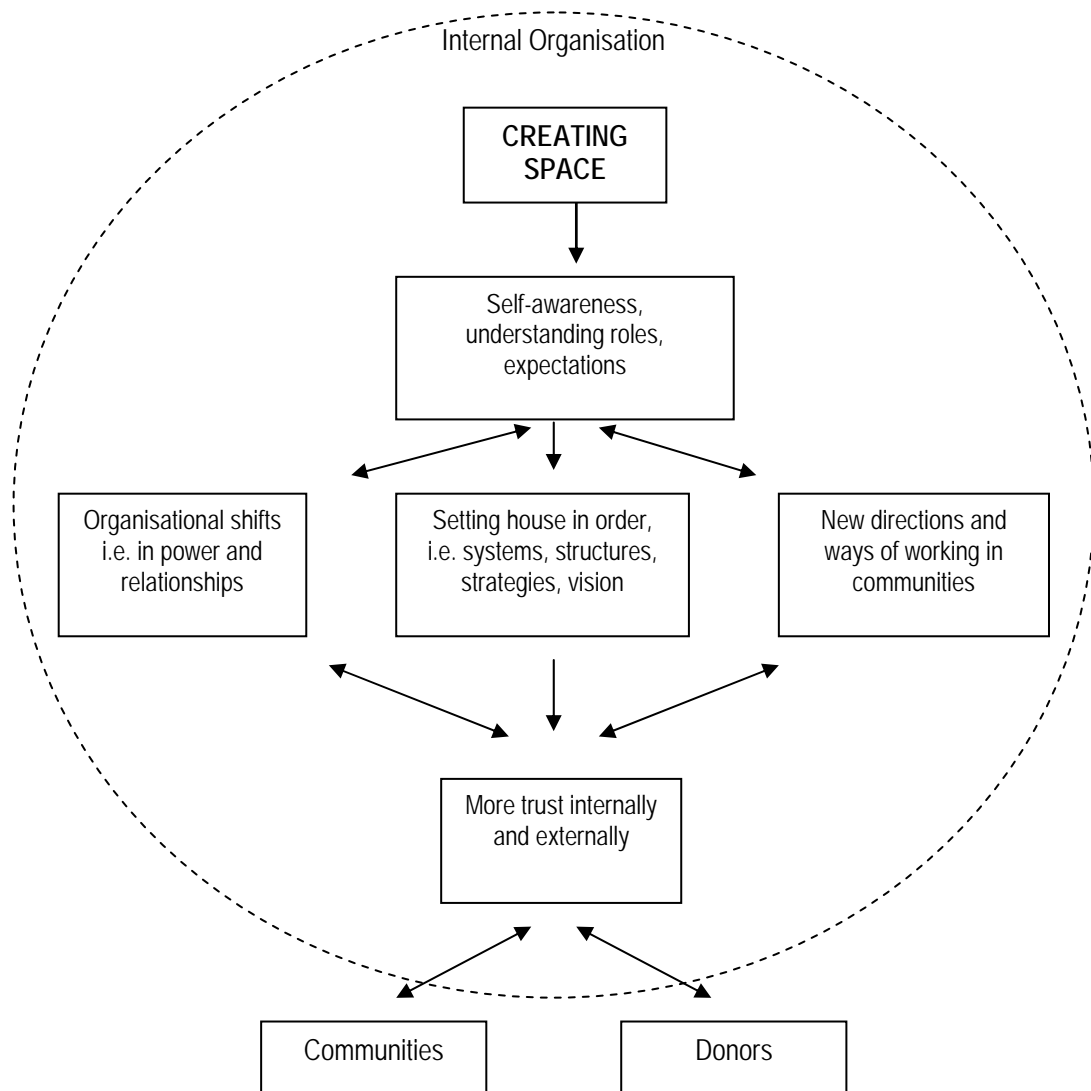## 4.2.1 Overall Content Analysis of all the Stories

Of the 23 stories, 21 described shifts or improvements in the internal relationships within the organisation and, of these, 12 also described improved external interactions and relationships with the wider community and donors. Participants in the summit found it significant that 1) so many of the stories described shifts in internal relationships which lead to shifts in relationships externally and 2) there was considerable consistency and coherence in the types of change that the storytellers perceived. This would suggest that capacity building interventions can consistently bring about impacts both within an organisation and beyond internal organisational processes. It was agreed that the stories illustrated the 'essence' of change brought about by CABUNGO's capacity building interventions. Further discussions helped to develop a more explicit theory about the change achieved which could help CABUNGO to gain a better understanding of the impacts of its work. Participants agreed that the change was catalysed by creating a space which enabled clients to:

- become more self-aware at individual and organisational levels (i.e., to open their eyes to the blind spots);

- shift relationships between leadership, staff and board to foster more ownership, motivation, energy, passion and empowerment;

- move in new, self-defined ways;

- become more organised by 'putting the house in order' (improving structures, systems, competencies, funding);

- have more trust internally;

- change the way they relate to others, particularly the communities in which they work and the donors that fund them.

The essence of this change is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Essence of the change in organisational capacity as a result of CABUNGO's interventions

Internal Organisation

```
            CREATING
             SPACE
               |
               v
         Self-awareness,
       understanding roles,
          expectations
```

Organisational shifts i.e. in power and relationships

Setting house in order, i.e. systems, structures, strategies, vision

New directions and ways of working in communities

More trust internally and externally

Communities

Donors

4.2.2 Insights Gained from the Individual Stories Selected

These six individual stories provide powerful examples of the types of change that CABUNGO has achieved. One story told of how members of a CBO had felt empowered to go to an international NGO to ask them to account for their own project expenditure. Various stories described increased levels of trust between the organisations and the communities in which they worked. Another recounted how the capacity of the director of a youth organisation had been recognised through his appointment as the chairperson for the National Youth Council. Yet another described how a CBO, following the OD interventions provided by CABUNGO, developed the confidence to respond constructively to a difficult situation:

> *'when a crocodile attack happened in one community, the local CBO went to the District Assembly who was responsible for providing a bridge over the river. They demanded that a community proposal for a bridge, which had already been submitted through the Social Action Fund, be supported. In response to this direct request the proposal was processed.'*

As was highlighted previously, various stories describe significant shifts in the quality and effectiveness of relationships both internally and externally. The story given by the director of a large Malawian Health Association mentioned:

> *I felt that the process used by CABUNGO narrowed the gap between managers and staff — even calling people by their names not their titles. Staff were less rigid and distant (e.g. standing to attention when managers arrived) and more confident about raising issues, and bringing suggestions and ideas in meetings. It feels like there is more ownership of the organisation and staff are taking more responsibility — not just referring everything to their managers. There is a sense of being a team and people are more engaged. There is more friendliness and sense that we are all equal. Beyond the secretariat there is more openness to respond to the needs of members. They can come when they want and all staff feel responsible for helping to resolve their issues rather than leaving them for managers.*

Another of the stories selected describes how an OD process facilitated by CABUNGO led to a greater sense of joint ownership and openness within a local Malawian NGO and improved relations within the wider community:

Selected Story: Opening eyes and sense of joint ownership

CABUNGO worked with a local NGO which was largely run by volunteers. They requested support as part of an internationally funded capacity building programme. The founder director was a strong leader but maintained a lot of control over the organisation. He didn't really understand the OD process and wanted results but didn't seem to want to swallow any 'bitter pills'. The board weren't clear on what their role was and what they had to do. Various staff were family members. The international programme was keen for the local NGO to improve its strategic plan, systems and procedures. There was little initial acceptance of what was emerging from the OD assessment process because it involved a shift in power. After initial discomfort, the process opened the eyes of the director, who then played a role in guiding a process of learning. He encouraged people to open up and ensured that there would

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be no blame or punishment. Now there is more clarity from managers, staff and the board on their roles and responsibilities.

They learned how to develop their own vision, mission and strategic plan, to become well organised, to agree on annual work plans and implement effectives systems and procedures. The board became more actively involved and there was more trust. This all led to the communities where they worked becoming less suspicious of their motivation.

One important outcome is that the local NGO is now funded by various organisations; that is, it has accessed and diversified funding. There is also more transparency, openness and trust.

4.3 Second Domain: Changes to Improve the Quality of Practice

The stories of change relating to improvements in the quality of CABUNGO's practice were divided into three areas of organisational capacity and grouped into 12 categories as is illustrated in Figure 2 (overleaf). The 'performance of CB/OD practice' circle represents performance issues relating to the capacity building interventions of CABUNGO. The 'external relations' circle represents issues to do with CABUNGO's linkages with other actors. The 'internal organisation' circle represents issues relating to CABUNGO's internal functioning.

The participants' overall analysis of all the stories of change revealed the following:

- Achieving the impacts described depends on ensuring the time, resources and expertise that quality capacity building interventions require.
- Income is irregular and unpredictable. This creates difficulties and uncertainties in managing finances and making long-term cash flow forecasts. For a small organisation like CABUNGO with no reserves, this creates a 'hand-to-mouth' culture which raises anxiety amongst staff and stifles longer-term planning.
- The true costs of providing quality services in the long-term include: providing time and space for internal management and learning processes, the purchase and depreciation of equipment, and developing and keeping well qualified and experienced staff.
- Quality capacity building services cost more money than local NGOs and CBOs can afford to pay. CABUNGO therefore faces the problem of providing services to clients who can't pay full consultancy rates, whilst covering the true cost of providing quality services.

Figure 2: Categorisation of stories of change for second domain
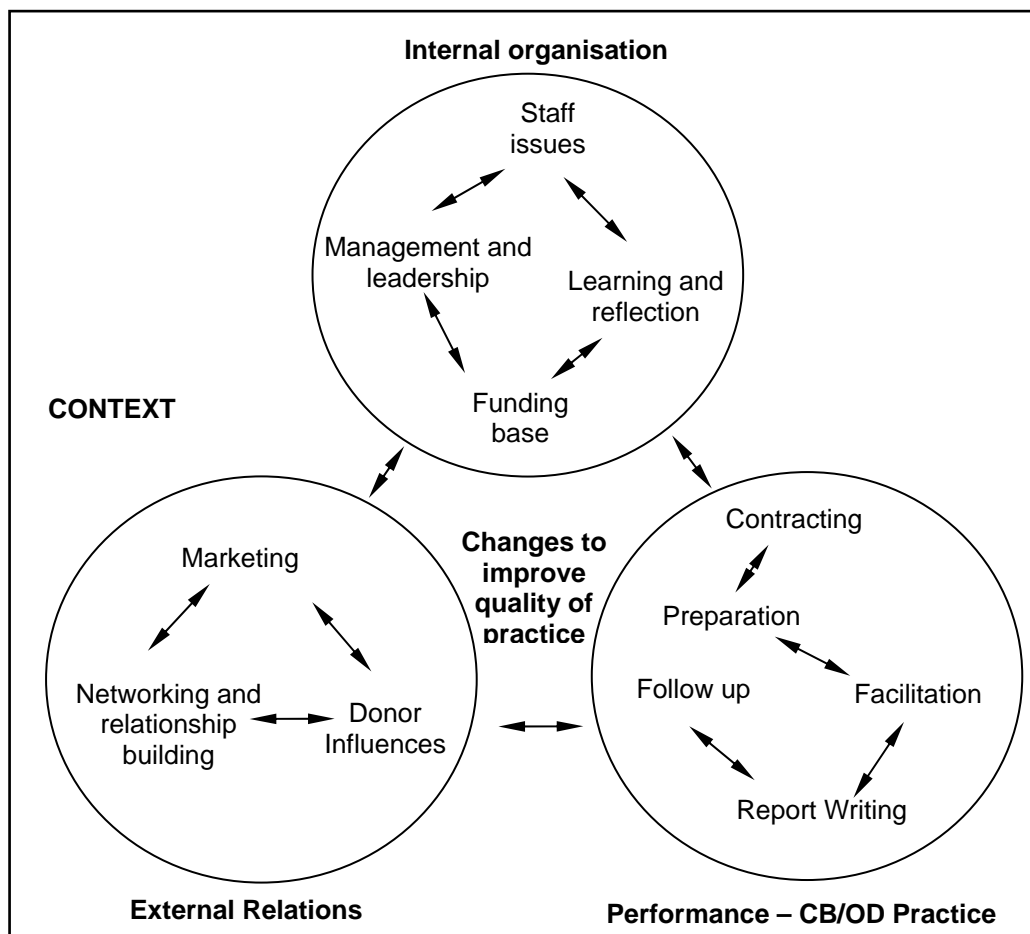
- In order to support local NGOs and CBOs, CABUNGO is often funded by third parties; that is, funding organisations which contract them on behalf of client organisations. These stakeholders may have different needs and agendas but also different levels of power and control over decision making. The challenge is therefore to negotiate a genuine consensus between all parties about the aim of the capacity building intervention, how it will meet these differing needs and a realistic timeframe that ensures the quality of the process.

The specific 'mini' stories of change that were selected are summarised below. The stories are all suggestions from those interviewed about how CABUNGO could improve their capacity building practice.

4.3.1 Performance — Capacity Building Practice

CABUNGO's participatory approach, commitment, passion for development and facilitation skills were very well recognised and appreciated. It was also acknowledged that OD processes take time to eventually bear fruits and that CABUNGO should not compromise on the time allocated. It was felt that it is time to

review, revise and maybe broaden CABUNGO's approach in line with changes and new challenges in the sector.

Contracting
The pressure to earn consultancy income makes it difficult to postpone, or even decline new work or negotiate realistic timeframes even when this compromises the quality of delivery CABUNGO expects of itself. All parties (consultant, client, funder) should clarify and agree mutual expectations before signing contracts.

Preparation
The OD approach cannot simply be replicated but needs to be adapted to different situations, rather than being based on predetermined conclusions. It is critical to allow enough time to prepare carefully in consultation with the client/funder. OD can be a painful process that can break an organisation if it is unwilling to face the issues that are raised. These issues need to be prepared for and handled carefully, preferably with the active engagement of leaders.

Facilitation
It was acknowledged that '*typical Malawian examples were used*' and that CABUNGO staff plan and facilitate with skill and flexibility.

Report Writing
Report writing fell short of expectations both in terms of quality and timeliness. This '*gave the impression that once the workshop had finished the facilitators already had their minds on the next job'*. The reports would benefit from being more reflective and analytical, not just descriptive.

Follow up
'*CABUNGO seemed to see the intervention as an ad hoc contract, whereas we would have liked a more ongoing consultancy partnership'*. They could have been more proactive in following up on work, finding out how clients are getting on and providing additional support if required.

4.3.2 External Relations

Marketing
- CABUNGO needs to stay at the cutting edge of OD support to stay vibrant — '*if their services appear stale they will lose their reputation and business'*.
- CABUNGO could market their services more aggressively — their name is widely recognised little is known of what they offer.

Donor Influences
- Donors or clients tend to apply pressure to achieve rapid results in a shorter time than is possible to conduct an OD process effectively. CABUNGO can also feel pressured to facilitate processes within a timeframe imposed by donors. This puts ownership of the process in doubt and defeats the purpose of empowering organisations.

- Benefits could be had from engaging with Malawian donors to build a local demand for services.

Networking and Relationship Building
- CABUNGO could work collaboratively with others to research and access funding opportunities, for example, to develop longer-term proposals or different types of partnerships with other NGOs, CBOs and capacity building providers.
- Opportunities to work collectively at the civil society level could be more fully explored, for example, by holding capacity building events to interact with others and discuss key issues.

4.3.3 Internal Organisation

Leadership/Management Issues
- There is a need to define clear roles and responsibilities between management, staff and the board.
- CABUNGO is dependent on one committed leader who is both a manager and a practitioner. An improved situation would involve shared leadership, prepared succession plans and documentation of existing organisational memory.

Staff Issues

- Having only five practitioners leaves CABUNGO quite vulnerable when staff are ill or leave. Staff sometimes have to turn work down or compromise on quality. Is this the optimal size to ensure quality and sustainability?
- It is difficult to find and retain people with the necessary skills to maintain quality.
- Internal team dynamics could be improved by showing willingness to be open to discussion, to hold each other to account and to work '*like a soccer team not a group of boxers*'.
- Having young staff can raise issues of credibility — '*there is a resistance to learn from those who are younger and their advice can be dismissed*'. More experienced managers could be brought in at key moments as peer support.

Funding Base
- There is a need to calculate the true cost of providing quality services in the long term. These include replacing equipment (vehicles, computers etc), time for learning and reflection, developing and retaining skilled staff, and providing services to clients who might not be able to pay consultancy fees.
- To cover these true costs there is a need to expand and diversify the funding base and reduce '*dependency on consultancy fees from a small circle of clients*'. CABUNGO could also build up some reserves to reduce their vulnerability.

Reflection and Learning
- A quality process relies on having the time and space to reflect. Therefore, internal learning is very important for CABUNGO's effectiveness. However,

preserving this time for learning is often difficult as work with clients is prioritised. More time should be set aside to reflect and learn from past interventions and talk about how to do things differently. Methods should be reviewed regularly and time set aside to access new ideas, be creative and interact with international thinking.

- '*As an OD provider, how open is CABUNGO to apply OD principles to itself'*.

5 Reflections on Using MSC to Evaluate Capacity Building

In this section we provide a reflection on the insights gained from using the MSC approach to evaluate capacity building. The section aims to:

1. Review the design and implementation of the MSC process that was used and suggest what could have been done differently.
2. Draw conclusions about the effectiveness of using MSC as an approach to evaluating capacity building.

5.1 Design and Implementation of the MSC Process

At the end of the evaluation process, CABUNGO and INTRAC staff came together to review the design and implementation of the MSC process. A consensus was reached that using the MSC approach provides a good means of identifying, analysing and conceptualising the complex outcomes of providing capacity building services to local organisations. It was also acknowledged that, despite the fact that time didn't allow the MSC process to be used comprehensively, it was relatively straightforward to implement but allowed the participants to gain a richer and more shared understanding of the impacts of CABUNGO's work. This was especially important because for CABUNGO, as an organisation that is largely dependent on reacting to contracted work, it is difficult to find the time, and cover the costs, of carrying out M&E activities.

As with all learning processes, hindsight indicates that many aspects of the process could be improved upon, and that there were difficulties arising from the time constraints for using the MSC methodology. While organisations like CABUNGO face problems in finding the time and resources for evaluation processes, it is recommended that the minimum period of time that should be allowed for the process is one month. This would allow sufficient time to prepare the process; engage stakeholders; and collect, review, select and analyse the stories. Not everyone would need to be involved all the time but the process might also benefit from allocating pauses between stages to reflect and allow for people's busy schedules.

5.1.1 Preparation

Given the distance involved, it was difficult to involve all staff in talking through the MSC methodology and planning how best it could be adapted to meet the aims of the evaluation. Although the experience was a pilot, ideally more time could have been allocated at the beginning for all those directly involved to gain familiarity with the approach. Creative approaches could also have been used to communicate the

objectives and process of the evaluation to wider stakeholders to spark their curiosity for engaging more actively.

5.1.2 Domains of Change

While CABUNGO staff were involved in defining the domains, time constraints prevented other stakeholders such as board members, clients and client funding donors from being included in this process. Employing a participatory approach to find a consensus on the most appropriate domains could have encouraged a more active interest and engagement in the MSC process and outcomes. While the first domain was a relatively simple category of change for people to understand, the second domain could have been phrased more clearly. As a consequence, several 'mini' stories were collected, rather than one story. This might have been avoided by asking: '*What lesson can be drawn from this change?*' and, '*What could be done better next time?*', rather than using the second domain. This could also have been used as a way of gaining a better understanding of the first domain stories by asking a 'what next?' question.[13]

5.1.3 Collecting and Verifying Stories

As interviewers, both Peter Njikho[14] and I found it relatively easy to encourage those interviewed to reflect on and share their stories of change. After an initial reticence about the purpose of the interview, the interviewees became enthusiastic about telling their stories and describing the changes they had perceived. Interviewees were also constructively critical in their assessment of what could be done differently and seemed to value the opportunity to express their view. Once a few interviews had been carried out Peter felt confident enough to carry out some of the interviews alone. The process of collecting the stories was also an opportunity to re-establish or strengthen relationships with clients and funding organisations. However, the process could have benefited from interviewing a wider range of stakeholders to gain different perspectives. This could have included interviewing:

1) more clients (in particular CBOs from rural areas);
2) a number of staff at various levels from each organisation;
3) members of the communities where the organisations worked.

The selected stories could also have been verified by visiting the places where the described events took place, though this would inevitably have added to the costs and time involved. The purpose of this would be to check that stories have been reported accurately and honestly, but also to provide an opportunity to gather more detailed information about the events that were viewed as being particularly significant. It was also noted that, when the staff of other Malawian capacity building providers were interviewed, it was difficult for them to answer the questions since

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[13] This suggestion was made by Rick Davies through personal communication.
[14] Peter Njikho is an ODP with CABUNGO.

they did not have specific information about the change that had occurred as a result of CABUNGO's interventions.

5.1.4 Reviewing and Selecting Stories of Most Significant Change

The Evaluation Summit provided a useful reflective space for key stakeholders to review and analyse the stories that had been collected. As facilitator, I felt that having two days for the workshop, rather than one, could have enabled a more in-depth discussion, but participants were constrained by busy schedules. Encouraging a broader range of stakeholders to attend the Evaluation Summit might have enriched the process.

Participants found reviewing and analysing the stories about the first domain[15] both revealing and invigorating since it lead to a more meaningful understanding of the impact of CABUNGO's work. Presenting and analysing the stories about the second domain[16] proved to be more difficult. The phrasing of the interview question had resulted in interviewees expressing a range of 'mini' stories. These were then initially grouped and categorised by the interview team before being presented to the participants of the Evaluation Summit. A more participatory alternative would have been to get participants to do their own categorisation of the 'mini' stories and use this as a basis for analysing the many similarities and differences. It was difficult to make a decisive selection because many of the stories involved significant changes to the way CABUNGO worked that required further discussion between staff and the board. CABUNGO staff members also felt that, while the process did reveal positive feedback about CABUNGO's performance, it did not sufficiently explore the success factors in achieving quality practice. This could have been avoided with the development of positive possibility statements for the changes suggested. However, the changes prioritised during the evaluation were found to be useful inputs for CABUNGO's subsequent strategic planning process.

5.1.5 Revising the MSC Approach

On reflection, CABUNGO felt that the MSC approach could become a useful part of their M&E system which could relatively easily be integrated as a more routine part of the organisation's way of working. This could include:

1. OD practitioners spontaneously writing down the stories they hear during the normal course of their work with client organisations.

2. Interviewing stakeholders, such as staff of client organisations at different levels, board members, community members etc., or holding group discussions as part of the follow up provided after capacity building interventions.

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[15] Changes in the Capacity of Local Organisations
[16] Changes to Improve the Quality of Practice

3. Asking clients to document their own stories. This would require providing enough information to ensure that they know what is expected of them.

4. Holding periodic Evaluation Summits, perhaps on an annual basis, to review the stories that have been collected, select the most significant ones and feed these into annual and strategic planning processes.

5.2 Conclusions about Using MSC to Evaluate Capacity Building

Overall, it is felt that MSC did provide an effective approach to evaluating capacity. In particular, it yielded information that might have been missed through a conventional use of performance indicators. The OD process used by CABUNGO is a holistic approach which results in a wide range of complex and often intangible internal and external impacts that are very difficult to predict in advance. Through being open and unstructured, the interview process allowed the flexibility for interviewees to express the changes that they perceived as most significant. The key advantages of using MSC were found to be:

- **Capturing and consolidating different perspectives.** Owing to the fact that the stories were collected from a wide range of stakeholders, the evaluation captured a variety of views about the significance of the change that had been achieved. By not focusing on predetermined outcomes, the process helped to identify unexpected change, such as improvements in the relationships between CBOs and the communities in which they worked. Although the stories were quite diverse, the MSC selection did provide a relatively easy way of discussing and analysing them.

- **Understanding and conceptualising complex change.** Using the MSC approach has helped to come to a clearer, 'richer' understanding of the change that had resulted from CABUNGO's capacity building interventions. The process of discussing and analysing the stories collected provided an opportunity to assess and then to conceptualise the particular characteristics of organisational capacity building; that is, the systemic, multi-dimensional and dynamic nature of organisational change processes.

- **Enhancing organisational learning.** For CABUNGO, the purpose of the evaluation was, *'to enhance CABUNGO's learning and therefore improve our performance'.* Using the MSC approach provided an effective and appreciated opportunity for CABUNGO staff to:

  1) collect stories of concrete experiences,
  2) analyse and reflect on those experiences,
  3) use this analysis to conceptualise the impact that had been achieved,
  4) discuss and define areas to improve the quality of their practice,
  5) integrate these findings into their strategic planning processes.

This follows a classic cycle of experiential learning[17] and suggests that one of the more powerful advantages of using MSC is the way that, while being relatively simple to apply, it can make a significant contribution to organisational learning. Since the experience is still relatively new it is difficult to judge the extent to which this has led to improvements in the quality of CABUNGO's capacity building practice.

The potential constraints of using MSC as an approach to evaluating capacity building were identified as follows:

- **Meeting the needs of externally driven evaluation processes.** As a self-evaluation process that was internally driven, using MSC proved to be a valuable learning process for CABUNGO as it identified unexpected and emergent change. However, what is less clear is whether the findings would meet the needs of an evaluation that is externally driven, for instance, one that demands specific quantitative data according to donor requirements. This could be overcome by combining MSC with other, more quantitative evaluation methodologies.

- **Dealing with subjectivity and bias.** MSC is based on the perceptions of change of those being interviewed and the opinions of the people involved in the selection process. This can lead to criticisms of subjectivity and bias, as was mentioned in Section 2.2. In the pilot experience, views were sought from a variety of stakeholders, but it is accepted that, due to time constraints, there was little opportunity to verify the stories or to seek the views of those who might have provided alternative perspectives, such as junior staff members, rural clients and community members. This may be less of a potential constraint where the evaluation findings are being used for learning purposes rather than as an accountability mechanism to donors.

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[17] See Kolb, 1984.

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Appendix 1: Outline of Interview

Sample Interview Format

Name of the storyteller: Organisation:

Position:

Want to have your name on the story   __ Yes   ___ No

Name of the person recording:

Date of recording:

Date of CABUNGO intervention:

Reason for the intervention:

Description of the intervention:

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of your organisation since the CABUNGO intervention?

Why do you think this change has been significant to you?

What lessons have been learnt from the interventions and what could be done differently to improve the quality of CABUNGO's practice?

Appendix 2: Selected Stories of Significant Change

Story 1: Stronger, More Sustainable Local Organisations

Storyteller: Training Specialist

Organisation: International Capacity Building Programme

Date of recording: 22 March 2006

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of an organisation that has received a CABUNGO intervention?

The International CB Programme interacted with CABUNGU during its first phase, which ran between 1999 and 2004. The programme gave grants to CBOs that were involved in community natural resource management. Out of the 45 CBOs involved, four CBOs and one NGO were assessed and went through an OD process so that they could be self-sustaining.

Out of the five, I know that four organizations seem to have benefited quite a lot from CABUNGO interventions, for example, the executive director of one is now a chairperson for the National Youth Council. One NGO had few roots in the community, but now they have an office, they have programmes running, have won support of donors and have a good structure. CABUNGO interventions also helped the programme to discover financial anomalies in one CBO which seemed to be doing fine up to the time when CABUNGO came in. The process empowered the community to see what was going on and to change management and board.

They are better organised and are implementing realistic programmes. Their structure is in line with their programmes and they don't have so many idle staff positions. The binding factor is that CABUNGO helped them to reflect and come up with a strategic direction (vision, mission, strategies) that guide their programmes. The strategic direction has given them confidence and they are able to explain where they have come from, where they intend to go and what plans they have for the future. When talking they now always make reference to their vision and mission.

What lessons can be learnt from CABUNGO's interventions and what could be done better?

- It seems most NGOs are in Lilongwe, so why don't CABUNGO have an agent there to link them with NGOs there? CABUNGO is well known for building capacity of NGOs/CBOs, therefore they could have business there.
- The timing and spacing of modules was good because it gave chance to participants to practice before they learnt new things, although others may have thought CABUNGO just wanted to make more money.
- Convinced that taking the organizations through the OD process was the right way of doing things and CABUNGO was quite on track with capacity building.
- CABUNGO should be alert to the changes taking place on the market. There are a lot of OD service providers emerging so the need to intensify marketing of the services to withstand the competition.
- The process was sometimes dragged out due to staff constraints, but this was not very serious considering other factors.
- Why not have a public relations officer who will (apart from OD work) be responsible for maintaining relations with potential clients/partners?

Story 2: Opening Eyes and Sense of Joint Ownership

Storyteller: Director   **Organisation: Local NGO**

Date of recording: 17 March 2006

Intervention: As organisation was forming wanted support in that process — CABUNGO was the closest and had a good reputation. Focused on strategic planning, team building and OD awareness.

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of your organisation since the CABUNGO intervention?

At a critical time the interventions raised awareness amongst a new team of how to build an organisation. This enabled our NGO to define its own style and approach as a team, which was important as the management approach and structure that is now used is quite different from the 'traditional' way of managing an organisation in Malawi. This may have gone against the grain but has been working quite well. Managers show leadership and take initiative and responsibility for their areas of work. The only area where this hasn't worked so well is in providing their own administrative support. There is an administrator, but managers are expected to provide backstopping, e.g. making travel arrangements and writing letters. This is not their strong point — maybe because this support is normally expected from others.

Why do you think this change has been significant to you?

Allowing a space for our NGO to develop its own organisational approach with the engagement, and therefore future ownership, of staff.

What lessons can be learnt from CABUNGO's interventions and what could be done better?

1. The facilitation was done to a reasonable standard – what fell short was the report writing both in quality and timeliness. This gave the impression that once the workshop had finished the facilitators already had their minds on the next job. Maybe this is because they are chasing work and therefore fitting into the agendas of others rather than working as a team to develop and negotiate realistic plans.
2. CABUNGO seemed to see it as an ad hoc contracting relationship whereas we would have liked a more ongoing consulting partnership. We would have liked CABUNGO to have been more proactive in keeping in more regular contact so that they could follow up on the intervention, know what was happening etc. They would then know when their services might be useful again – we're often busy but could have done with some refresher work now and again e.g. time for introspection to review where they are going.
3. We have experience of collaborating with a number of local organisations to develop a proposal and submit it to major donors. CB support is written into this. CABUNGO could do the same to provide more ongoing stability and enable it to provide support to organisations that can't afford their services. For example, working with a group of HIV/AIDS organisations to provide support both to those organisations and CB support to their partners.
4. Should ensure that they are staying at the cutting edge of OD support – be vibrant and innovative. If their services appear stale then they will lose their reputation and business. The market is always evolving – should never get to the point where clients catch up and think they can do just as well! They could benefit from spending the time to interact with international thinking – VSO volunteer? Someone to ensure quality control, e.g. sit in on sessions and give feedback.

Story 3: Renewing Organisations through Positive Change

Storyteller: Director and CABUNGO board member   Organisation: Local NGO

Date: 15 March 2006

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of an organisation that has received a CABUNGO intervention?

OD is a relatively new field. It touches on very sensitive management issues. Not all organisations want to embrace it – 'just a fashion that will pass'. CABUNGOs persistence has increased awareness of the importance of OD. As a key provider they brought OD onto the landscape and popularised it. This has resulted in organisations which are more accountable and effective. There is a great need for OD. I have seen many examples of founder syndrome, entrenched systems and structures, bosses who know it all, no vision, mission or identity, adapting projects just to access funds.

Within the large local NGO I work for, the OD process has helped to inspire a rethink of all internal processes. The organisation had stagnated, stopped thinking and reached the end of its creativity. This was even perceived by donors. The OD process looked at relationships internally and externally, reviewed internal processes and developed an understanding of the change necessary for renewal. This led to positive change and more efficiency and effectiveness. As a result the NGO has developed a different relationship with communities. The process of internal ownership and accountability has extended externally. Our approach is now not to implement projects but to catalyse and support development in communities, e.g. not to build bore holes for communities but to help them build and maintain their own. We have had to adjust to the changing context to use a more developmental approach which is about community ownership, sustainability and self reliance.

Why do you think these changes have been significant to you?

Organisations that are open to renewing themselves through positive change can achieve greater accountability, efficiency and effectiveness.

What lessons can be learnt from CABUNGO's interventions and what could be done better?

1. As an OD provider how open is CABUNGO to apply OD principles to itself? Trying to resolve issues can reach a stalemate where the board can want to say 'doctor heal thyself!'. Could be helped by getting outside peer support.
2. Need to infuse a business approach to maintain quality practice. CABUNGO started with institutional funding from DFID but it was a shock when this funding ended. Need to find new business and not be too dependant on a small circle of key clients and this makes them vulnerable and have to live hand-to-mouth with no reserves to fall back on.
3. Need to define clear roles and responsibilities between management, staff and board.
4. Financial management is weak and doesn't provide timely information for management and the board to make decisions at the right time. This creates stress and anxiety.
5. Need to engage the leaders of organisations in change. Often managers are good technical people but have limited management skills. They don't want to have their weaknesses highlighted – especially the 'old school'.
6. There is a resistance to learn from facilitators who are younger – can always make the excuse of 'what do you know about management' and therefore dismiss advice. Could bring in older, experienced managers at key moments as peer support.
7. Leadership in CABUNGO sometimes too tolerant – it is difficult to be both a peer and a manager who has to make difficult decisions.

Story 4: Shifting Thinking and Behaviour in Organisations

Storyteller: Staff member   **Organisation: CABUNGO**

Date: 14 March 2006

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of an organisation that has received a CABUNGO intervention?

At the Malawian NGO many staff were leaving. CABUNGO was asked to review their terms and conditions and do a needs assessment. As part of the holistic approach, CABUNGO interviewed staff – not just about their salaries but about what was happening in the organisation. It became evident that staff were not leaving because of conditions but because of leadership and management issues. A joint feedback and analysis of the information from the interviews was then carried out. The manager concerned was shocked about what emerged but people were able to open up about the challenges being faced. The intervention provided a platform for the organisation to look at its own challenges but also to shift their thinking and actions. People were happy to develop a vision of a different organisation and were open to finding a way to do things differently.

Why do you think this change have been significant to you?

Interventions will not lead to a breakthrough if there is no will to change. When people within an organisation have shifted their thinking enables the organisation to come to a realisation that they can do things differently. When the realisation is internalised, and not from external sources like donors, it can be truly owned and lead to lasting change.

What lessons can be learnt from CABUNGO's interventions and what could be done better?

1. Getting leadership on board is key. If leaders are not supporting and owning the process it is a challenge to achieve a genuine shift or transformation within the organisation. Sometimes is can be easier to go round leaders if they are too difficult but this will mean the intervention will not be successful in the long term.
2. External stakeholders can negatively impact on the process if they try and push their own agenda to influence the outcome, e.g. donors.
3. CABUNGO doesn't receive any institutional funding and therefore can't provide any services for free as it used to do. This means that CABUNGO has to rely on clients or donors paying for services and has to prioritise fee-paying work. If a donor is paying, this can lead clients to distrust the purpose of the intervention and not to have ownership.
4. It can become difficult not to take sides within an intervention. This makes it difficult to listen openly without prejudices as perceptions may be influenced by the views of a few. It can lead to the wrong diagnosis and block the process.
5. ODPs need to have the openness and capacity to listen and make the right diagnosis in order to facilitate an organisational shift/transformation. This takes great skill and commitment to CABUNGO's approach and to their own learning. This motivation and commitment can be difficult, especially with the conditions CABUNGO can offer.
6. The commitment of board members has been significant to the survival and success of CABUNGO. This trust in CABUNGO and its approach has been very motivating.
7. The ability to survive so far has given CABUNGO a strong sense of identity and confidence but initially internal struggles meant that there was less time to focus on providing services. This meant that initial reserves were reduced as there was little income coming in. However, crises can lead to strength ('a dog that is sleeping too warm and comfortably outside will be eaten by lions as night falls!').

Storyteller: Staff member   **Organisation: CABUNGO**

Date: 14 March 2006

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of an organisation that has received a CABUNGO intervention?

CABUNGO worked with a local NGO which was largely run by volunteers. They requested support as part of an internationally funded capacity building programme. The founder director was a strong leader but maintained a lot of control over the organisation. He didn't really understand the OD process and wanted results but didn't seem to want to swallow any 'bitter pills'. The board weren't clear on what their role was and what they had to do. Various staff were family members. The international programme was keen for the local NGO to improve its strategic plan, systems and procedures. There was little initial acceptance of what was emerging from the OD assessment process because it involved a shift in power.

After initial discomfort the process opened the eyes of the director, who then played a role in guiding a process of learning. He encouraged people to open up and ensured that there would be no blame or punishment. Now there is more clarity from managers, staff and the board on their roles and responsibilities. They learned how to develop their own vision, mission and strategic plan, to become well organised, to agree on annual work plans and implement effective systems and procedures. The board became more actively involved and there was more trust. This all led to the communities where they worked becoming less suspicious of their motivation. The impact of this is that the local NGO is now funded by various organisations – i.e. it has accessed and diversified funding. There is more transparency, openness and trust.

Why do you think this change has been significant to you?

- These changes resulted from the holistic organisational approach used by CABUNGO.
- After initial discomfort everyone was willing to change, to build teams, improve motivations, give and receive feedback etc.
- The process opened the eyes of the director who then played a role in guiding the process of learning. He encouraged people to open up and ensured that there would be no blame or punishment.
- The NGO had a sense of ownership of the process – nothing can be achieved without this.

What lessons can be learnt from CABUNGO's interventions and what could be done better?

1. OD can be a painful process which can break an organisation if it is unwilling to face the issues that are raised. For example, this happened in one case with a local CBO funded by COMPASS. The director couldn't accept the changes suggested by staff during the process. This even led to a meeting with a representative of an internationally funded capacity building programme, the paramount chief and the district commissioner but eventually the organisation split into three different organisations. However, subsequently the director seems to have taken on board the experience and the organisation he runs, and the other two are still surviving.
2. Internal organisational learning is very important for CABUNGO's effectiveness. Need to have time to reflect on work in order to improve it. Could have more frequent learning sessions – to learn from each other and reflect on what has worked and what has not. This space needs to be created but it is very difficult for CABUNGO because it is time that can't be charged to a client. Therefore who funds these costs? The sustainability of the organisation means that people are likely to prioritise work that can be charged to clients

and calculations are all based on % chargeable time. Might be possible to get funding for learning, charge admin fees to clients or package learning with other things.

3. Staff retention is difficult and their knowledge and experience is then lost to the organisation. It is not easy to find the staff with necessary skills to ensure and maintain quality of OD processes and it takes time to train new staff. The remuneration CABUNGO can offer makes it difficult to retain staff but could try and find other ways to retain them, e.g., performance related bonuses on top of fixed pay.

4. Could maintain a closer relationship with clients beyond the intervention itself. This may lead to repeat business, and informal follow-up could be provided but CABUNGO could also gather information about what has worked and what impacts it has in order to improve future interventions. However, even if it just involves dropping by when you are passing, maintaining relationships is difficult to prioritise when there is so much pressure to earn income.

5. Sometimes donors or clients can put pressure to achieve results in a short period of time – but need to allow time for the OD process for it to be effective. It's a bitter pill to swallow all at once and can be more easily swallowed if taken in smaller, regular doses. Time should be spent with both donor and client to explain and understand the process, what's involved, why it takes time etc and maybe come to a compromise about the timeframe.

6. May need to revisit the purpose of CABUNGO and the criteria for deciding on what work to take on, e.g. is it just for development organisations or can it include profit-making organisations that are involved in development? What part does doing research and evaluation work fit in? – part of constantly asking ourselves about the purpose, and ways of achieving it in response to changing needs and context.

Story 6: Gaining a Spirit of Self-Reliance and Initiative

Storyteller: Staff member   **Organisation: CABUNGO**

Date: 14 March 2006

From your point of view, describe the most significant change in the capacity of an organisation that has received a CABUNGO intervention?

CABUNGO's interventions are like a tributary entering a river which flows downstream with a slow pace and not much life. The tributary brings with it heavy rains which contain a lot of stones and mud. At the beginning this dirties the river (people may become defensive or not want to face mistakes) but also brings fertility to the land and increases the flow. Eventually the dirt begins to settle and an offshoot off the river brings an exit to the process.

CABUNGO worked with a CBO in the northern region of Malawi to facilitate an OD process. At first the CBO had no funding. The director was committed but many other members were not. It received support from CABUNGO through an international CB Programme. The OD process initially challenged the director – who was convinced he knew what he was doing. As a result, the director received some leadership counselling.

After the invention, the CBO was able to organise itself and, with very little available resources, was able to keep itself going. This planted a seed and three years later it is still surviving and has been able to access funding to scale up its work. Those involved, members and volunteers, were motivated by the process. All the passion of the organisation used to lie with the director – some members even left. But the process helped the director to articulate his passion and vision and therefore to share it with others. Those involved, members and volunteers, were motivated by the process. They could then engage their own passions and get more actively involved. This passion was then shared more widely and communities began to believe in reforestation and how it could help them. This enthusiasm was ultimately shared with donors who were then inspired to provide funding to the CBO. The intervention fostered a spirit of self-reliance and initiative.

What lessons can be learnt from CABUNGO's interventions and what could be done better?

1. It is critical to prepare carefully for each process. The approach is not one to be replicated but needs to be adapted to different circumstances and contexts. This involves reflecting on, and learning from, past interventions and talking about how things might need to be done differently. The client has the solutions – the facilitator just has to help them to see them.
2. CABUNGO doesn't seem to have adequate resources to consistently ensure the quality of its work and approach. The assets bought with DFID funds now need replacing but current income only covers salaries and small running costs. Can find ways to arouse and engage individual passions and motivations to make up for the lack of luxury. But also need to calculate the true costs of providing quality services in the long term, e.g. staff development and retention, learning processes, time for reflection etc.
3. Internal pressures can create worries and concerns which affects the frame of mind of staff. This also undermines the ability of staff to share and discuss learning but also to learn inter-organisationally. A quality process relies on time and space for reflection, but this is sometimes postponed as work with clients is prioritised.
4. Need to review and maybe broaden CABUNGO's approach. The sector and context have changed. Organisations are now facing new challenges and needs. For example, HIV/AIDS wasn't previously highlighted or addressed but is now a huge issue. Support from Oxfam has allowed CABUNGO to review and revise OD toolkit to mainstream HIV/AIDS and gender into the approach and improve skills to implement these tools.

5. Internal M&E capacity could be improved – there is sufficient passion but pressures mean that it is not prioritised. Only receive feedback on the intervention itself but need to follow up more consistently. This would help to capture the challenges being faced in operationalising what has been learnt through the OD process – are organisations putting into practice new ways of working? This also adds to organisational costs.

Praxis Paper No. 12

Learning from Capacity Building Practice
*Adapting the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC)
Approach to Evaluate Capacity Building Provision
by CABUNGO in Malawi*

By Rebecca Wrigley

This paper provides a reflection on a pilot experience of using the 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) methodology to evaluate the capacity building services of CABUNGO, a local capacity building support provider in Malawi. MSC is a story-based, qualitative and participatory approach to monitoring and evaluation (M&E). INTRAC and CABUNGO worked collaboratively to adapt and implement the MSC approach to capture the complex and often intangible change resulting from capacity building.

The paper shows how CABUNGO has achieved significant impacts on the sustainability and effectiveness of the NGOs and community-based organisations (CBOs) with which it has worked. These impacts were felt not only on attitudes, skills, knowledge and behaviour, but also in relationships and power dynamics. The key advantages of using MSC to evaluate capacity building are assessed in relation to its ability to capture and consolidate the different perspectives of stakeholders, to aid understanding and conceptualisation of complex change, and to enhance organisational learning. These advantages are considered in light of the potential difficulties around adopting a qualitative approach in an environment in which donor requirements are focused on measuring achievements against specific quantitative data.

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