The Octagon

A tool for the assessment of strengths and weaknesses in NGOs

Target group

Working environment

Structure

Activities

Expertise

Systems and finance

Relevance

Identity

Sida

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Description of the Octagon

How the Octagon came into being

In 1999, Sida invited a number of Swedish non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the so-called frame organisations, to a discussion on possible ways of measuring results of the support provided for capacity and organisation development at local partner organisations. A special reference group for reporting results was formed, consisting of representatives of most of the frame organisations. In May 2000, a model for the evaluation and follow-up of organisations was presented to this group. The model – the Octagon – was presented by a consultant, Peter Winai, on behalf of Sida.

Peter Winai was commissioned to further develop the model together with another consultant, Anders Ingelstam, and a small working group consisting of representatives of Sida and some of the frame organisations. Among other things, a manual was produced as well as a tool for compiling data in tabular form.

One year later it was possible to present a complete model to the frame organisations. Prior to the formal launching of the model, Sida implemented a pilot project in cooperation with Diakonia, in which the model was tested by some of Diakonia's local partner organisations in South America and Asia. The analyses of these pilot projects led to certain revisions being made to the model, which is presented here in its final form.

The idea behind the Octagon

The main purpose of Sida's support to Swedish NGOs is to promote the development of robust and democratic civil societies and to strengthen local partner organisations in developing countries. The method provides support for organisation and capacity development.

The Octagon is a tool for the assessment of strengths and weaknesses in NGOs and can be used by both the Swedish organisations and their partners in cooperation. The Octagon can function as an instrument to structure the dialogue with a partner organisation when the aim is to obtain an overall picture of the organisation and to get to know it well. It can also serve as an aid for the selection of partners; for grouping partner organisations in relation to their needs of internal organisation development; or for identifying the point in time when the Swedish organisation, as the financier, should phase out its support for organisation development.

The Octagon is based on the idea that it is possible to obtain a comprehensive picture of an organisation's capacity and development profile by making systematic reviews and assessments of four basic aspects:

– The organisation's objectives and *management/administrative structures*, the so-called *organisational base*.

– The organisation's activities with or for selected target groups, i.e. *output*. (N.B. It is easy to confuse this with the effects of the organisation's work, which cannot be assessed with the Octagon.)

– The organisation's *capacity* to succeed in its work. This refers both to its professional skills and the *funds* at its disposal, as well as its administrative systems.

– The organisation's capacity to create and maintain *relations* with its target groups and other actors in civil society.

Apart from the fact that the Octagon is a tool for rapid and simple analyses of an organisation's strengths and weaknesses, the model also identifies necessary measures to improve the organisation's capacity to perform effectively. If the same type of analysis is made systematically on several occasions over several years, it is also possible to follow changes in the organisation in question. In this way, the Octagon can be used both for "base-line studies" and for measuring changes and results of internal organisation development over a certain period of time.

In other words, the development of an organisation can be measured with the aid of the Octagon. On the other hand, it does not evaluate the results of certain projects, i.e. the effects of the organisation's work with or for target groups. This is intentional.

The Octagon can also provide a form of support prior to a major programme for organisation development. Since it provides a comprehensive picture of central parts of the organisation, it can be used, for example, to initiate a dialogue among the staff or management at the organisation. However, the Octagon has limitations if it is used for the purpose of developing an organisation. In such cases it needs the support of other, in-depth tools.

How to use the Octagon

The Octagon is constructed in such a way that four basic aspects of an organisation are analysed with the aid of eight variables.

The organisation's base:

1. *Identity*: The organisation expresses its basic values and has articulated the reasons for its existence.

2. *Structure:* The organisation's management and its division of duties and responsibilities are explicit and visible.

The organisation's activities – output:

3. *Implementation of activities:* The organisation has the capacity to plan and to implement planned activities.

4. *Relevance of activities:* The content of activities and the methods used are relevant in relation to the organisation's vision and operational objectives.

The organisation's capacity development:

5. *Professional skills:* voluntary and paid staff and management have the requisite professional skills and qualifications to pursue and develop the organisation's operational objectives and vision.

6. *Systems:* The organisation has the financial resources and administrative routines to run its activities.

The organisation's relations:

7. *Acceptance and support of target groups*: The target groups' assessment of the organisation and the demand for its activities give the organisation legitimacy.

8. *Relations with its external environment*: The organisation is accepted and supported in the community and is able to mobilise support for its vision and operational objectives.

The eight variables form an octagon. Each dimension is ranked by assessments of two statements/questions on a seven-point scale. When all the variables have been analysed and ranked, the average points are transferred to an Excel document where the organisation's development profile is illustrated in the form of an octagon (see Figure 1).
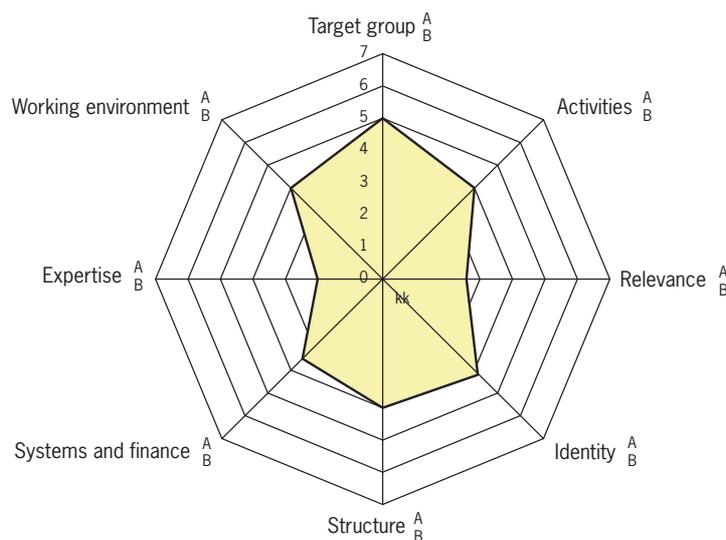

Figure 1. Example of the result of a measurement.

As a user of the Octagon, it is important in the first place to determine the purpose of collecting information on an organisation, regardless of whether it is a partner organisation or one's own organisation. Likewise, it is also important to document this work. Appendices 1 and 2 contain forms that can be used for this purpose. In order to produce a picture of the organisation in the form of an octagon, access Excel is required. This handbook is available on Sida's web-site in pdf format, including the Octagon in Excel. The Octagon is also available in Swedish and Spanish.

I. A tool for the follow-up and measurement of results of organisation development

It is possible for financiers or partners to use the Octagon as a tool for measuring results or following up organisation development at a partner organisation. However, it is important to be aware of the fact that the Octagon is based completely on subjective assessments of the organisation. Its subjectivity makes the Octagon a sensitive instrument. Therefore, it is important to give reasons in writing for each ranking of the Octagon's eight variables on the very first occasion measurements are made. In order to measure results, it is necessary to make analyses of the same variable on several occasions over a long period of time, for example at one-year or five-year intervals. Since the person who makes the first Octagon analysis of a partner organisation may

change his/her opinion over the course of time or may be replaced, it is necessary to document what, for example, was the reason for awarding four points in one part of the Octagon analysis on the first occasion. The weakness of the Octagon as an instrument for measuring change is the risk that it is the basis used for personal assessments that has changed and is reflected in the Octagon's results, rather than real changes at the partner organisation. As long as there is awareness of this risk and everything possible is done to eliminate subjectivity in assessments, the Octagon will function as a tool for rapid results analyses. The form in appendix 2 can be used to advantage for this purpose.

II. A tool to start organisation development at a deeper level

If you, as a financier, partner or consultant, intend to use the Octagon for organisation development purposes, it is important to remember that the Octagon is a tool for making a rough initial analysis of an organisation. Thereafter, other tools must be used. The responsibility for the process must rest with the partner organisation. Nevertheless, you must explain that the purpose of your initiative to make an Octagon analysis is the first stage in providing support for the internal organisational development of the partner organisation, and describe the forms of your support for this process in the future. Is your role to finance measures that have been identified? To act as a sounding board or as a mentor? Or something else? The partner organisation must feel that it has the overall responsibility for the strengths and weaknesses that emerge in the analysis, while your role as an analyst can be active or not so active.

It is possible to use the Octagon as the first step for organisation development purposes if the tool is used as an instrument for a so-called self-assessment process and involves many diverse representatives of the organisation. Where self-assessment processes are concerned, it is also necessary to have a moderator who is well-informed about the different components of the Octagon. The moderator's role is to lead the discussion. A self-assessment process for organisation development purposes is a one-day workshop and should involve 3–7 persons from the organisation who have different areas of responsibility and different perspectives on the organisation's work. It should possibly also include members or representatives of the target group. A self-assessment process of this type requires a considerable degree of openness in the organisation. Participants should be able to express themselves freely and they should have the capacity to listen constructively to different experience. If there is the slightest uncertainty about the organisation's ability to handle differences of opinion among the staff, it is recommended that the self-assessments are made first in homogenous groups: the operative personnel, management or the target group only. Thereafter, the different groups should be brought together for a joint discussion at which each group's self-assessment is presented and analysed. In this way, experience is presented at a general, overall level rather than a personal level.

A self-assessment workshop should preferably be started with a presentation of the Octagon's eight variables. Thereafter, let the participants individually apply the Octagon to their own organisation and rate the eight variables. Also, in connection with this, ask the participants to identify what is lacking for a maximum seven-point rating. The rating process should be regarded as an aid for a group discussion on the organisation's current strengths and weaknesses, and changes that will be necessary in the future. In this way, at the same time as an analysis has been made of the organisation's

strengths and weaknesses, a plan of action for the organisation has also been identified. For individual ratings, the form in appendix 1 can be used. To document the group's overall ratings, the consensus-based rating, and the plan of action that has been identified, appendix 2 can be used.

In order to produce the visual picture of the Octagon, access to Excel is required. Transfer the ratings to the Excel matrix and the organisation's profile will be visible in the form of an octagon.

III. A tool for deeper understanding and dialogue with the partner organisation

If you, as a financier or partner, intend to use the Octagon with the aim of improving your dialogue with, and understanding of, another organisation, you should make it clear to the partner organisation what the information will be used for. Is it to be used for initiating or phasing-out cooperation? Is it to be used in a decision on an increase/reduction in grants? Information for the purpose of understanding another organisation can be obtained with a large or small degree of participation on the part of the organisation concerned. If it is a question of an organisation that has been a partner organisation for a very long time and a great deal of information on the organisation is thus already available, individual supplementary interviews with key persons in management or in the field can be sufficient to make a complete Octagon analysis of the partner organisation. If the partner organisation is involved in the analysis, it is recommended that several persons be included in the process: representatives of management, the operative personnel and possible the target group. You can then form a picture of the organisation's strengths and weaknesses in the light of the responses given by these representatives of the organisation to the Octagon's eight areas of analysis. It can be a delicate matter to bring these representatives together and hold a group discussion. In order to obtain as frank responses as possible, you should consider interviewing them on different occasions, or holding group discussions in which each group is homogenous. Use appendix 2 to document your assessment of the partner organisation. There is space on the assessment form for regular assessments. This makes it possible to follow developments and results over time.

Users' Guide for the Octagon

◆ The organisational base

A strong institution has a democratic structure and is open to insight. The application of democratic rules also includes promoting the participation of women. Furthermore, it is important that the organisation has a vision and a mission – in other words, the organisation knows what it wants to achieve and how it should do it.
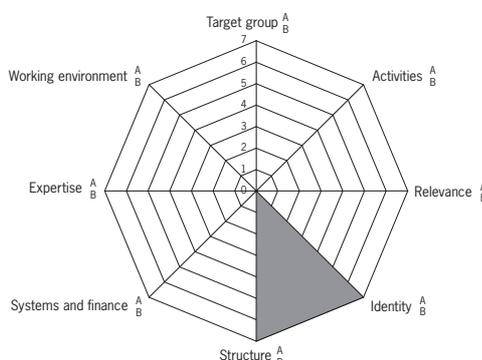
An institution's strength is shown, among other things, in the existence

of a structure that holds the organisation together, and that is not dependent on individual leaders or members. A structure of this type is shown by a clear division of duties and responsibilities. Registration at the authorities (in those countries where this is possible) can provide a good indication of the degree of structure in the organisation.

1. An organisation's basic values and identity

A. Formulation of the organisation's vision and mission
An organisation's identity can be expressed in different ways, for example with the aid of written declarations that describe the reasons for the establishment of the organisation, the objectives the organisation wishes to achieve in the future (vision), and the contributions the organisation wishes to make (mission). The organisation's members can then support the basic vision to varying degrees.

Ascertain whether the vision has been documented; if it has been discussed internally; how it was developed; and who participated in its development.

Highest points are awarded if the organisation's vision and mission are documented in writing, are known and accepted by all members of staff, and have been spread outside the organisation.

Lowest points are awarded if the organisation has not defined the purpose of its activities, the objectives it wishes to achieve, or its mission in society.

One characteristic of an intermediate situation is that a person who wishes to find out about the organisation's basic concept can be given information in the form of written and oral descriptions.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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B. Formulation of relevant strategies in relation to the vision
Where the organisation's stage of development is concerned, the crucial factor is whether there are strategies – courses of action – for the realisation of the vision. Ascertain whether written strategies exist or whether strategies of this type have been discussed and whether these reflect what the organisation claims it is working with. Are there sub-goals that shall be achieved on the way to realising the vision and the overall objectives?

Highest points are awarded if the organisation has devised strategies that have been documented and which are clearly linked to the organisation's vision. The organisation has also formulated sub-goals that shall be achieved in order to realise the vision and overall objectives.

Lowest points are awarded if the organisation has not formulated any strategies at all, not even ideas that can be expressed orally, on how the organisation should proceed towards its overall objectives.

Characteristics of an intermediate situation are that work has been started on drawing up strategies and that there are documents that contain strategic considerations.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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2. Structure and organisation of activities

A. Application of a clear division of duties and responsibilities
Structure in an organisation means that duties and responsibilities are allocated and coordinated. The structure can then be made more specific in various ways, for example by documenting it in the form of an organisation chart. However, the crucial factor is the extent to which there is a specific, practical division of duties. It is important to understand that structure is not the same as hierarchy, i.e. a pyramidal structure. In principle, the structure can be flat – this is still a structure.

Ascertain whether an organisation chart exists and whether the staff are fully aware of their positions and duties in the organisation.

Highest points are awarded if management and all members of staff know the duties, responsibilities and powers they have in the organisation. All functions are also documented in an organisation chart.

Lowest points are awarded in a situation in which everyone can take on all types of duties, but there is no specific division of responsibilities.

An intermediate situation is characterised by the existence of a certain division of duties but a lack of clarity in respect of who should really do what and what powers members of staff actually have.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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B. Application of democratic rules

The concept of structure where non-governmental organisations are concerned also includes the application of democratic rules and that the manifestation of these rules in the organisation's constitution. One of the most important principles is that decision-makers can be held responsible for their decisions and actions. Furthermore, the way in which management is appointed and the possibilities available to change the constitution of the organisation can also provide indications of democracy in the organisation. Ascertain, for example, the position of management in relation to the annual general meeting.

A democratic organisation does not exclude participation by people on account of their sex, or their ethnic or religious affiliation. Ascertain, for example, the breakdown of men and women among the decision-makers in the organisation, or the extent to which different ethnic groups are represented.

Highest points are awarded for a completely transparent situation in which there are routines and systems for the approval of annual accounts and reports, and for the scrutiny of decisions made by decision-makers. This situation also includes the participation of both men and women in the decision-making process and their equal representation in, for example, management. There are just as many programmes for the development of the managerial skills of women as there are for men.

Lowest points are awarded for an organisation in which decision-makers are not held accountable for their actions, and decisions are made without any participation at all by members of staff. Women or ethnic/religious minorities are largely excluded from participation in the decision-making process.

Characteristics of an intermediate situation are that the organisation has the ambition to establish democratic decision-making procedures and there are clear indications that democratic principles are actually being applied.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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◆ Activities – output

Every organisation has the ambition to supply something, to contribute to change for the better. One important criterion in the assessment of an organisation's strength is, therefore, whether it has succeeded in delivering what it has promised. This is naturally a question of how extensive the organisation's activities have succeeded in becoming, and of the content and quality of activities.
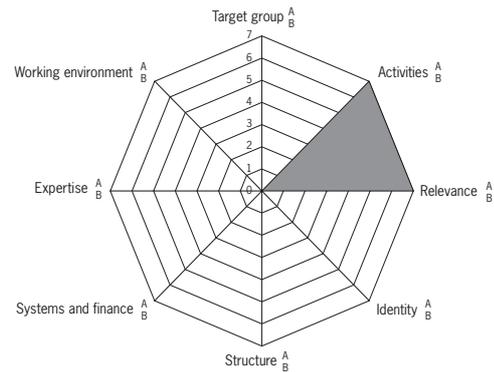
One important aspect in this assessment is whether the organisation has the capacity to make realistic plans that are based on its policy. One indicator is, therefore, whether it has performed as planned. Here it is important to assess the relationship between the organisation's activities, i.e. its output, and the organisation's access to financial and personnel resources.

The other aspect that should be assessed is whether the activities are relevant in relation to the organisation's declared vision and objectives. Is the organisation a learning organisation? The temptation of counting seminars should be avoided – instead an examination should be made of the quality of the seminars. Therefore, it is important to see whether there is a continuous discussion on the activities of the organisation and whether this discussion actually leads the organisation forwards, towards its objectives.

3. The implementation of activities

A. Planning for the implementation of activities
An organisation contributes something to the world around it in the form of goods or services (output), i.e. it provides an activity for certain, identified target groups. In other words, it is not a question of output for internal consumption, for example internal information. This concept is not without problems in non-governmental organisations. Ascertain what the organisation defines as outputs intended for its target groups. Can the organisation describe its activities in the form of operational plans? Consider then the quality of the plans. Are the plans useful for the implementation of the organisation's activities and can the results achieved be traced back to the plans?

Highest points are awarded if the organisation can produce operational plans that are actually used by management and in its activities in order to achieve the organisation's objectives. Furthermore, results achieved have been documented and can be traced back to the plans, i.e. it is possible to see the extent to which the plans have been fulfilled. The organisation also achieves the planned results.

Lowest points are awarded if there is a total absence of operational plans and the organisation is unable to describe what it should achieve.

An intermediate situation is characterised by the existence of operational plans, but it is not completely clear whether they cover all operations or whether all results can actually be traced back to the plans.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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B. Follow-up and learning from work done

In this context, follow-up means that results achieved are really compared against plans. The quality and quantity of the results are placed in relation to resources invested and are evaluated on this basis. Are there systems and routines for regular follow-ups and are discussions held on the extent to which the results correspond to the plans? Ascertain whether there are routines to incorporate deviations and experience gained in new plans, i.e. whether the organisation is a learning organisation.

Highest points are awarded if there is clear evidence that there is a continuous discussion on results in relation to resources, i.e. that there are systems and routines for regular follow-up and for making good use of experience gained. This means that conclusions drawn from the follow-ups have a clear impact on future planning, in which any deviations receive attention.

Lowest points awarded if there is no follow-up and activities tend to continue as before. Systems and routines for making good use of experience gained have not yet been developed and the organisation has no idea of the cost of its activities.

An intermediate situation is characterised by questions being asked on how activities should be run in the future. Thought is also being given to the use of resources and there is a picture of the quality that should be achieved.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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4. Relevance

A. The content of activities correspond with the vision

The activities pursued by the organisation correspond with its vision. This means that the work of the organisation is not permitted to be in conflict with the vision or dominate the vision negatively, for example through commercial activities or the exercise of authority.

The fact that planning and methods development is given priority in an organisation indicates that the organisation is working strategically in its regular activities in order to realise its vision and its long-term objectives.

Highest points are awarded if the activities of the organisation actually correspond to its vision and this is the subject of continuous reflection and internal discussion. Furthermore, planning and methods development are given priority in the organisation.

Lowest points are awarded if there is no link between the origination's activities and its vision, and planning and methods development are not given priority.

An intermediate situation is characterised by a discussion on the relationship between activities and vision, but the extent to which they actually correspond is unclear.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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B. Working methods correspond with the vision
An organisation's working methods must correspond with its vision and objectives, i.e. the organisation must practise what it preaches. For example, an organisation that works for respect for human rights cannot exclude a certain group of people on account of their religious/ethnic affiliation. Awareness of this requirement is shown if the organisation makes regular evaluations of its working methods. Ascertain whether, for example, the working methods can be found in policy or strategy documents, and whether the methods are openly and critically examined by the members of the organisation.

Highest points are awarded if the organisation practises what it preaches. There is full awareness in the organisation that its methods should correspond with its vision. The organisation has also introduced routines for regular evaluation of its working methods.

Lowest points are awarded if there are double standards and self-contradiction in the organisation. The organisation is run with methods that are in conflict with the vision.

One characteristic of an intermediate situation is that a discussion is taking place in the organisation on its working methods, but that no systematic evaluation is made.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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◆ Capacity

This refers to all the internal resources that an organisation needs in order to do its work and to develop the organisation. In other words, this is not merely a question of finance, it also refers to the inputs of the staff and volunteers, as well as various systems and structures that create efficiency and stability in the core activities. To facilitate the measurement of these resource components – while still providing a comprehensive picture of the organisation –

decisive and competent leadership has been identified as an indicator. Good management provides leadership and has the ability to make good use of the potential of the staff.
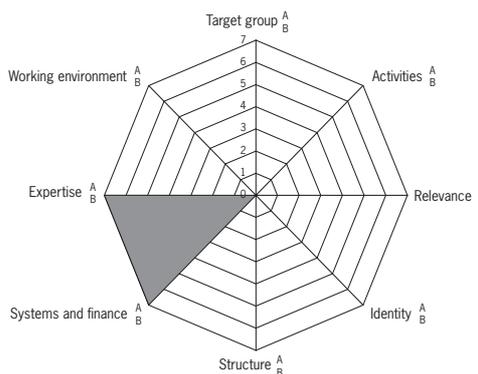
5. Right skills in relation to activities

A. The professional qualifications and experience of the staff
The persons working in the organisation – members, volunteers and employees – should, as far as possible, have the qualifications and experience necessary to achieve objectives and to implement plans. This is not merely a question of formal qualifications, it also includes what can be called tacit knowledge. The engagement of the target groups in activities is essential, not least to obtain information about their needs. It is important that there is awareness in the organisation of the importance of relevant qualifications and experience. This would be indicated by the existence of job descriptions (or similar) for the posts in the organisation, and that the staff working for the organisation actually have the qualifications and experience stated in the job descriptions. There are organisations, particularly small organisations, where the duties rotate among the members. They can nonetheless possess the requisite skills to perform the different duties. Job descriptions in organisations of this type may be slightly different, but nonetheless express the organisation's criteria in respect of qualifications and experience.

Ascertain whether the organisation has a recruitment strategy and selects personnel in accordance with existing, documented criteria.

Highest points are awarded to organisations that have documented job descriptions for all posts and which, in addition, have staff in place that fully meet the criteria of the job descriptions. Therefore, in the ideal situation, there are no vacancies and all members of staff have exactly the qualifications required.

Lowest points are awarded to organisations in which there are no documented requirements of qualifications and experience and that the skills possessed by the staff are unclear or irrelevant in relation to their working duties.

An intermediate situation is characterised by an ongoing discussion of requisite qualifications and experience and that initial attempts are being made to formulate criteria. The staff have qualifications and experience that are satisfactory for running activities.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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B. The ability of management

The ability of management is shown, for example, in its capacity to make good use of the skills and potential of the staff. This implies that management encourages the entire work force, women and men, to participate and develop. Other indicators of the ability of management are regular presence at staff meetings, knowledge of activities, and the existence of relevant plans for staff development that have been produced in consideration of individual and group requirements and from a gender equality perspective.

Highest points are awarded if the staff regard management as legitimate and give management their active support. Furthermore, there is a living plan for human resource development that is used and discussed. There are concrete examples of programmes for staff development that take both individual and group needs into consideration, and which also have a gender equality perspective.

Lowest points are awarded to organisations where management is not legitimate in the eyes of the staff or does not participate in activities. Furthermore, there are no plans for human resource development.

The intermediate situation is characterised by management that is visible, for example members of staff can refer to directives from management. There is no plan for human resource development, but the issue of staff development is on the agenda.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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6. Systems for financing and administration

A. Administration of financial resources

Crucial factors for the ability of an organisation to survive are the capacity to handle its financial dependence, and a realistic perception of what it can do within the framework of the resources it has. A highly developed capacity to handle financial dependence is accompanied by a determination to spread risks and to avoid one-sided dependence on one single financier. The organisation also plans the scope of activities in relation to its finances. Ascertain which, and how many, sources of finance the organisation has, and whether it is a question of donations, government grants, sales, project support etc. Examine also whether the organisation has a plan to reduce its dependence on external grants and whether existing financial resources are sufficient to implement planned activities.

Another aspect that reveals a great deal about the administration of financial resources in an organisation is its bookkeeping. A cash ledger in which expenditure and revenue are recorded regularly, and which permits regular checks on transactions, is a good start. Are there observable systems and routines for the bookkeeping of expenses and income (cash ledger) and of assets and liabilities? In an efficient bookkeeping system, for example, last month's transactions have been recorded in the books and are in good order. The existence of performance reports and annual accounts for the last few years is a further indication that the bookkeeping is in good order.

In certain countries, particularly those in which democracy is fragile or there is a dictatorship, the concept of double bookkeeping tends to have the meaning of registered and unregistered transactions. This can be necessary to avoid harassment and confiscation, but at the same time it increases the risk of corruption

Highest points are awarded when the organisation has guaranteed financing and, in all probability, several sources of finance. This makes the organisation minimally vulnerable. The organisation can also show that resources actually exist for ongoing and planned projects, as well as for regular activities. A bookkeeping system has been installed, is in good working order, and is used.

Lowest points are awarded when the organisation is barely managing to survive financially and receives funds from one financier who has started to direct activities. The organisation does not have a cash ledger. Nevertheless the organisation has extensive plans and ongoing projects that, if implemented, will require additional capital.

Characteristics of the intermediate situation can be that resources are available for projects, but only in the short term, and that no financing is available for basic administrative activities. The organisation is dependent on one financier, but anticipates that it may be possible to obtain financing from another source. A bookkeeping system is in place, but it is difficult to obtain an overall picture of the financial situation and financial trends.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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B. Administrative routines
Highly developed internal administrative systems and routines of various types are important components of a good organisation. Ascertain the organisation's routines for the systematic documentation of its activities: operating manuals, plans of operation, reports on operations, follow-ups and evaluations, job descriptions and contracts, registrations and contacts with the authorities etc. Are there, for example, transparent systems and routines that document knowledge and experience? These tend to enhance the expertise of the organisation and to make the organisation less vulnerable.

Highest points are awarded if the organisation has efficient administrative systems in which documents are filed systematically. Manuals have been produced on how documents shall be handled and there are routines to ensure, for example, that time margins are kept.

Lowest points are awarded if activities are not documented and any documents that do exist are not filed. The organisation's knowledge is "documented" in the heads of individuals.

An intermediate situation is characterised by the existence of an administrative document-handling system. However, the system does not function satisfactorily. Documents (for example reports) are presented, but with difficulties.

| 7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

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◆ Relations

The organisation's interaction with target groups and its working environment are important for its legitimacy. In the assessment of the organisation, the degree of support and acceptance that the organisation receives from its target groups is important, as well as whether it cooperates and conducts an active dialogue with the target group. The same applies to the organisation's interaction with its working environment and its legitimacy in the eyes of other actors, for example its active participation in different networks. The organisation's legitimacy in its own context affects, in turn, the organisation's strength and its output.
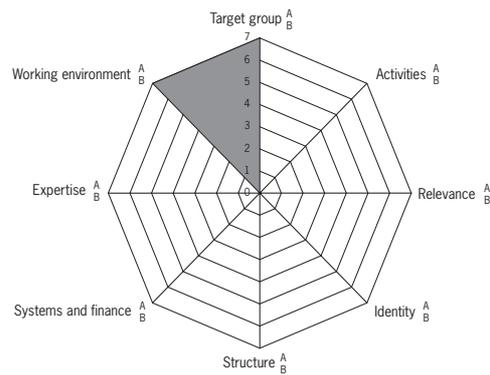
7. Target groups

A. Support and acceptance by target groups
The support of target groups can be seen in different ways. It must be possible, for example, to clearly define the target group(s). Does the organisation know which target group(s) it is working for/with? Another aspect is that the organisation is active in its relations with its target groups and that the target groups accept the organisation and its work, i.e. the organisation enjoys the trust of its target group(s).

Highest points are awarded if the organisation has documented how the target groups are defined. There are also clear indications that the organisation has legitimacy in the eyes of the target groups, for example persons from the target group contact the organisation's representatives, the organisation can show that it is appreciated by the target groups and so on.

Lowest points are awarded if the organisation is unknown. The organisation has difficulties in pointing out whom it works for, or the target group has little confidence in the organisation.

One characteristic of an intermediate situation is that, in practice, there are target groups that the organisation works with but they are not fully defined. The organisation is known among the target groups but there is some uncertainty as to what the organisation stands for.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Dialogue with the target groups

To enable the organisation's work with the target groups to develop, it is necessary that the organisation is aware of the needs of the target groups and of how its activities contribute to meeting these needs. Since it is often a question of qualitative work, where it can be difficult to specify the activities, it is even more important to analyse the depth and regularity of contacts. If the target groups are actively engaged in activities, it is easier to adapt activities to needs.

Ascertain whether the organisation encourages the continuous and broad participation of the target groups in its activities, and whether the target groups participate, in one way or another, in the planning, implementation and evaluation of activities etc. Give some concrete examples of activities designed to increase the participation of the target groups and when the target groups have influenced activities.

Highest points are awarded when the target groups are clearly involved in activities, particularly in both the planning and evaluation phases. This will also be reflected in the documentation. There are also clear indications that the target groups participate continuously in activities, and in discussions on activities.

Lowest points are awarded when the target groups do not participate in the planning and evaluation of activities. The organisation does not collect the points of view of the target groups, either since this is difficult or because the target groups are not considered to be sufficiently competent.

One characteristic of an intermediate situation is that the organisation is open to the points of view of the target groups, but there are no systematic activities to engage the target groups in activities.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

8. The working environment

A. Legitimacy for its work

The starting point for being recognised is being known. To enjoy legitimacy the organisation must communicate its message. Therefore, it is important that it has a communication and information strategy. However, its endeavours to inform and communicate must be placed in relation to its size. A small organisation does not have the same amount of funds at its disposal as a large popular movement. The organisation's legitimacy among other actors is equivalent to its really being recognised as an actor in its field of work.

Ascertain the knowledge and picture that other actors have of the organisation, how often it is referred to in the media or in other public contexts.

Highest points are awarded if a relevant information strategy is being used and that the organisation is mentioned and noticed in different contexts in the community. The organisation is a recognised actor in the community in its field of work.

Lowest points are awarded if the organisation is not known among actors in its working environment. The organisation has not yet produced a strategy, written or oral, for providing information about its existence.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Active participation in networks

The likelihood that the organisation will survive and have an impact is strongly related to how it tries to cooperate with others, in both the short and long term. Cooperation can be spontaneous or deliberate – strategic.

Ascertain whether there are concrete examples that the organisation is part of, and actively participates in, existing networks, and whether the organisation takes initiatives for coordination between organisations with similar objectives. Are there examples of joint activities, methods work, regular meetings with networks?

Highest points are awarded when the organisation participates actively in existing and functioning networks and also, whenever necessary, builds new relevant networks and strategic alliances.

Lowest points are awarded when the organisation competes with all other NGOs in its working field.

One characteristic of an intermediate position is that the organisation participates, but not regularly, in different networks. The organisation is a passive participant. It has not analysed the way in which it participates.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

Appendix 1

◆ Basic values and identity

1.   Identity

A. Formulation of the organisation's vision and mission

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Formulation of relevant strategies

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

2. Structure

A. Application of a clear division of duties

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Application of democratic rules

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

◆ Activities – output

3. Implementation

A. Planning for the implementation of activities

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Follow-up and learning from work done, output

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

4. Relevance

A. The content of activities correspond with the vision

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Working methods correspond with the vision

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

◆ Capacity

5. Qualifications and experience

A. The professional qualifications and experience of the staff

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. The ability of management

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

6. Systems

A. Administration of financial resources

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Administrative routines

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

◆ Relations

7. Target groups

A. Support and acceptance by target groups

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Dialogue with the target groups

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

8. The working environment

A. Legitimacy for its work

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

B. Participation in networks

7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Excellent	Very good	Good	Reasonable	Weak	Very weak	Non-existent

Comments

. . . .

Appendix 2

Dimensions	Actor Review 1	Actor Review 2	Actor Review 3	Plan of action
1. Basic values/Identity A. Vision and mission B. Strategies	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
2. Basic values/Structure A. Division of work B. Democracy	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
3. Activities/Implementation A. Planning B. Follow-up	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
4. Activities/Implementation A. Content of activities B. Working methods	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
5. Capacity/Expertise A. Staff B. Management	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
6. Capacity/Systems A. Finances B. Administration	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken

7. Relations/target group	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
A. Support and acceptance				
B. Dialogue				

2. Relations/ Working environment	Points	Points	Points	Actions taken
A. Legitimacy				
B. Participation				