Introduction

' … if all you have is a hammer, then every problem becomes a nail …'

1. Background

The idea of capturing, storing and sharing knowledge so as to learn lessons from the past and from elsewhere – overcoming the boundaries posed by time and space – is far from being a new one. In recent years, a growing movement has emphasised the improved application of knowledge and learning as a means to improve development and humanitarian work. The movement has led to the widespread adoption of learning and knowledge-based strategies among the range of agencies involved in such work, including donor agencies, multilaterals, NGOs, research institutes, and the plethora of institutions based in the South, including national governments, regional organisations, and indigenous NGOs.[1]

This guide is aimed at staff working in all such organisations. There are 30 tools and techniques contained here, divided into five categories: i) Strategy Development; ii) Management Techniques; iii) Collaboration Mechanisms; iv) Knowledge Sharing and Learning Processes; and v) Knowledge Capture and Storage.

Many of these tools are simple and trying them out requires nothing more than the desire to try something new, and the drive to 'get on and do it'. Undertaking them effectively requires effective – sometimes advanced – facilitation and communication skills. Here, we have aimed to provide comprehensive accounts of how to apply such techniques, with a focus on the requirements of potential facilitators.

Other tools covered here are more complex, and call for significant planning and resources if they are to be delivered effectively. Here, we have attempted to provide an introduction and orientation to a broad subject, as well as suggestions for further resources that might prove useful for the reader.

There are a number of existing toolkits on knowledge and learning, some of which, such as the deservedly popular UK National Health Service knowledge management toolkit and the *Learning to Fly* books, have served as inspiration for the current volume.

The aim behind this toolkit is to present entry points and references to the wide range of tools and methods that have been used to facilitate improved knowledge and learning in the development and humanitarian sectors. It is hoped that our efforts here will go some way to ensuring that the quote starting this chapter does not become a truism: users will have access to more than just hammers, and the diverse problems faced in this important area of work will not have to be treated as just nails.

The RAPID programme

Knowledge and learning is at the heart of the Research and Policy in Development (RAPID) approach on which ODI has been working for the past five years. RAPID has worked hard to further understanding in this area of work, through efforts to deepen awareness of what works in practice, to explore new and innovative ways to apply this awareness, and to undertake action and theoretical research across a wide range of circumstances. Our interest has led us far and wide:

- RAPID has undertaken reviews of knowledge and information approaches: a review of information systems in sustainable livelihoods, followed by a literature review of knowledge management and

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[1] King, K. and S. McGrath (2004) *Knowledge For Development? Comparing British, Japanese, Swedish and World Bank Aid*, London and New York: Zed Books; Cape Town: HSRC Press.

organisational learning[2] and a case-study based investigation into the effectiveness of knowledge and learning.[3]

- Valuable lessons have been learned through developing and implementing the ODI strategy for knowledge and learning; RAPID has carried out similar activities for a range of other organisations, including bilateral donor agencies, multilaterals, Southern NGOs and governments.[4]

- RAPID has evaluated and suggested improvements to ongoing initiatives, and run training courses for recipient groups ranging from humanitarian workers to economic researchers.

- Studies have been made of shifts in international policy on development and humanitarian issues, including examining the contribution of different forms of knowledge to these changes.

- RAPID has consulted with civil society organisations across the world as to how they use knowledge to influence policy.

- RAPID has facilitated energetic regional and national debates on how to build local capacities to utilise different kinds of knowledge for developmental ends.

- The complementary RAPID toolkit on communication may also be helpful for those interested in knowledge and learning in the external environment.[5]

In carrying out the above, we have stood on the shoulders of others, trying as hard as possible to practise what we preach. We have learned that, regardless of the institutional setting, organisational learning and knowledge management initiatives that are successful are those that focus on a number key of organisational competencies.

2. Why is this guide relevant?

RAPID research has shown that knowledge and learning tools, if effectively applied, have the potential to transform the efficiency and effectiveness of development and humanitarian agencies. However, tools and techniques alone are not enough: a number of other factors need consideration. Findings have indicated in particular that where knowledge tools and processes, relationships and collaborations, organisational contextual factors and external factors are dealt with in an integrated and coherent manner, resulting strategies may prove more effective. Since undertaking this research, we have applied these principles in wide range of settings, learning more with each application.

Figure 1, developed as part of our research into this area, demonstrates the importance of using knowledge and learning tools as part of a holistic approach to organisational change. The diagram takes account of the specific environment and pressures faced by development and humanitarian agencies. The knowledge, relationships, contexts, external factors model is one that has since been used by RAPID to undertake research on existing initiatives and to develop new initiatives. And as the test of any such model is in the application, we have been gratified that it has proved useful in a range of settings.
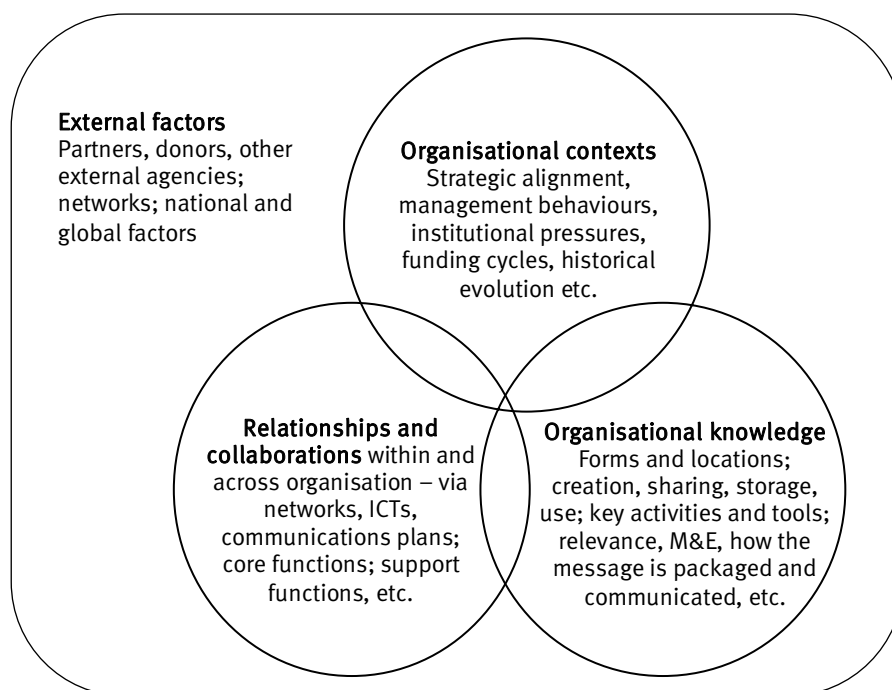
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[2] Hovland, I. (2003) *Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning: An International Development Perspective*, ODI Working Paper 224, London: ODI.
[3] Ramalingam, B. (2005) *Implementing Knowledge Strategies: Lessons from International Development Agencies*, ODI Working Paper 244, London: ODI.
[4] See: www.odi.org.uk/rapid for further information and resources.
[5] Hovland, I. (2005) *Successful Communication: A Toolkit for Researchers and Civil Society Organisations*, ODI Working Paper 227, London: ODI.

Figure 1: A holistic view of knowledge and learning tools

External factors
Partners, donors, other external agencies; networks; national and global factors

Organisational contexts
Strategic alignment, management behaviours, institutional pressures, funding cycles, historical evolution etc.

Relationships and collaborations within and across organisation – via networks, ICTs, communications plans; core functions; support functions, etc.

Organisational knowledge
Forms and locations; creation, sharing, storage, use; key activities and tools; relevance, M&E, how the message is packaged and communicated, etc.

3. Overview of the tools

Our approach to this toolkit was inspired and has been reinforced by the groundbreaking and highly popular work of Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell in their *Learning to Fly* series.[6] In particular, we have found their Five Competencies Framework very useful in organising and applying tools within knowledge management and organisational learning initiatives. We believe that the approach addresses a fundamental need in knowledge and learning: the need for a conceptual framework such that the different dimensions of such an initiative can be simply communicated and easily understood.

We have used the model presented in Figure 1 to adapt the Five Competencies Framework, and have been encouraging organisations to use this as a starting point for developing their own knowledge and learning strategies. Groups and teams can easily apply the process to work out how well they are performing in terms of the Five Competencies, and identify their goals and priorities for improvement.

The rest of the toolkit uses the five competencies in the form of chapters, as follows: Strategy Development; Management Techniques; Collaboration Mechanisms; Knowledge Sharing and Learning Processes; and Knowledge Capture and Storage.

Strategy development

This competency relates to how an organisation might start to look at its knowledge and learning in a strategic manner. The tools presented provide different frameworks which can be used to plan, monitor and evaluate knowledge and learning initiatives.

1.   The Five Competencies Framework
The first tool in this guide explains how to apply the Five Competencies approach, and therefore serves as a starting point for readers, to help establish clear rationale and entry points for using this toolkit.

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[6] Collison, C. and G. Parcell (2001) *Learning to Fly*, Oxford: Capstone.

2. Knowledge Audit

Knowledge Audit provides a structure for gathering data, synthesising findings and making recommendations about the best way forward for knowledge and learning initiatives against a background of the broader structural, operational and policy factors affecting an organisation.

3. Social Network Analysis

Social Network Analysis has been called the most systematic way of analysing relationships and knowledge flows between individuals and groups. Properly undertaken, SNA can yield invaluable data about how to tailor and focus knowledge and learning activities to organisational needs.

4. Most Significant Change

Most Significant Change is a narrative-based mechanism for planning programmes of change. As so much of knowledge and learning is about change, and this change takes place in a variety of different domains, the MSC tool could prove invaluable.

5. Outcome Mapping

Outcome Mapping is a participatory planning, monitoring and evaluation methodology which focuses on the contribution of a programme to changes in the actions and behaviours of the 'boundary partners'. Applied to knowledge and learning strategies, OM has a number of potential benefits.

6. Scenario Testing and Visioning

Both of these tools focus on the future of an organisation, and enable imaginative and creative ideas to play a central role in developing and rolling out knowledge strategies.

Management techniques

If leadership is the process of working out the right things to do, then management is the process of doing things right. Here are a range of simple approaches, from assessing managerial responses to mistakes, to assessing the forces for and against stated organisational changes, which might prove useful to managers working towards the learning organisation.

7. The SECI Approach

This approach, made popular by Japanese management specialists Nonaka and Takeuchi, is based on systematically managing the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge, through four easy-to apply-processes based on simple principles of group dynamics.

8. Blame vs Gain Behaviours

Managing a learning organisation requires a managerial approach to mistakes which is healthy and balanced, and which encourages staff to take certain risks and to be honest about the consequences of their actions. This simple process enables groups to reflect on their own approach to mistakes and errors, and how they might go about addressing these, through use of a series of generic 'Blame' or 'Gain' behaviours.

9. Force Field Analysis

Force Field Analysis enables teams to work out what their goals are, and systematically to identify the forces for and against achieving them. This is the classic change management tool developed by Kurt Lewin, pioneer of action research, and can be an empowering and energising tool for teams.

10. Activity-based Knowledge Mapping

All activities require different inputs and generate outputs; increasingly, these inputs and outputs are information based. This tool, which has been drawn from the field of 'business process re-engineering', enables the mapping of inputs and outputs for key activities, with a view to improving their efficiency. This provides managers with an in-depth understanding of the different processes they are overseeing.

11. Structured Innovation

This tool works by listing the characteristics of a specific problem, and brainstorming the possible variations. Done correctly, this tool enables groups systematically to generate new ideas and assess their potential. This is useful for managers who feel the need for more creativity.

12. Reframing Matrix

Everyone sees problems in different ways, and one of the key problems with knowledge strategies is that knowledge is in the eye of the beholder. This tool enables different perspectives to be generated, and used in management planning processes.

Collaboration mechanisms

When working together with others, the whole of our efforts often proves to be less than the sum of the parts. Why? Frequently, there is not enough attention paid to facilitating effective collaborative practices. The tools in this section can be applied to reflect on the workings of teams, and to help strengthen relationships and develop shared thinking.

13. Teams: Virtual and Face-to-Face

This tool enables teams to work through five stages towards a 'shared responsibility'. Either face-to-face or virtually, teams can cross the five stages assessing where they lie in terms of different areas, including atmosphere and relations; goal acceptance; information sharing; decision making; reaction to leadership; and attention to the way the group is working.

14. Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice enable similarly minded interacting people to work towards generating and collaborating on knowledge and learning initiatives in a variety of ways, through a number of overlapping functions.

15. Action Learning Sets

Action Learning Sets are a structured method enabling small groups to address complicated issues by meeting regularly and working collectively. This tool is geared especially learning and personal development at professional and managerial levels.

16. Six Thinking Hats

This tool offers a way out of the habitual thinking style by enabling participants to use different approaches and perspectives to analysing decision making. This is particularly useful in that it allows a broad and objective view of decisions, and one which covers more options and possibilities.

17. Mind Maps

Mind Maps are a graphic technique to enable participants to implement clearer thinking in their approach to many different tasks. It is useful both for individuals and for groups, and provides as non-linear method of organising information.

18. Social Technologies

Social Technologies cover a broad swathe of tools, all using technology to build collaboration and sharing of tacit knowledge. There are many different fora for this, chiefly internet-based tools but also including telecommunications, radio and face-to-face socialising.

Knowledge sharing and learning

So much of effective knowledge and learning is about two-way communication which takes place in a simple and effective manner, and applying simple techniques to try and build on past experiences to improve activities in the future. These essential tools are covered in this section.

19. Stories

Storytelling is an approach which can both allow for expression of tacit knowledge and increase potential for meaningful knowledge sharing, particularly by permitting learning to take place through the presence of a narrative structure.

20. Peer Assists

This tool encourages participatory learning, by asking those with experience in certain activities to assist those wishing to benefit from their knowledge, through a systematic process, towards strengthened mutual learning.

21. Challenge Sessions

Challenge Sessions are a structure framework geared towards solving problems by allowing participants to supplement their habitual thinking with new methods, centred around working towards dealing with problems that are made up of conflicting requirements or challenges.

22. After Action Reviews and Retrospects

The After Action Review facilitates continuous assessment of organisational performance, looking at successes and failures, ensuring that learning takes place to support continuous improvement in organisational learning and change.

23. Intranet Strategies

Intranets can have a great impact on knowledge management, particularly in the fields of information collection, collaboration and communication, and task completion. Following the necessary approach, this tool can substantially increase the likelihood of an effective, useful system within an organisation.

24. Email Guidelines

Email is one of the most commonly used communication tools in the modern business environment; there is an increased need nowadays to manage this tool to reduce the risk of overload. This tool helps to control this tool and therefore increase its effectiveness as a communication tool.

Knowledge capture and storage

Knowledge and information can leak in all sorts of ways and at all sorts of times. To make sure that essential knowledge is retained by an organisation requires, a range of techniques can be applied, from traditional information management tools such as shared drives, as well as more modern techniques such as blogs and knowledge based exit interviews.

25. Taxonomies for Documents and Folders

This tool has been in existence for many decades in the form of classification schemes and indexing systems, and still can have a great deal to offer in terms of structuring information for easier management and retrieval.

26. Exit Interviews

Exit Interviews represent a specific learning process, not just a way to leave a company, and one which highlights the importance of capturing and storing know-how. This can minimise the loss of useful knowledge through staff turnover and ease the learning curve of new staff, benefiting both the organisation and the leaving staff.

27. How To Guides

This tool enables the capture, documentation and dissemination of know-how of staff within an organisation, to help them make better and wider use of existing knowledge. The ultimate goal is to capture an effective sequence or process with enough accuracy so that it can be repeated with the same good results.

28. Staff Profile Pages

Using this tool, an electronic directory storing information about staff in a given organisation, can facilitate connections among people through systematising organisational knowledge and learning initiatives.

29. Blogs

A Weblog in its various forms enable groups of people to discuss electronically areas of interest in different ways, and to review different opinions and information surrounding such subjects.

30. Shared Network Drives

Shared Network Drives work in most organisations to store and categorise information. If used correctly, and under systematised good practices, they can enable better retrieval of knowledge and improved information sharing across an organisation.