



PICO TEAM

Institute for People, Innovation and Change in Organisations

facilitation, coaching, consulting for change

The LearningWheel®

A methodology for creating common frameworks for joint learning, action and knowledge management

'Lesson learning' has become a common practice to capture experiences in implementing projects and programs. However, the lessons often end up not being used outside the interventions from which they emerged. In response to that gap, the LearningWheel methodology has been developed and tested in numerous cases over the last 8 years. It suggests a way to organize experiences and lessons in conceptual and operational frameworks which enable a wide-spread use of the conceptualized knowledge. The development of LearningWheels is a rapid way to tap and build on the knowledge and experience base multi-stakeholder groups in workshops and create a common understanding of complex process-oriented development interventions.

Developing LearningWheels: From Practice to Concept

The LearningWheel methodology generates experience-based conceptual frameworks from practice, building on the lessons and success factors of practical case examples in an analytical and appreciative manner. In several analytical steps, workshop participants distil the success factors which were central to generate successes in different cases and experiences. These are clustered into 'cornerstones' and systematized into a LearningWheel framework.

The 'cornerstones' of the LearningWheel frame are fundamentals of successful interventions which are in systemic interaction with the other fundamentals. Based on 'systemic intervention', each of the cornerstones need to be addressed as otherwise the weakest one becomes a threat to the whole approach. This does not mean that they all have to be actively addressed at the same time, some of them might be in place anyway, others which are identified as gaps, can be addressed through linkages and partnerships. In this sense, the LearningWheel serves as a checklist which can also be used for self-reflection and evaluation of initiatives and for the design of new initiatives.



Example for applying the LearningWheel® methodology in practice – Rural and Agricultural Service Reform

Each cornerstone is processed further in terms of its 'elements', 'key strategies & processes' to deal with the elements, and 'possible ways to implement' within these strategies. These components are also distilled from participants' experiences and brought together into a table. Possible links to available experiences and websites describing them help to make the whole framework an open-ended 'learning frame' for knowledge management in multi-stakeholder initiatives.

In each of the cornerstones, the gaps in existing knowledge and experience can be defined and then specifically explored in different places by different people in future actions. Their insights, lessons and experiences can then be integrated after some time into the overall umbrella approach and so all the parties involved in this systematic joint learning process can obtain a much broader and faster experience base than alone.

The participatory process of developing the LearningWheel is logically structured in an analytical manner. Often, individual cases have only lessons, success factors and promising strategies in some areas, but when analysing a variety of different experiences / cases together, a comprehensive framework can be developed.

Application of the LearningWheel frameworks: from concept back to practice

The utility of the conceptualized experiences is in its application back in practice to enhance better practice and learning. Some of the options where the LearningWheel framework has been successfully applied back in practice are:

As a frame to design new programmes: In setting up new programmes, the context can be analysed along the cornerstones together with the main stakeholders and the main areas of interventions of the projects can be defined on the basis of the joint

analysis (e.g.: what exactly do we mean by this cornerstone, why is it important? is that cornerstone really in place?, how do we know?, if not, is it a hindrance now?, what do we need to do to avoid it to become a barrier or to overcome the gap?. Key functions and related possible partners can be identified in an inclusive and rigorous process in which all partners can win through the synergies. The LearningWheel is a tool to select more clearly the required partners and prioritise core activities of partners in a holistic perspective.

As a frame to monitor & evaluate on-going programmes in a strategic way Implementation teams can use the frame to reflect on their intervention and analyse the state of the art for each cornerstone. This helps them to reach a common perspective on where they are now, what they consider success and what the knowledge and design gaps are in their existing intervention. An iterative self-reflection (e.g. every half year or annually) with the whole team and some stakeholders can be a powerful way of steering an intervention and learn systematically together. Every year there will be useful new insights which might require to deal with new / different aspects to make the whole intervention process work as a system rather than just focussing on some components.

As a knowledge management tool The lessons and experiences and methodologies / tools used to enhance each of these cornerstones can be collected, synthesized across programmes and put back into the framework (the tables). This way, the frame will build up and enhance a rigorous and systematic learning in institutions / networks. Increasing operational knowledge from different actors on how to manage successful intervention processes can be integrated in the common frame and develop into a multi-stakeholder knowledge management system (e.g through interactive websites). It fosters an analysis of lessons and methodological knowledge within programmes and across agencies.

As a tool to create a common understanding and vision of the way to implement certain types of interventions among a diverse range of stakeholders and partners involved in the implementation teams. A particular benefit is the creation of a common understanding of an implementation process as a result of the joint analysis on the basis of the framework in the different contexts described above. It helps to learn together and to recognise the complexity and get a grasp of how to handle it. For example, if the cornerstone is 'effective private sector institutions' in the case of rural economic and enterprise development, the partners have to clarify automatically what they mean by 'effective' and set criteria. Going through all the cornerstones in detail creates a deep common understanding of the system and the issues.

Ultimately it does not matter at what stage of a programme or initiative the analysis on the basis of the LearningWheel is carried out. Interventions / initiatives are considered as on-going learning processes among stakeholders who continuously try to improve their effectiveness. Regular reflections with the partners on the basis of the framework help to strengthen a dynamic problem and opportunity analysis.

This takes into account systems thinking which stresses that the true functioning of systems only reveals through intervention within the system ('if you want to know how things really work, just try to change them'). The new insights which are gained in an intervention by all partners are being taken into account in the flexible frame shifting the emphasis on any cornerstones if they reveal to be bottlenecks. The flexible frame is a simple tool to help operationalisation of process and systemic intervention together with multiple stakeholders.

Some examples for the application of the LearningWheel methodology are: The multi-donor REED initiative –Rural Economic and Enterprise Development: http://www.donorplatform.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=37&Itemid=70; The INRM initiative of CGIAR: <http://www.icarda.org/Publications/NavigatingAmidstComplexity.pdf>; Guide to strategic planning in CGIAR: http://www.worldfishcenter.org/Pubs/corporate/muddy_waters/muddywaters.htm; Conceptual Framework for Rural Service Reform Processes: http://www.gtz.de/de/dokumente/en-framework-anglophone-Africa-2006_.pdf; The multiple use services of water (MUS) Project: www.IWMI.org (used as knowledge management framework to guide the project)

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