

Running head: INCREASING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF NGDOS

Making NGDOs Effective

Justin Hettinga

Trinity Western University

Dr. Harold J. Harder

Introduction

In these three chapters Fowler tackles a wide range of topics. There is an incredible amount of useful information and ideas that I would like to further elaborate on but for the purpose of this paper I will limit my discussion to several topics that really challenged me or engaged me. I will not summarize but will highlight significant ideas and show how they relate to what I have done, am doing or plan to do in my work here in Peru.

Organizing Non-Profits for Development

The concept of organizational capacity is of interest to me because I am faced with issues surrounding it on a daily basis, here in Peru. Of particular interest is building the organizational capacity of our Peruvian partner NGDOs.

I appreciate Fowler's definition of NGDO capacity, "capacity is the measure of an NGDO's capability to satisfy or influence stakeholders consistent with its mission (p. 43) This definition is inline with people-centered development if we recognize that our primary stakeholders are the poor whom we are serving.

Organizational Alignment

Ensuring organizational alignment between vision and action is no small issue. We discussed this yesterday with ATEK (locally run and governed NGO with whom we work here in Cusco.) We were doing some detailed operational level planning and several times I had to challenge the ATEK staff to demonstrate how a certain activity was aligned to their vision. It is very easy for us to pursue good activities when new opportunities arise. But there are too many good activities that are not the best activities when we consider alignment with our vision.

How organizational systems align with vision is something that I have not thought too much about but it is something that I would like to consider more, particularly with regards to

building the organizational capacity of our local partners. Tushman and O'Reilly offer some good ideas in their *Congruence Model* (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2002). Their model basically deals with aligning (ensuring congruence) between the various organizational components.

Fowler speaks of how many NGDOs get stuck in doing a top-down approach to higher level planning and visioning. I agree with him that it is critical that it be a bottom-up approach that is characterized by dialogue with external stakeholders. My only concern with what he mentions is that I think this process of dialogue needs to be viewed as horizontal rather than top-down or bottom-up. I think that this is by no means unique to NGDOs or non-profits. This is needed in the business world as well.

We have made a conscious effort in the past two years to include our external partners in our planning process. In business terms this would be referred to as a value chain. We are trying to bring all the value chain members together to plan. By doing this we are working towards alignment, not only within our own NGDO but also throughout our value chain. Now with that said it is our downstream partners who really sit down with us to contribute to our planning processes. Our up stream partners exert influence on our planning processes via their policies and funding conditions and boundaries. By trying to develop external alignment we always need to compromise to some extent. These compromises will often affect our internal organizational alignment, at least at a superficial level. If we are truly results focused we should be able to see the long-term impact of such negotiations.

“All too often weak, dependent Southern NGDOs respond by embarking on a strategic planning exercise which simply reorients their priorities towards those of their Northern partners (p. 49).” This is a concern of mine with regards to our local partners. We genuinely

want them to be independent but we have had so much influence in their development that I wonder how much of their vision is their own.

Decentralizing

After reading Fowler's section on decentralizing I realize that we function in a much decentralized way. We have tremendous freedom but we still have some crucial centralized support services that help the frontline work. The struggle that I see happening with local Peruvian NGDOs is that they struggle in the area of trust which then makes decentralization difficult. In order to place high levels of authority and power in the hands of those on the periphery, there must be high levels of trust. This takes us back to our previous discussion on subsistence versus market economies where a market economy requires high levels of trust in the system and others.

Enabling and Empowering NGDO People

The Cultural Dimensions and Challenges

Those of us involved in international work are constantly hopping back and forth across cultures. When I am working with a local level organization in Peru I always seek to fit into their culture. This is of course easier said than done.

One of my biggest challenges in my work for the next 3 years is to build the capacity of 2 local level, church-based NGDOs to the point that they will be ready to directly deal with funders from the North. At this point they are only dealing with us as northerners who have adapted to their culture in many ways.

Cultural self-awareness seems to me to be crucial when organizations are dealing with various cultures. I agree that Northern NGDOs should seek, as much as is possible, to become like their Southern NGDO partners, in cultural terms. But at the same time if it is our goal to

build the organizational capacity of our Southern partners we should include in this, the ability to understand one's own culture and be able to understand and relate to other cultures, particularly the culture of their donors. I do not believe that this means that our Southern partners need to give up or change their culture but they will be that much better positioned if they know how to relate, dialogue with and understand those from other cultures.

One small but significant example of this is the task of writing reports. By simply understanding the culture of their donors, southern NGDOs can write to that culture. They are not changing who they are or what they are doing but they are simply changing what and how they communicate.

Leadership

I wholeheartedly agree with Fowler when he mentions that in many cultures of the south and east, people's views of an organization are based on who is the leader. This is certainly true in Peru. When expatriates are involved in either hiring or giving their support to a leader they need to understand this. We in the West look at people's resumes to determine if they are the right person for a given job. We need to understand that a bad reputation can make someone completely ineffective. This is true in Canada as well, but not to the degree that is found in many cultures of the south and east. Related to this is our experience with dubbing the JESUS video into languages around the world. Many times we have recorded the voice of someone who was a prominent leader to be Jesus only to discover down the road that no one will take the video seriously because this person fell into sin. We also see this happen in Bible translation where expatriates put too much focus on the necessary skill set and ignore the necessary character traits and reputation that is necessary.

Gender

Gender equity issues are here to stay. This is one area where talk about cultural adaptation and the importance of respecting other cultures get thrown out the window. In general I believe that the best agents for culture change are those from within the given culture. Most people do not take well to outsiders telling them that their culture needs changing.

Right now I see the need for our local partners to increase the number of women in their top leadership positions. I believe that many of the members of these organizations see the need for it as well but they are having a hard time finding qualified women to lead. This became clear to me when we decided to try and ensure that more women were trained to teach literacy classes. But what we found was that in these remote communities there was often no, or very few, women that could read, let alone teach reading. In the last year some of our literacy classes have come full circle in that several women who just learned to read have now turned around and are teaching others to read. This is a start but I would really like to see women in true positions of influence and authority in our partner organizations, but the issues are bigger than simply hiring more women. Often times there simply aren't enough qualified women available because of their history of being neglected in the rural educational systems.

NGDO Relationships

Intervention

My experience with the three stages of intervention is limited to the first two because I am still in stage two but am now processing how to make an effective withdrawal. Stage one for me took several years of relationship building and planting seeds. Eventually our team called together leaders from all denominations working with the Quechua people and we initiated dialogue on how we could all work together to increase literacy and the use of the Quechua scriptures. This meeting sparked the formation of a CBO and launched us into stage

two. We as expatriates were catalysts in the formation of this CBO but we intentionally tried to let it develop from within the local community, but our fingerprints are all over it. According to Fowler's descriptions of process ownership (pp.104-105) this would likely fall into the second trajectory where the external agency initially has a high level of influence.

The action process found in figure 5.2 is something that should be happening at various levels. The cycle of action reflection needs to become part of our daily thinking, our annual planning and review as well as at the larger level of stage two.

As this CBO has developed the voice of the community has been heard. For example; the need for working with marriages arose from within the community and was not part of any strategy that we as expatriates had. As an outsider I was completely unaware of the extent of rape, incest and physical violence going on in families. This was a very private and hush-hush topic and so I never saw the extent of it. The focus of this new CBO on strengthening marriages was something that came as a response to the voice of the community and although it is hard to measure its impact, I know that major impact will happen. To me this is an example of people centered, participatory development.

My goal now is to ensure that this new CBO is sustainable. Right from the beginning we have been saying that as soon as this happens we will leave. We are already planning a phased out withdrawal that should be totally finished in mid-2010.

I was really hoping that Fowler would have something to say about stage 3 of the intervention process. Unfortunately he offered virtually no help for those of us getting ready to enter the withdrawal stage. This is something which I really need help with but that does not seem to be well documented. Chapter 8 may help me understand when I am done stage 2 but some good principles and steps to take in stage 3 would have been helpful.

Conclusion

These three chapters have covered a significant amount of material. I was not able to get a thorough understanding of all the issues discussed. But I was able to get a glimpse into many of them and I now have some helpful resources to turn to when I am faced with these issues.

Perhaps the most significant idea that I was exposed to was Fowler's model of intervention. I feel that I have been trying to apply much of these ideas to a greater or lesser degree. Looking back there are many things that I could have done differently to increase community ownership right from the entry stage. At this point I will need to learn from these mistakes so that I can do it better next time and offer advice to those heading into an intervention.

References

Fowler, A. (1997). *Striking a balance: A guide to enhancing the effectiveness of non-governmental organisations in international development*. London: Earthscan.

Tushman, M., & O'Reilly, C. A. (2002). *Winning through innovation: A practical guide to leading organizational change and renewal* (Rev. ed.). Boston, Mass.: Harvard Business School Press.