How monitoring and evaluation systems support (or fail to support) organisations to improve their performance

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that, except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed. I acknowledge the support I have received for my research through the provision of an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship.

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Date: March 2018
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<tr>
<td>ACAC</td>
<td>Active Citizenship and Accountability</td>
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<td>ACFID</td>
<td>Australian Council for International Development</td>
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<td>ADB</td>
<td>Asian Development Bank</td>
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<td>AHW</td>
<td>At Home Week</td>
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<td>ANCP</td>
<td>Australian NGO Cooperation Program</td>
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<td>ANO</td>
<td>Australian National Office</td>
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<td>APR</td>
<td>Annual Plan and Review</td>
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<td>AR&amp;R</td>
<td>Annual Review and Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td>AusAID</td>
<td>Australian Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>BRICS</td>
<td>Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa</td>
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<tr>
<td>CAPF</td>
<td>Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework</td>
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<tr>
<td>EJ</td>
<td>Economic Justice</td>
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<td>ES</td>
<td>Essential Services</td>
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<tr>
<td>EPoC</td>
<td>Embodied, Power-conscious and Collective</td>
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<tr>
<td>CBO</td>
<td>Community Based Organisation</td>
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<td>CC</td>
<td>Climate Change</td>
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<td>CCCD</td>
<td>Child-Centred Community Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
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<td>CO</td>
<td>Country Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>CoP</td>
<td>Community of Practice</td>
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<td>CSO</td>
<td>Civil Society Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DET</td>
<td>Development Effectiveness Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>DFAT</td>
<td>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRM</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Management</td>
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<td>DRR</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction</td>
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<td>GE</td>
<td>Gender Equality</td>
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<td>GFS</td>
<td>Global Financial Crisis</td>
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<td>GJ</td>
<td>Gender Justice</td>
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<td>HR</td>
<td>Human Resource</td>
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<td>HRD</td>
<td>Human Resource Development</td>
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<td>HSU</td>
<td>Humanitarian Support Unit</td>
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<td>IH</td>
<td>International Headquarters</td>
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<td>IMF</td>
<td>International Monetary Fund</td>
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<td>INGO</td>
<td>International Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<td>IPS</td>
<td>International Programs Section</td>
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<tr>
<td>MDG</td>
<td>Millenium Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>M&amp;E</td>
<td>Monitoring and Evaluation</td>
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<td>MEL</td>
<td>Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIT</td>
<td>Massachusetts Institute of Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Government Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>National Office</td>
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<tr>
<td>NOPD</td>
<td>National Office Program Directors</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>OAU</td>
<td>Oxfam Australia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ODE</td>
<td>Office of Development Effectiveness</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>OECD DAC</td>
<td>Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development Development Assistance Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OI</td>
<td>Oxfam International</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ORID</td>
<td>Objective, Reflective, Interpretive and Decisional</td>
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<tr>
<td>PDU</td>
<td>Program Development Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>PET</td>
<td>Program Effectiveness Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>Doctor of Philosophy</td>
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<tr>
<td>PI</td>
<td>Plan International</td>
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<tr>
<td>PIA</td>
<td>Plan International Australia</td>
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<td>PMG</td>
<td>Program Management Group</td>
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<td>PMT</td>
<td>Program Management Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPO</td>
<td>Public Policy and Outreach</td>
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<td>PQU</td>
<td>Program Quality Unit</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAP</td>
<td>Reflective Annual Practice</td>
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<td>RCR</td>
<td>Rights and Community Resilience</td>
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<td>SDG</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>SIRUP</td>
<td>Strategic Investment Plan</td>
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<td>SMS</td>
<td>Single Management System</td>
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<td>SMT</td>
<td>Senior Management Team</td>
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<tr>
<td>ToC</td>
<td>Theory of Change</td>
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<td>UN</td>
<td>United Nations</td>
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<td>UNDP</td>
<td>United Nations Development Programme</td>
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<td>US</td>
<td>United States</td>
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<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>United States of America</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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<tr>
<td>WASH</td>
<td>Water, Sanitation and Hygiene</td>
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<td>WTO</td>
<td>World Trade Organisation</td>
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Abstract

Evaluation can be a useful tool for organisations to examine whether programs and policies work, and how they work for different people in different circumstances. The interest in evaluation is widespread, across sectors and types of organisations, and there is much evaluative activity and requirements for evaluation in international development. However, while evaluation can be useful, its effectiveness can be limited. Evaluations can be commissioned for political purposes, evaluation commissioners may not agree with findings or evaluation methods, resources to implement findings may be inadequate or findings may come too late – after the program or policy has ceased. Additionally, evaluations are generally conducted on single programs, while organisations now need to understand their effectiveness across multiple interventions or thematic areas. As a consequence, there has been a growing interest in building monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems to address these limitations (Liverani & Lundgren, 2007; Simister, 2016). The idea is that MEL systems draw from monitoring data and individual evaluations to reach conclusions about program and organisational effectiveness. However, there is a lack of clarity about how these MEL systems work or how they might work.

This thesis analyses the learning systems, a key part of the MEL system, of two Melbourne-based international non-government organisations (INGOs). The organisations set up and sanctioned staff to use the two learning systems in order to better understand and improve their practice, and for each organisation to encode relevant experience into improved policies and procedures. Both organisations
developed these systems in the context of an increased emphasis on the impact of aid and development assistance by global development institutions and Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) donors. Developing learning systems was one way the two INGOs increasingly focused on assessing and enhancing their development effectiveness in order to meet their own and their international donor expectations.

The thesis uses the Kirkpatrick model of training evaluation, alongside concepts of evaluation use, to assess these two learning systems, including their conception, structure, process and outcomes. The Kirkpatrick model investigates the effectiveness of training by examining outcomes across four levels. The first level is whether trainees find the training high quality and relevant, the second level is whether trainees learn, the third level is whether trainees implement their learning and the fourth level is whether the implementation of learning leads to an improvement in organisational results. The study finds that both systems were effective at levels 1 and 2. Staff valued the learning activities and reported learning from their involvement. However, the systems were less effective at converting learning into behaviour. That is, most staff did not change their practice because of what they had learned in the systems. And, given the lack of wide-scale change in practice, the organisational learning systems were unable to impact on organisational results.

The thesis argues that evaluation and learning needs to better support practice improvement and thereby increased organisational effectiveness to justify the resources it consumes. In order for MEL systems to support improvements in practice, they must separate learning-oriented evaluative and organisational
learning activity from upwards-focused accountability exercises. Learning oriented activity must be carried out using approaches and strategies that foster behaviour change. The model developed in the thesis, EPoC – Embodied, Power-conscious and Collective – comprises three learning approaches and associated strategies for evaluators and organisational learning facilitators to use when developing MEL systems. The EPoC approach to learning supports people to work through the implications for how what they learned will change how they behave rather than only focusing on transmitting knowledge. EPoC directly addresses power dynamics that affect how data are produced, shared and used rather than being blind to power imbalances and inequalities, particularly gendered and racial inequalities. EPoC acknowledges that all behaviour change in organisations involves groups of people. For this reason, EPoC understands learning as improved collaborative practice rather than individual cognitive change. The EPoC approach was developed through case studies of two INGO two learning systems and is most relevant to organisations that are working towards positive social change. The model can also be tested by organisations in other sectors working to improve performance, through supporting practitioners change their behaviour, for relevance.
Chapter 1: Introduction

How do organisations learn? And how can organisational learning help improve organisational results? Some of the earliest work done in response to these questions was by James G. March and Richard Cyert in the 1960s (1963). Interest in learning at an organizational or systemic level took off in the USA in the mid-1980s sparked by the rapid postwar growth of the Japanese economy (1950s–1980s), which took the world by surprise. US companies struggled to understand the success of Japan as it became a development model for the other countries of East Asia (Steger & Roy, 2010). Large-scale empirical research into Japanese manufacturing company success, which identified the importance of structurally embedded group learning, was driven by the need to better understand, and potentially replicate, new production and manufacturing systems which could deliver commercial benefits. The research efforts of the 1980s were led by the likes of James March and Barbara Levitt (1988), who described organisational learning as systems of encoding experience into routines, and Chris Argyris and Donald Schon (1978), who described the different types of learning required by individuals in order to improve organisational performance. These efforts were followed by new contributions in the early 1990s. John Seely Brown and Paul Duguid (1991) described the significant learning and innovation generated in informal communities-of-practice, and Peter Senge (1990) described five learning disciplines required to build a learning organisation.

Organisational learning, encompassing all systemically-connected collaborative learning experiences involving large groups of people bound to a single
goal-directed entity, is now understood, at a theoretical level, to be central to effectiveness, regardless of field or enterprise. However, this realisation has yet to fully work its way through different spheres of practice. One area or sector that requires strategic use of learning to achieve organisational aims is the international non-government development sector, broadly defined in this thesis as non-profit organisations established by citizens, and working at the international level to provide services and empower poor people (Vakil, 1997).

1.1 The research problem

International non-government organisations (INGOs), like governments, began to be more results oriented in the 1990s and 2000s, influenced by the wave of ‘new public management’. This mode of operation had taken the world’s state bureaucracies by storm in the 1980s and involved the introduction of neoliberal ideas to the public sector (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 39). For example, governments and citizens were increasingly asking INGOs to describe the changes they were making in the world (outcomes) rather than describing what they did (activities). INGOs needed to articulate the outcomes they were working towards, and develop systems to improve and measure progress towards those outcomes. Donors, national governments and INGOs developed a set of aspirational goals, the Millennium Development Goals (2000) and the subsequent Sustainable Development Goals (2015), and agreed to measure the delivery of aid delivered in pursuit of these goals. These international-level goals cascaded down into national and individual organisational goals and program targets.
However, despite the international agreement on shared development goals, there was no consensus on how performance in relation to these agreed goals and outcomes might be judged. That is, how would an INGO know if it was performing well? What would constitute evidence of effective practice? INGOS largely passed the task of better understanding and improving their performance to their evaluation units (Cordeiro, 2015; Kelly & Chapman, 2003). Staff within these units were responsible for developing systems and processes to collect, analyse and present information to help the INGO understand how it was performing and how it could improve.

However, INGO evaluation staff found little guidance in the literature to develop these systems. Most evaluation theorists either do not address evaluation use or address it in terms of specific individuals, rather than considering how groups of individuals or the whole organisation might use evaluation, as outlined in more detail in Chapter 2. Research by NGOs provides some guidance, for example Bruce Britton’s (1998, 2005) two volumes on learning in INGOS for the International NGO Training and Research Centre. Britton’s 2005 paper, ‘Organisational learning in NGOs: Creating the motive, means and opportunity’, provides a number of useful learning methods to be used at the individual and organisational levels. However, these two works are largely theoretical in nature, and lack practical examples and evidence of application of organisational learning systems in INGOS. For these reasons, INGOS in the 2000s were searching for models of organisational learning systems to help them better understand, improve and communicate their work.
1.2 Research aim, objectives and questions

This thesis sets out to understand how organisational learning contributed to improved development effectiveness in two Melbourne-based INGOs, Oxfam Australia and Plan International. Each of the two organisations is introduced briefly here, with more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

Oxfam is a development actor that works to transform structural relations that keep people in poverty. Oxfam Australia (hereafter OAU) is the Australian arm of Oxfam – a large international NGO headed by Oxfam International. Oxfam is not a single entity, but a federation of independent, national-level NGOs that work towards an agreed global strategy. OAU, an independent affiliate, is one of the 17 members of the international confederation working in more than 90 countries (Jayawickrama, 2012). At the time of the study, OAU was one of the largest international NGOs in Australia, employing 573 staff, 266 of whom were based in country offices, and had an annual budget of some A$70 million (OAU, 2011c).

The second of the two case study organisations is Plan International Australia (PIA). PIA is focused more narrowly on achieving the rights of the child, in contrast to OAU. PIA is smaller than OAU, with approximately 100 staff and an annual budget of some A$34 million at the time of the research. PIA, similar to OAU, is part of a global confederation that operates in 71 countries (PI, 2016).

The thesis research is grounded in practice, stemming from the researcher’s experience as an evaluator working in the development context. It started from the researcher’s practice-based enquiry into how INGOs use evaluations and whether this use makes any positive difference to their operations. It became clear after
engaging with both case study organisations that it would be necessary to study the learning systems that each organisation had created, which drew from individual evaluations, in order to make broader conclusions about sectoral or organisational effectiveness. As a consequence, the research focus shifted from evaluations to learning systems as the unit of analysis. That is, evaluations came to be seen as an input into the organisational learning, rather than the key focus of the study.

The thesis defines the systems under scrutiny as the learning systems that the OAU and PIA set up and sanctioned staff to use in order to better understand and improve their practice, and for each organisation to encode relevant experience into improved policies and procedures. The thesis aims to answer the three following research questions:

1. How did these case study organisational learning systems work?
2. What were the factors that supported and that inhibited learning in these organisational learning systems?
3. What was the effect, if any, of the organisational learning systems?

The case studies were selected because they are internationally significant non-government development actors and the challenges they face are common amongst INGOs in general. Additionally, the two case study organisations were situated in the favourable context of the time where funding support was available to support the development and implementation of the learning systems. The rationale and methods for selecting the two case study organisations are explained at length in Chapter 4. The research aims to inform the work of the case study
INGOs, and other INGOs where relevant, to improve their systems for understanding and improving development effectiveness.

1.3 Outline of the thesis

The thesis starts, in Chapter 2, by examining the existing ideas that INGOs had access to through evaluation use theory, which they drew from to establish organisational learning systems. The thesis then examines alternative perspectives to the evaluation use literature from the adult and organisational learning literatures in Chapter 3.

Chapter 4 describes the methodology of the research, which involves a comparative case study based on longitudinal placement in the two case study INGOs. The researcher conducted the study by collaborating with staff from each agency and ensured the research was based on a praxis framework, that is, a framework that combines theory and practice, to ensure findings are linked to practice. As explained in the chapter, the researcher used a framework drawing from the Kirkpatrick model (1998) for evaluating training and concepts of evaluation use to analyse the data gathered from the two case studies. The Kirkpatrick model provides a framework that analyses the success of training over time. The model assumes that for training to be successful it must convert from increases in individual knowledge to changed behaviour to improvements in organisational results. The research methods chapter describes at length the research rationale and underpinning principles, and the subsequent way the researcher designed and implemented the research, including details of the methods of data collection and analysis, research ethics and the study’s limitations.
The common historical context for each of the case studies needs to be taken into consideration if we are to appreciate the impacts of larger global, systemic changes on approaches to organisational learning. Chapter 5 presents a historical progression of the concept of development and its subsequent evaluation, ending with a focus on the period for this research and an explanation as to why each organisation studied connected learning to development effectiveness. Chapters 6 and 7 then present the case study findings – first from OAU and then from PIA.

Chapter 6 explains the organisational learning system of OAU, known as the ‘Hubs’, that were the subject of research in the OAU case study. These were the: Active Citizenship and Accountability Hub; Economic Justice Hub; Essential Services Hub; and Gender Justice Hub, each of which related to OAU’s organisational goals and its central commitments. Staff participated in the Hubs on a voluntary basis, where they identified and prioritised learning projects to better understand strategies being used and outcomes being achieved. Hub members generally responded positively to, and learned from, their interactions in the Hubs. Learning was supported by the self-directed nature of research/evaluation within the Hubs, translating tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, and bridging the different cultures of programming, campaigns and advocacy. Learning was inhibited by a focus on upwards-focused accountability reporting, learning being primarily thought of as formal learning, meetings being highly administrative and not facilitated as learning events, and technology tending to get in the way of learning. Crucially, the Hubs were not designed to support practice change. Where practice change did occur, this happened largely as an initiative of the individual Hub participant. As a consequence
of the lack of focus on practice improvement, the Hubs had limited impact on organisational results.

Chapter 7 describes PIA’s organisational learning system, the Reflective Annual Practice or RAP. The RAP was a system of collaborative enquiry that required participation by all program department staff (staff who managed international programs), in contrast to the voluntary participation in the OAU Hubs. Staff conducted enquiries in small groups on a self-determined topic that related to a senior management identified/mandated theme. Each enquiry was conducted over a year, with set inputs from RAP support staff and external consultants every quarter. Similar to the case of OAU’s Hubs, the findings reveal a positive reaction by participants to the RAP and indicate that participants learned from the RAP. Learning was supported by surfacing and using strategies to manage internal division and by drawing on external input. On the other hand, learning was inhibited by: the lack of a common definition of the term ‘effectiveness’; the tension between learning and demonstrating expertise; and the tension between output-oriented and process-oriented learning styles. However, similar to the case in the Hubs, there was limited evidence of participants applying their learning from the RAP in the workplace. Due to this lack of application, the impact of organisational learning on organisational results was limited and arguably ‘sub-optimal’.

Chapter 8 discusses the factors that supported learning and that inhibited practice change across both cases. The chapter illustrates the two common factors that supported learning across the cases: participants largely directed their own learning enquiry; and the organisational learning systems brought staff together from across organisational divides, who shared their expertise and built
relationships. The chapter also illustrates three factors that supported learning that were specific to each organisation. One of the RAP groups addressed power differences of rank and gender in their group to good learning effect, one of the external experts used in the RAP scaffolded the learning of group members well, and members of the Hubs were able to explicate their tacit knowledge in the Hub sessions. The chapter explains how each of the factors that supported learning has a strong theoretical foundation in the adult and organisational learning literatures, and argues for the utility of INGOs applying these as learning strategies in evaluations and organisational learning initiatives more broadly, given both the efficacy of these learning approaches in the case organisational learning systems and their theoretical basis.

Chapter 9 presents two solutions to address the sub-optimal application of learning in both case study INGOs. The chapter presents options from the evaluation literature to respond to the tension between learning and upward accountability in order to better enable practice change. Chapter 9 then presents a model, EPoC, for organisational learning that addresses the findings of the cases, as well as building on the strengths and addressing the limitations of existing models of organisational learning and evaluation use. This model, EPoC draws from Embodied, Power-conscious and Collective learning theory and is designed to better enable practice change. EPoC addresses the common factors across the case studies that inhibited practice change and, by extension, limited the impact on organisational results.
1.4 Significance of the study

The study is significant as it develops a model of organisational learning that addresses the problem faced by the two case study INGOs, and faced by organisations more broadly, of the gulf between learning and practice improvement. Bridging this gulf is critically important to organisations, as system-level improvement is necessarily based on improvements in staff practice. The model builds on the organisational learning literature, particularly Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) work on organisational knowledge generation and explicating tacit knowledge, as well as the adult learning literature, particularly Gonczi’s (2004) work on embodied learning and Friere’s (2007) critical pedagogy. The learnings from organisational and adult learning literatures are applied to address the specific problem encountered in the two case study INGOs, and have been developed for other INGOs and organisations to test for applicability.

The cases are particularly useful as they were conducted at a time where resources and external incentives for spending time and money on evaluation and learning were very high, as detailed further in Chapter 5. The difficulties experienced by the two case study organisations were in a situation where the usual constraints were reduced. That is, the evidence of some of the barriers to the organisational learning systems working well in these circumstances provides powerful evidence of a fundamental flaw in how they were conceptualised and implemented.

The findings are also significant as INGOs are important development actors that manage a large proportion of aid funds; for example, Riddell (2007, p. 9) estimates that in 2004 NGOs were responsible for some $23 billion of aid money or
over 30 per cent of all overseas development assistance. More recent data from the OECD confirms Riddell’s earlier findings (2013, p. 3). How staff in INGOs learn and practise, and how INGO organisational systems embed knowledge, are important given the significance of INGOs as development actors.

Finally, the thesis findings from the two organisational learning systems contribute to the discussion in evaluation theory on evaluation use. This thesis is one of the few empirical studies of evaluation use in organisational contexts and its findings in relation to factors that supported learning and that inhibited practice change contribute to the understanding of organisational use of evaluation in the manner of Cousins, Goh et al. (2014).
Chapter 2: Evaluation use theory and underpinning ideas on learning

2.1 Introduction

Evaluators tend to draw from the evaluation literature when responding to demands for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) systems. The most relevant stream of evaluation theory for evaluators tasked with developing MEL systems is what is known as theories of evaluation use. These theories help evaluators understand how evaluations are used and provide strategies to improve use. However, existing theories of evaluation use are limited in their applicability to organisational settings. This chapter examines the development of the idea of evaluation use, and describes the strengths and limitations of each understanding of use to the development of systems of collective learning.

Theories of evaluation use are underpinned by theories of learning. The chapter explains how theorists’ ideas of how evaluations are used parallel theories of how learning occurs. The match between evaluation use theory and learning theory is not perfect. But inquiry into the underpinning theories of learning helps us understand evaluation use theory better, including its limitations in relation to organisational learning.

2.2 Evaluation use theory

Evaluators have been interested in how the effect of evaluations since the growth of the profession in the 1960s and 1970s in the USA (Shadish, Cook, & Leviton, 1990). Evaluation became an important tool to account for large increases in federal
funding under the Johnson Administration’s Great Society programs aimed at eliminating poverty and racial injustice (Alkin & King, 2016, p. 571). Evaluators needed to distinguish themselves, and their profession of evaluation, from research in the early stages of the profession. For this reason, evaluators defined the purpose of evaluation as providing information for action and decision-making, in contrast to the intrinsic value or prospective uses of research (Weiss, 1977). Therefore the issue of utilisation has been important to evaluation since its inception. More recently the terminology and conception of utilisation has broadened to and on of influence. The historical progression of ideas is outlined in the following section.

**Individual use of evaluation**

Evaluation theorists developed their understanding of how evaluations have effect over time, progressively adding to the initial understanding of evaluation use, as depicted in Table 1 and explained in the following sections.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideas of use</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Key evaluation theorists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instrumental use</strong></td>
<td>Decision-makers use evaluation findings to change the object of the evaluation in some way</td>
<td>(Weiss, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conceptual use</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation findings help program staff understand the program in a new way</td>
<td>(Weiss, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Symbolic use</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation is used as an instrument of persuasion or to legitimate an existing position and gain adherents</td>
<td>(Weiss, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enlightenment use</strong></td>
<td>Evaluation findings add knowledge to the field and are used broadly</td>
<td>(Weiss, 1977)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process use</strong></td>
<td>Changes result from engaging in the evaluation process and learning to think evaluatively</td>
<td>(Patton, 1998)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational process use</strong></td>
<td>Individuals and teams in organisations learn through being involved in the evaluation process</td>
<td>(Bourgeois &amp; Cousins, 2013; Cousins et al., 2014; Preskill &amp; Torres, 1999a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational instrumental use</strong></td>
<td>Organisation uses evaluation as a basis for action and change through the implementation of evaluation recommendations</td>
<td>(Bourgeois &amp; Cousins, 2013; Cousins, Goh et al., 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational conceptual use</strong></td>
<td>Organisation uses evaluation information to clarify aspects of a program or highlight specific program results</td>
<td>(Bourgeois &amp; Cousins, 2013; Cousins, Goh et al., 2014)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organisational symbolic use</strong></td>
<td>Organisation uses evaluation information for reaffirmation of program worth, compliance with organisational or program sponsor mandates and the like</td>
<td>(Bourgeois &amp; Cousins, 2013; Cousins, Goh et al., 2014)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own work

Evaluation theorists first thought of evaluation use instrumentally – that is, that decision-makers use the evaluation findings to change the object of the evaluation in some way. However, Weiss’s empirical work on evaluation use showed
a wider range of uses. Weiss (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1977, pp. 226-228) developed a taxonomy that introduced three other types of evaluation use: conceptual, symbolic and enlightenment. Conceptual use is when the evaluation findings help program staff understand the program in a new way. Symbolic use is when an evaluation is used as an instrument of persuasion or to legitimate an existing position and gain adherents. Enlightenment use is when the evaluation findings add knowledge to the field and are used broadly.

Weiss’s work helped evaluators better understand the application of evaluation. However, this early work of Weiss is limited in its focus on individuals as the users of evaluations. Weiss (Weiss & Bucuvalas, 1977, p. 214) talked of evaluation use by individuals, particularly decision makers. In addition, Weiss (C. H. Weiss, 1998, p. 27) pointed out the range of other individuals who used evaluations: program sponsors, directors, practitioners and clients, and also those beyond the immediate program such as managers of similar programs, federal officials and foundation officers, policymakers, social scientists and other evaluators.

Weiss later (1998) acknowledged the limitations of this individual focus. She reflected on the concept of use and its limitations when giving her plenary address at the 1998 American Evaluation Association conference (C. H. Weiss, 1998). These reflections came ten years after her earlier plenary address and the subsequent debate between Weiss and Patton on the concept of use in the American Journal of Evaluation (Patton, 1988; Weiss, 1988a, 1988b). In her 1998 address, Weiss (1998) explained that the focus on individuals misses the constraints of the collective context in which individuals are situated. For example, in the organisational context an individual faces a range of internal constraints to using evaluations such as
funding, recruitment and promotion. Individuals also face external constraints such as tradition and regulation. However, despite recognising the importance of collective contexts, Weiss (1998) did not expand the concept of collective use in her later work, nor did she develop strategies for better facilitating evaluation use in organisational contexts.

Patton conducted an empirical study (Patton et al., 1977) into factors that affected use. He developed a range of strategies to increase the instrumental use of evaluations. To increase the likelihood of evaluations being used, Patton advocated identifying the primary intended use of the evaluation, primary intended users and the people who are committed to the evaluation and who will serve as internal champions to advance the evaluation process and findings, and basing all decisions about the evaluation around their primary intended uses (Patton, 2008, pp. 59-98).

Patton subsequently developed the concept of ‘process use’ based on feedback to earlier editions of his major work in this area, Utilization Focused Evaluation. Individuals noted the value of evaluation in terms of the influence of the process. Consequently, Patton (1998, p. 225) defined process use as the changes that result from engaging in the evaluation process and learning to think evaluatively. Process use became a major new definition of evaluation use that followed the definitions articulated by Weiss. Importantly, Patton’s concept of process use defines how evaluations are used but also serves as a strategy to increase evaluation use. That is, Patton advocated involving staff in evaluation processes to increase other uses of evaluation.

While Patton’s (1998) concept of process use expands evaluation theory’s understanding of use, it also remains focused on individuals. For example, in his
article ‘Discovering process use’ Patton talked about “ways of thinking” that evaluation cultivates which are individual capacities: clarity, specificity and focusing; being systematic and making assumptions explicit; operationalising program concepts, ideas and goals; distinguishing inputs and processes from outcomes; valuing empirical evidence; and separating statements of fact from interpretations and judgements (Patton, 1998, p. 226). While Patton made the comment that the impacts of process use may result in “changes in program or organisational procedures and culture”, this was not an area of focus or something that he advocated (Patton, 1998, p. 225). While Patton’s later work (2008) takes greater account of the organisational context of evaluation, the focus on organisations remains minor in comparison to individuals. Patton’s utilisation-focused work does not point to the important groups or units (for example, finance, strategy and human resources) and processes (recruitment, induction, planning and budgeting) within organisations that need to be taken into account when facilitating use.

Organisational use of evaluation

While most evaluation theorists have focused on individuals as the users of evaluation, a few theorists have developed an understanding of what it means for organisations to use evaluation (Cousins, Goh, Clark, & Lee, 2004; Preskill, 1994; S. F. Rallis & G. B. Rossman, 2000). These theorists have drawn from the process-use stream of the evaluation literature and on the organisational learning literature that impacted on a number of disciplines powerfully (this point is discussed further in Section 3.3). These theorists show how individuals and teams in organisations learn through being involved in the evaluation process. These authors suggest that
evaluation processes that are collaborative and guided by dialogue and reflection facilitate learning at the individual, team and organisational levels (Preskill & Torres, 1999b). The organisational perspective of these theorists broadens the existing concept of evaluation use. This perspective illuminates a broader set of interpersonal dynamics between people within an organisation and the organisational dynamics that are important to consider when trying to build commitment to evaluation use. The focus on organisational interpersonal dynamics is a shift from Patton’s focus on the dynamic between the evaluator and organisational staff or the intrapersonal development of individual staff through the evaluation process.

Preskill and Torres (1999a, 1999b, 1999c, 1999d, 2001) have written extensively on the relationship between evaluation, learning and organisational development. Their writing has focused attention on the contexts of evaluation, and calls on evaluators to take account of an organisation’s history and resultant culture and values. To increase use, evaluators must determine the kinds of data that are “believable” within the organisation’s changing culture (Preskill, 1991, p. 11). Preskill and Torres’s concept of organisational process use is that evaluative enquiry contributes to learning (Preskill & Torres, 1999a). In their view, evaluative enquiry sparks learning at the individual, team and organisation levels (Preskill & Torres, 2000). According to Preskill and Torres (1999a, p. 43) there are seven benefits to individuals and team members from engaging in evaluative activity, as outlined below. Individuals and team members might:

(1) better understand how their actions affect other areas of the organisation, (2) ask more questions than give solutions/answers, (3)
develop a greater sense of personal accountability and responsibility for the organisation’s outcomes, (4) act more consultatively, (5) be more likely to ask for help, (6) use information to act, and (7) be more willing to share the work that needs to be done.

More recently, a number of theorists have mapped the ways organisations use evaluation in relation to how individuals use evaluation (e.g., Cousins et al., 2004; Mark & Henry, 2004; Shulha & Cousins, 1997). For example, Cousins et al. (2014, pp. 16-17) map out evaluation use according to three of Weiss’s (1977) categories as well as Patton’s (1998) concept of process use:

- Instrumental uses as decision support, whether at the level of program disposition (e.g., termination, continuance and expansion) or program revision for improvement
- Conceptual or educational uses reflected by learning and discovery associated with the program itself or the effects (intended, unintended) that it is having
- Symbolic or persuasive uses, such as reaffirmation of program worth, compliance with organisational or program sponsor mandates and the like
- Process use, influence and use in organisations arising from teams of people being involved in evaluation processes.

The work of this stream of theorists is helpful in broadening evaluators’ understanding of how organisations use evaluations. However, this perspective is limited by the normative perspective of evaluation that these theorists hold. They assume that evaluation is good and that more evaluation is better. For example, Preskill and Torres (1999b, p. 2) argue that evaluative enquiry is an avenue for
individual and organisational growth and development. Rossman and Rallis (2000, p. 81) saw evaluation’s purpose as influencing the fair and equitable distribution of social goods and fostering a more civil society. Cousins, Goh, Elliott and Bourgeois (2014, p. 18) see building capacity to perform and use evaluation as helping organisations become learning organisations (Senge, 1990). 

This normative perspective does not consider how evaluations may remain unused or be misused. This normative perspective means that these theorists do not discuss examples such as organisations commissioning an evaluation for publicity only, using evaluations to avoid taking responsibility or selectively reporting results. This lack of engagement with the ways organisations might not use or might misuse evaluations does not equip evaluators well to deal with these situations.

Another limitation of the existing concept of organisational use is that these theorists view the organisation and the people within it as rational. The organisation is assumed to take decisions with full information, enabling it to choose the best solution among alternatives to reach its objectives (Schaumburg-Muller, 2005, p. 211). They do not examine the roles of power and politics in organisational evaluation conduct and use. For example, when discussing how to facilitate dialogue, Preskill and Torres (1999b, p. 2) argue that “undiscussable” issues can be addressed in an open and honest way if dialogue is supported by the organisation’s infrastructure. There was no analysis of the way power can impact on whether forums are convened, and how differences in gender, race and rank can impact on whether issues are raised and how they are discussed. This thesis has the potential to offer some analysis in this regard, discussed further in the findings and implications chapters.
Evaluation influence

Evaluation use theory has recently been expanded by the construct of evaluation influence. Kirkhart (2000) developed the concept of evaluation influence in response to the limited scope and language of the concepts of evaluation utilisation and evaluation use. She argues that ‘influence’ is a broader term than either ‘utilisation’ or ‘use’ and takes three important dimensions into account: intention, source and time (Kirkhart, 2000, p. 7). This framework allows evaluators to examine whether an evaluation has influenced in intended or unintended ways; and whether this influence has been stimulated by the evaluation results or process; and has occurred during, straight after or far into the future after an evaluation. Kirkhart’s framework, illustrated in Figure 1, encompasses the idea of process use. However, it augments, rather than overrides, the previously established categories of evaluation use: instrumental, conceptual, symbolic and enlightenment. That is, these categories still usefully describe the process by which evaluations are used (or have influence) and sit alongside Kirkhart’s dimensions of influence, source and time of evaluation influence.
Mark and Henry (2004) developed the concept of evaluation influence further by identifying what they describe as the “mechanisms” through which influence occurs, as shown in Figure 2. The figure itemises mechanisms of evaluation influence. The authors identify four types of influence: (1) general; (2) cognitive and affective; (3) motivational; and (4) behavioural. Their work identified a number of mechanisms that mediate each type of influence at the individual, interpersonal (between individuals) and collective levels. For example, an individual can be influenced by an evaluation elaborating on an issue. As another example, a collective can have its behaviour influenced through program continuation, change or cessation brought about by an evaluation.
Mark and Henry’s conceptualisation of evaluation influence relates to the existing concepts of evaluation use that have been discussed so far, as depicted in Table 2. Instrumental use relates to behavioural influence. Conceptual use relates to cognitive and affective influence at the individual and interpersonal levels. Symbolic use relates to justification and ritualism, which are types of general influence. Enlightenment use relates to cognitive and affective influence at the collective level. Where Mark and Henry have added to the existing conceptualisations is through the concept of motivational influence, which has no equivalent definition of evaluation use. This is an important new mechanism of influence that the authors have identified.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concept of evaluation use</th>
<th>Concept of evaluation influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instrumental use</td>
<td>Behavioural influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conceptual use</td>
<td>Individual and interpersonal cognitive and affective influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbolic use</td>
<td>General influence (specifically justification and ritualism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process use</td>
<td>Source of influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enlightenment use</td>
<td>Collective cognitive and affective influence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Motivational influence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own work

Mark and Henry (2004) contextualise the levels and mechanisms of influence within a larger program logic for evaluation use, as shown in Figure 3. The logic allows us to conceive how evaluation inputs, activities and outputs lead first to general mechanisms, which then lead to cognitive/affective, motivational and/or behavioural mechanisms, which in turn lead to the long-term outcome of social betterment. Mark and Henry’s evaluation program logic also noted that the evaluation context and contingencies in the environment will have an impact on the evaluation.
The concept of evaluation influence broadens the concept of evaluation use. It helps evaluators consider that evaluations may be used in ways that they intended or not, now or into the future. The new factors of evaluation influence – intention and timing – can sit alongside the established considerations of source of influence. That is, evaluation use theory has established that both the process of evaluation as well as the findings can be used or have influence.
However, the concept of evaluation influence, as with the concept of evaluation use, is limited in the lack of attention often given to the organisational context in which evaluation occurs. For example, Kirkhart’s framework is focused specifically on evaluation. There is no mention of organisational context or culture, or the ways they diminish or negate evaluation’s influence. Similarly, Mark and Henry’s framework has a primary focus on the evaluation and only pays surface attention to the organisational context and setting. Mark and Henry (2004) themselves note this as a limitation to their framework. However, they posit that the complexities of the organisation are represented by the ‘Decision/policy setting’ box and the ‘Contingencies’ box in Figure 3. While the framework does point to the evaluation context or contingencies in the environment, the assumption of the framework for practitioners is that, by improving the evaluation activity and output attributes, evaluators will contribute to better intermediate and long-term outcomes. There is no attention to managing the decision or policy settings or environmental contingencies on the part of the evaluator.

2.3 Learning theories that underpin evaluation use theory

Evaluation use theory has developed progressively over time, as outlined in the section above. This development has been underpinned by changing conceptions of learning encapsulated in the three main learning theories: behaviourism, cognitivism and constructionism. Each learning theory and the parallels to evaluation use theory are outlined in this section.
Behaviourism: Learning as stimulus to an external response

Behaviourism is a well-known orientation to learning that was developed in the early decades of the 20th century (Merriam, Caffafella, & Baumgartner, 2007). Behaviourism encompasses a number of individual theories, including the work of Watson, Thorndike, Tolman, Guthrie, Hull and Skinner (Ormrod, 2008). Behaviourist psychology and learning theory are based on the proposition that all behaviour is learned through conditioning processes that are external to the individual (Harris & White, 2013). A behaviourist orientation to learning holds three basic assumptions: that learning is determined by the elements in the environment, not by the individual learner; that reinforcement is central to explaining the learning process; and that observable behaviour, rather than internal thought processes, provides the evidence of learning (Merriam, Caffafella, et al., 2007). Behaviourist learning theory makes use of conditioning, by providing rewards and punishments, for specific changes to behaviour (Harris & White, 2013).

As a consequence of behaviourism’s popularity, evaluation use was first defined instrumentally, in the 1960s, when evaluation was being established as a profession. This formative period of evaluation was marked by evaluation theorists distinguishing evaluation from research. Part of the logic for this distinction of evaluation from research was that evaluation should lead to action (Alkin & Coyle, 1988; Weiss, 1972). However, this distinction between evaluation and research has broken down, notably with the emergence of action research and other models of process improvement.

The instrumental conception of evaluation use parallels the behaviourist approach to learning. For example, the instrumental view of evaluation use focuses
on the evaluation findings – an element external to the individual – as the learning prompt. Another parallel between the instrumental view and the behaviourist approach is the focus on behaviour change as the evidence of evaluation use. The instrumental view argues that evaluations should lead to immediate and specific actions, particularly decision-making or program improvement (Mark & Henry, 2004, p. 294).

**Cognitivism: Developmental stages**

Cognitivist learning theories came after behaviourist theories and arose from an intellectual rejection of the latter’s deterministic conclusions. Theorists in the cognitivist school, for example Piaget (1929), Bandura (1975) and Bruner (1966), take a developmental approach: outlining stages of cognitive development and the alignment between these stages and ways of learning. A major difference between cognitivists and behaviourists is the locus of control over the learning activity. For cognitivists, control lies with the individual learner; for behaviourists, control lies with the environment. This shift to the individual’s internal psychological processes is characteristic of cognitivist-oriented learning theories (Merriam, Caffafella, and Baumgartner, 2007).

The ideas of conceptual and enlightenment use of evaluation, defined in Section 2.2, parallel the cognitivist approach to learning. As with cognitivism, conceptual use and enlightenment use focus on the learner and the shifts in understanding of individuals over time. Using an evaluation conceptually or for enlightenment means that evaluation will lead to changed understandings on the
part of those who read evaluation reports. These changes can be at the individual level (conceptual use) or more broadly (enlightenment use).

**Constructivism: The importance of other people and context in learning**

A constructivist stance extends the cognitivist’s idea of the individual’s control over learning. Constructivists see learning as a process of individuals or collectives constructing meaning. Individual constructivism involves individuals building or constructing their own idea or meaning of concepts or events, based on current and past experience (Sullivan, 2009). The social constructivist views meaning-making, in contrast, as a process of collaborative enquiry (Gergen, 1999). Collaborative enquiry is a social or communal dialogic process in which individuals share findings, question or debate one another, and collaborate to accomplish a task (Sullivan, 2009).

Socioculturalists extend the ideas of social constructivists by showing how learning is embedded in the history, culture and associated understandings of each particular context. Socioculturalists show how learning can be supported by expert others through concepts such as the “zone of proximal development” (Vygotsky, 1982, p. 117) and “scaffolding” (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The zone of proximal development explains how children develop and are able to do things they did not know how to do independently through support from adults who are familiar with these activities (Vygotsky, 1982, p. 117). Adults scaffold the learning of children by providing support when they need it and retract this support as children are able to accomplish these tasks themselves (Berk & Winsler, 1995). The concept of process use parallels the constructivist approach.
Process-use theorists see evaluation as a process where staff construct meaning alongside evaluators, as discussed in Section 2.2. Table 3 summarises the three key orientations to learning and the parallels between learning and evaluation use theory.

**Table 3: Orientations to learning and parallels between learning and evaluation use theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aspect</th>
<th>Behaviourist learning theory</th>
<th>Cognitivist learning theory</th>
<th>Constructivist learning theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Parallel to concepts of</strong></td>
<td>Instrumental use</td>
<td>Conceptual and enlightenment use</td>
<td>Process use</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>evaluation use</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose of</strong></td>
<td>Changes in programs and policy</td>
<td>Deeper technical knowledge of programming staff to change programs immediately or into the future</td>
<td>Developed capacity and skills of programming staff through involvement in the evaluation process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>evaluation</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>View of the</strong></td>
<td>Change in behaviour</td>
<td>Information processing (including insight, memory, perception, metacognition)</td>
<td>Construction of meaning from experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>evaluation change process</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluator’s role</strong></td>
<td>Arrangement of evaluation report to elicit desired response</td>
<td>Structuring content of evaluation report to relate to stage of program staff or general knowledge level in the field</td>
<td>Facilitating and negotiating meaning-making with staff</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author’s own work*

While there are parallels between evaluation use theory and learning theory, as outlined above, there is no perfect fit. For example, instrumental use could relate to cognitive rather than behavioural theories of learning. In contrast, a behaviourist view of learning through evaluation would focus on patterns of reward and
punishment. Frequent feedback to people from monitoring systems could reward effective practices and encourage their continuation. Equally, there is no place for the symbolic use of evaluation in Table 3. However, there is enough overlap between learning theory and concepts of evaluation use to see that evaluation-use theorists drew from the ideas of learning which were available at the time. While these learning theories have been useful to evaluation-use theorists, they are limited in that they have been applied primarily to education contexts with a primary focus on the development of children. In contrast, evaluation is conducted in organisational contexts where the focus is on adults. For this reason, the next chapter explores adult learning and organisational learning theory for insights into improving evaluation use.

2.4 Conclusion

The chapter started by presenting concepts from evaluation theory of evaluation use and influence. Evaluation theory has understood use as instrumental, conceptual, symbolic and enlightening. It has understood that both evaluation findings and processes are used. Theorists have more recently expanded the concept of use to one of influence. Evaluation influence can be intended or unintended and it can occur during, directly after or a long time after an evaluation. There are a number of mechanisms that can facilitate evaluation influence at the individual, interpersonal and collective levels. These mechanisms influence cognition, motivation or behaviour towards the ultimate goal of evaluation influence: social betterment.

The chapter has outlined how evaluation use theory draws from learning theory in its assumptions about learning and change. It has examined the parallel
development of evaluation use theory and learning theory. In reviewing the three main schools of learning, it has become clear that early discussions of instrumental evaluation use were dominated by behaviourism. Evaluators thought that the final product of an evaluation – the report – would induce behaviour change. Evaluation theory’s understanding of use broadened as studies found that instrumental use was not evident. Rather, evaluation use was often conceptual (for either an individual or broader group – enlightenment) as well symbolic. Here, cognitive learning theory and the understanding of heuristics are important. Process use is largely informed by constructivist learning theory, as is the concept of evaluation as organisational learning. What is consistent within these approaches, however, is the focus on the evaluation as the learning prompt.

What is less evident in evaluation theory is the social constructivist approach to learning. Here, groups of people work together with objects in their work environment. In this view, evaluation is one learning prompt among many. Additionally, adult learning and organisational learning theories have not been drawn on by evaluation theory, but have the potential to offer insights into how evaluations can better be used. These theories are explored in the next chapter.
3. Alternative ideas on learning from adult learning and organisational learning theories

3.1 Alternative ideas on learning from adult learning theory

The previous chapter mapped out theories of learning that evaluation use theorists have drawn on. In doing so, it became clear that these theories of learning are focused primarily on children. The subject of research in this thesis, by contrast, is adult and organisational learning in the INGO sector. For that reason, it is important to recognise how these learning needs differ with age or maturity. Theories of adult learning, specifically andragogy and self-directed learning, allow us to focus attention on the specific learning needs of adults as opposed to children. These theories are more relevant to the examination of INGOs, which are comprised of highly motivated people with a heightened level of commitment to mission and who are very self-directed. Adult learning theory provides a valuable map for exploring how these people learn, individually and as members of a team.

From the 1970s onwards, educators started to focus on the characteristics of adults and the specific ways that they learn. Spurred by new research at the time that showed humans continue to learn into adulthood, foundational models of andragogy and self-directed learning differentiated adult learning from the learning of children (Merriam, 2001b). Andragogy is concerned with why and how adults learn, while self-directed learning examines a particular way that adults learn in depth. This chapter explains both theories, which are later examined for relevance to the case study findings.

In addition, the chapter outlines three key criticisms of adult learning that must be considered in any application: the privileging of cognitive and rational ways
of knowing; privileging of Western approaches; and blindness to power and structural dynamics (Merriam, Caffarella, et al., 2007). As this thesis contends, these dynamic and exterior factors also have a bearing upon how adults learn, and thus how professionals working in INGOs assimilate and then apply the process and products of evaluation.

**Andragogy: A focus on why and how adults learn**

Why do adults learn? Malcolm Knowles (1973), the original andragogy theorist, outlined two reasons that adults choose to learn. First, adults learn in order to assume a degree of control over their life situations. This is known as the ‘orientation to learning’ principle (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2005, p. 3). Second, adults learn because of their own internal motivations, rather than external pressures. This is known as the ‘motivation to learn’ principle (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 3). These two principles paint a vastly different picture to the one where adults learn in response to learning prompts (behaviourism), or ‘automatically’ during stages of conceptual advancement (cognitivism) or to construct meaning (constructivism). The picture provided by these two principles of andragogy, that adults learn in order to deal with life situations and problems through intrinsic motivations, is much more attuned to the situation of INGO workplaces and community contexts – where staff are continually encountering problems that need to be solved.

Andragogy is also concerned with how adults learn and Knowles (1973) outlined four ways that adults learn. First, an adult must be ready to learn – the ‘readiness’ principle. An adult becomes ready to learn in relation to the timing of
real-life situations, rather than arbitrary timeframes (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 3).

Second, adults seek to learn things that are related to their learning goal. The rationale for learning any content that does not clearly relate to their learning goal must be clarified to adults. This is known as the ‘learner’s need to know’ principle (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 3). Third, adults’ self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and lives needs to be reinforced in any learning situation in order for adults to persist. This is the ‘self-concept of the learner’ principle (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 3). Finally, adult learners come into a learning situation with experience that needs to be tapped into and managed – that is, learners must examine their own mental habits, biases and presuppositions. This is the ‘prior experience of the learner’ principle (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 3). These principles draw attention to the internal timeframes and learning prompts of adults, recognising that content must be clearly related to adults’ learning goals, pointing to the need to treat learners as adults rather than infantilising them, and asking adults to both draw from and interrogate their own experience. Logically, therefore, if organisational learning is to occur through use of evaluations as an important input, the learning system and evaluations themselves should be attuned to the learning motivations and orientations of individual staff.

While andragogy outlines principles that are common in adult learners, it does not assume that all adults are the same. Rather, contemporary andragogy acknowledges that there are a variety of factors that affect adult learning in any situation. Contemporary approaches focus on the continuum between student-directed and teacher-directed learning, rather than continuing to focus on the differences between adults and children. Contemporary andragogy acknowledges
that each individual learner is different, individual goals and purposes of learning are
different, and each situation is different. Student-directed learning can be
appropriate for either adults or children, depending on the situation and the
experience of the student (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The question
to be considered in the context of this thesis is: To what extent do evaluators take
these factors into consideration?

It is unfortunate that evaluation use theorists do not draw from adult
learning theory, given the insight the theory brings regarding why and how adults
learn. Evaluation use theory is primarily based on a teacher-directed – or evaluator-
directed – learning model that does not pay attention to the specific learning needs
of adults. None of the major theorists in the field of evaluation use (Alkin, Cousins,
King, Patton, Shulha, Weiss) discuss the characteristics of adults as learners, nor how
to best engage adults in the process of evaluation. In contrast, this thesis tests the
applicability of adult learning theory to encouraging INGO staff engagement in
evaluation and learning processes.

Self-directed learning

Effective evaluation use is most likely to occur when there is strong engagement in
the evaluation process and/or buy-in to evaluation findings and recommendations.
From the perspective of self-directed learning theory, it can be argued that this is
only possible where staff are able to engage in deliberate and self-generated
processes of gaining knowledge and skills that change them in some way (Tough,
1967, 1971). Self-directed learning theory was developed through empirical studies
in the 1970s that showed almost all adults undertake at least one or two major
learning efforts in a year and some individuals undertake as many as 15 or 20. Adults spend an average of 700 hours a year devoted to learning efforts (Tough, 1971, p. 4). Self-directed learning theory builds on the insights provided by andragogy to assert that adults take themselves through learning cycles in order to change themselves and are doing this continuously each year. These cycles include learning needs analysis, resource identification and self-evaluation of learning outcomes (Tough, 1967, pp. 73-75). The implications of this insight for evaluation use are manifold.

Like andragogy, contemporary self-directed learning theory understands that a learner’s autonomy is likely to vary from situation to situation, rather than being an ongoing characteristic of any adult learner (Candy, 1991). An adult who has been self-directed in one situation may not be in another situation (Merriam, 2001a). Equally, self-directed learning theory can apply to children as it does to adults.

Evaluation use theory, as noted above, assumes the evaluator and the evaluation as the learning prompt. In contrast, self-directed learning theory demonstrates that adults are engaged in their own self-directed learning processes. Self-directed learning theory allows evaluators to see the self-directed learning activities that staff may already be engaged in, rather than only considering how to involve staff in evaluative activities. Seeing these activities is the first step to connecting to them – allowing the evaluator to create greater engagement and build on existing knowledge. This is particularly important in the INGO context, which is comprised of self-directed and highly motivated adults who need to be given guidance on how to translate learning into outcomes for their organisation.
Critiques of adult learning

Any application of adult learning theories must pay attention to its limitations in addition to its strengths. Adult learning theory and the adult learning models discussed above have three main limitations that are discussed in this section (Merriam, Caffarella, et al., 2007). First, these theories ignore affective and emotional aspects of the learning process. Second, they ignore context – particularly existing power relations and structures. And third, theories of adult learning claim to be universal while only drawing from the Western tradition. The latter point is crucial when evaluating the work of organisations that operate in international and multicultural contexts, such as OAU and PIA.

Models of adult learning privilege cognitive and rational ways of knowing

Each of the models introduced above pictures learning as a rational, reflective or cognitive activity (Merriam, 2001a). In this way, these models ignore the affective and emotional aspects of the learning process. There is no mention of other types of learning, including embodied or somatic learning and narrative.

Embodied learning theory contrasts with the disembodied understanding of learning in Cartesian philosophy, which separates mind from body, nature from culture and reason from emotion. The separation of mind from body continues to dominate Western European education discourse, meaning knowledge and learning are conducted in what feminists have named a framework of ‘abstract masculinity’, where legitimate knowledge is seen as universal, applying to all times and places (Harstock, 2012, p. 296). Producing knowledge, as Michelson (1998) puts it, requires transcending the “specific sites at which human beings are always located – their
own bodies, their social context, and their historical moment – an act of both corporeal and social dismemberment” (Michelson, 1998, p. 218).

Embodied learning theory recognises learning as an embodied and emotional activity, rather than only a cognitive, rational or ‘disembodied’ activity. For example, Matthews (1998) defines embodied learning as “an experiential knowing that involves sense, precept, and mind/body action and reaction – a knowing, feeling, and acting” (Matthews, 1998, p. 236). John Dewey talks of the “unity” of the human being and critiques the dualism of the Cartesian subject (J. Dewey, 2008, p. 322). Recent research indicates that emotions are not peripheral to reason and cognition, but crucially connected to rational thinking processes (Damasio, 2005). For example, if learners make an emotional connection to the curriculum, their learning is much richer and deeper (Freire & Freire 1997; Beckett & Hager 2002; Beckett & Morris 2003; Hunter 2004). The importance, yet absence, of emotion from learning theory has been critiqued by feminists for the association with irrationality and the gendered stereotype of women as emotional and irrational beings (Spelman, 2012, p. 17). Adding an understanding of how humans learn through the body and emotions into adult learning can help to engage with the lived experiences and motivations of adult learners engaged in evaluations and organisational learning.

**Models of adult learning do not question existing power relations and structures**

Most adult learning theorists do not acknowledge how each person is influenced by existing patterns of power and inequality embedded in social institutions, culture and society, and how these patterns are reproduced in each learning interaction (Merriam, 2001b). Mainstream adult learning theory is usefully informed by more
critical perspectives, including critical pedagogy, feminist theory and critical race theory. For example, Friere’s (2007) critical pedagogy takes account of patterns of power and oppression, and the ways in which knowledge production and reproduction tie into these patterns. Friere questions existing patterns of power and oppression, and considers what is needed to change these patterns.

Feminist theory helps make visible the gendered inequality between and within professions (Acker, 2006). Despite their altruistic missions, development and humanitarian INGOs can perpetuate power imbalances and gendered or racialised stereotypes through their internal hierarchies. For example, using the lens of feminist theory it can be argued that development and humanitarian affairs is a feminised occupation which is less well remunerated than masculine professions (WGEA, 2014) and that women tend to work part-time and at lower levels within non-government organisational structures (WGEA, 2014).

Critical race theory helps to surface the racial inequality inherent in ‘head office’ and ‘national office’ relations, where the head office and national office staff are often drawn from different racial groups (Delgado & Stefancic, 2012). In this approach, questions are raised about the relative status of one racial group as the ‘provider’ of resources and expertise and another racial group as the ‘beneficiary’. Critical race theory can also be applied when analysing intra-organisational politics or examining questions on why, for example, black employees are consistently under-preferenced during employment, retention and justice decisions in the World Bank (Walden & Edwards, 2009). Additionally, issues of gender and race do not stand on their own, but intersect. It is important to consider the compounding of
inequality with the intersection of a number of marginalised identities that inform power relations within organisations.

**Models of adult learning privilege Western perspectives**

Each of the models of adult learning introduced is centred in a Western perspective. In these models, the learner is independent, learning is an isolated and individual activity, the emphasis is on cognitive approaches and the bias is towards formal learning (Merriam, Caffafella, et al., 2007). The non-Western perspective is rarely introduced in adult learning texts, nor is the bias of the Western perspective explicated. This is a significant omission when considering applying adult learning principles to evaluation in a development context, given the cultural diversity in field contexts as well as within contemporary organisational settings.

### 3.2 Alternative ideas on learning from organisational learning theory

Evaluation use theory is based on one set of assumptions about organisational learning that limits the understanding of learning in organisational contexts. Instead, this section outlines three ideas that augment the contributions from adult learning theory explained in the previous section. Specifically, this section outlines how organisational learning theories help to unpack the learning agent, what learning in organisations looks like and what organisational learning is for. In addition, the section outlines the limitations to organisational learning that must be considered in any application. These insights and limitations will be used to analyse the case study findings.
The learner in organisational learning

Some organisational learning theorists, and most evaluation use theorists, focus on individuals or groups of individuals as the agents within organisations that learn (Argyris & Schön, 1978). These theorists emphasise that it is only individuals who can learn and change their behaviour. Some of them see organisational learning occurring through social interactions in addition to individuals learning on their own (J. S. Brown & Duguid, 2001). However, consistent among these different views is the primary focus on the individual learning agent, whether singular or in groups.

Individuals are clearly central to organisational learning and evaluation use. Patton’s research on the need to identify users as well as champions to ensure evaluations are used evidences this perspective (2008). This research demonstrates the necessity of identifying those specific individuals who need to know specific things at specific times. However, the conception of the learning agent can be augmented by an understanding of the organisation as the learner. Theorists with this focus describe how organisations embed learning (Levinthal & March, 1993) via systems that acquire, interpret, distribute and store information within the organisation (Wang & Ahmed, 2003). In this view, organisational learning occurs through changed processes and is documented and stored within procedures, which then become part of the ‘embedded wisdom’ of the organisation.

Few evaluation use theorists have focused on the organisation, describing evaluation use at the organisational level in addition to the existing focus on individuals and teams. One example is Owen and Lambert (1995), who take a systems approach to evaluations in organisational contexts. The researchers argue for evaluators to have access to parts of the organization beyond the program or set
of programs that are the focus of the evaluation (Owen & Lambert, 1995, p. 248). This access is needed to identify program consequences beyond system boundaries and influence strategic decision-making in the organization. Evaluation use theory is based on one set of assumptions about learning that limits the understanding of learning in organisational contexts. To address this shortcoming, this section outlines three ideas that augment the contributions from adult learning theory explained in the previous section. Specifically, this section outlines how organisational learning theories help to unpack the learning agent, what learning in organisations looks like and what learning is for in these contexts. In addition, the section outlines the limitations to learning that must be considered in any application of learning theory in an organisational setting. These insights will be used to analyse the case study findings.

Owen and Lambert’s view is that organisations must consider reform of policies and structures, as well as individual programs, if they wish to engage in long-term change. Their perspective draws from the organisational focus of organisational learning described above. This perspective helps us see that learning from evaluations must be embedded into both organisational systems and procedures, as well as individual programs, for it to have an effect at the organisational level.

This study assumes that individual learning and team learning are necessary but not sufficient for organisational learning. In addition, any individual or team learning must be embedded in ongoing organisational systems and procedures.
**What organisational learning looks like**

Some organisational learning theorists focus on knowledge as a product that involves acquisition, dissemination, refinement, creation and implementation (Lyles & Schwenk, 1992). This perspective sees organisational learning as requiring diverse information which can then be shared and exploited in the form of ‘knowledge’ (Fiol & Lyles, 1985). The product perspective of organisational knowledge sees knowledge as stored in both individuals and the organisation. Individuals store knowledge in the form of experience, skills and personal capability. The organisation stores knowledge in the form of documents, records, rules, regulations and standards and so on (Weick & Roberts, 1993). This knowledge is transferred to staff through induction and training and becomes their framework of practice, much of it embedded in individual work routines reinforced through daily interactions with the organisation’s systems and processes.

Other theorists focus on culture in contrast to this emphasis on knowledge products. These theorists show how culture guides and shapes the values, behaviours and attitudes of employees (OReilly & Chatman, 1996). To build a culture of learning and collaboration, organisations must facilitate mutual trust and open communication, and support the explication of implicit knowledge (Nonaka, 1994; Schrage, 1990). Open communication, including the acceptance of disagreement, between individuals, teams and departments can thereby facilitate the gaining of new perspectives, leading to the adjustment of individual practice (Samaha, 1996). Organisational learning initiatives and evaluative enquiry that are conducted in unsupportive organisational cultures face significant barriers to success.
Early evaluation use theory focused on the evaluation findings and evaluation report, as noted in the evaluation use theory section. More recently, process use theorists have taken organisational culture into account. For example, Preskill and Torres (1999b) note that an organisational culture of learning is fundamental in support of evaluative enquiry and evaluation use. This study examines the organisational culture in each of the two case study organisations and explains how the lack of a supportive culture inhibited each of the learning systems.

What learning is for

Some theorists take a ‘continuous improvement’ approach to organisational learning, seeing learning as contributing to an ongoing process of system refinement (Buckler, 1996). This approach focuses on improved profitability and incremental changes within existing frameworks. The continuous improvement approach is typified by what Argyris and Schon describe as “single-loop” learning, the correction of errors within an organisation’s existing norms, policies and objectives (Argyis & Schon, 1974, pp. 2-3).

On the other hand, other theorists emphasise how organisational learning facilitates change through innovation. An example is the development of ‘lean’ thinking, developed by Toyota and made popular through the work of Womack and colleagues (1990). Toyota’s system was informed by the work of Deming (1994), who cautioned against the previous management-by-results approach, which focused on reducing errors. In contrast, he advocated system improvement and innovation led by management (Deming, 1994, p. 33). Toyota’s lean production system was underpinned by the collective learning of all those involved in producing Toyota cars:
Toyota workers and managers, parts suppliers and distributors. Each actor in the system was trained in how to see and get rid of waste at every stage of the production process (Womack et al., 1990). For example, workers were empowered to improve processes, including stopping the production line when issues and errors occurred.

Another set of terms for continuous improvement and innovation are ‘exploitation’ and ‘exploration’ (March, 1991), where exploitation is the refinement and extension of existing competences, technologies and paradigms, while exploration is experimentation with new alternatives. Rather than placing importance on one or the other, March advocates a trade-off between the two to ensure system survival and prosperity.

Evaluation use theory has long been focused on the incremental improvement of existing programs and policies. More recent evaluation theory, including real-time evaluation and developmental evaluation, focuses on providing evaluative findings back to program and policy makers during development and piloting to improve program and policy creation (Cosgrave, Ramalingam, & Beck, 2009; Patton, 2011).

This thesis examines the two learning systems introduced in the two organisations. Both of the systems were innovations, developed in response to new contexts and issues as described in Chapter 4. The research was conducted in real-time in collaboration with staff who were grappling with how to best deliver their new systems.
Limitations of organisational learning

Organisational learning theory has two limitations which need to be considered before application in different contexts. These relate to the limitations of adult learning theory (discussed above). First, learning theorists in this field view learning primarily as a rational and cognitive activity. Second, organisational learning does not problematize power differences but rather emphasises the perspectives of managers and educators, thereby tacitly accepting inequalities and power differences in the learning process.

Conventional organisational learning is limited in its Cartesian view of learning as primarily rational and cognitive. Theorists tend to emphasise critical reflection especially through small-group talk, as a facilitative mechanism (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994). As with adult learning, there is a lack of emphasis in the organisational learning literature on emotional and motivational factors, with these factors either subsumed under broader headings such as ‘learning culture’ or condensed to attributes like ‘trust’ (Shipton & Defilippi, 2015). This lack of attention to emotion has led to under-theorisation, particularly the ways in which emotions in a collective setting influence learning and change (Fineman, 2003). As argued in relation to adult learning theory, emotions also have a bearing upon how people react to power structures within organisations. While there is some agreement that seeing emotion as somehow separate from cognition may be misleading, the question of how emotions and cognition interact to elicit learning in organisations remains unaddressed (Shipton & Defilippi, 2015).

Organisational learning is largely presented from the perspective of managers and educators, as a top-down process rather than a communicative one.
Fenwick (1996) notes how organisational learning models tend to posit employees as subordinate, undifferentiated learners-in-deficit. Individual workers’ perspectives, agendas and visions are silenced unless these serve the organisation (Fenwick, 1996, p. 9). In addition, the agenda and vision of the leader or educational agent are not questioned or critiqued. The individual employee is viewed as in deficit and responsible for reducing their deficit to increase the organisation’s health (Fenwick, 1996, p. 14). Not all organisational learning literature is presented from the perspective of managers and educators. For example, Wenger and his colleagues’ work on communities of practice is written from the perspective of community members – those people who “share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002). However, Fenwick’s critique that the organisational learning literature is largely management led and hierarchical in nature applies to both of the case study systems and will be used in the analysis of the cases in this thesis.

In summary, organisational learning theory provides three insights that will be applied to the analysis of the cases: that system-level learning also involves the organisation embedding learning into its processes and systems; that organisational culture impacts on how learning occurs; and that learning can be used to support innovation in addition to its more frequent use for incremental improvement. In addition, the two limitations of organisational learning literature will be considered in analysing the case studies: that the view of learning as primarily rational and cognitive, as with adult learning theory, is limited; and that prioritising the needs of
managers and educators over the needs of employees in organisational learning systems can demotivate learners.

**Application of organisational learning theory in INGOs**

INGOs and other development agencies have drawn from works that apply organisational learning theory to the development sector in an effort to improve their development effectiveness. However, this approach is deficient in at least four aspects. First, the majority of the applied literature is theoretical, largely derived from experience in the private sector and is prescriptive in nature. Most studies adopt principles from business-oriented models and uncritically describe how these could be applied to NGOs, for example Britton’s two papers Organisational learning in NGOs (2005) and The learning NGO (1998), neither of which cite any empirical data in support of the stated prescriptions. In other words, INGOs are assumed to operate under similar principles as organisations in any other sector. There is a lack of empirical work that analyses the application of organisational theory and organizational learning in development contexts – something that this thesis seeks, albeit in a small way, to correct.

Second, where there is empirical research on organisational learning it is focused mainly on knowledge management, which again is a field of inquiry in which business applications loom large. For example, Oppenheimer and Prosak (2011) describe how the World Bank develops, stores and transfers knowledge requested by its clients for project and other development. In this analysis, World Bank staff are the generators of knowledge, and there is no description of the process of
knowledge generation, nor acknowledgement of others involved in generating knowledge.

Third, where there is empirical research it is often in the form of detailed single case studies. For example, Action Aid has published on the Accountability, Learning and Planning system it developed (Scott-Villiers, 2003). Another example is the study of learning practices of a feminist NGO, Just Associates, which operates across Southern Africa (Wet & Schoots, 2016). These case studies are useful for understanding the learning endeavours of a single organisation. However, the lack of comparison to the practices and experiences of other similar organisations limits the broader applicability of such findings.

Fourth, most works take a rational perspective of the organisation, with few incorporating political or institutional perspectives. The rational perspective sees the organisation engaging in rational decision-making and action in order to achieve clearly stated goals (Schaumburg-Muller, 2005). However, political and institutional perspectives of the organisation may also be relevant for understanding how evaluation and learning occur in aid agencies. A political perspective of the organisation sees the interests and power of its members as key variables in understanding how the organisation functions (Schaumburg-Muller, 2005). Taking this perspective, groups in the organisation each have their own agendas, ideologies and goals, and negotiate to form coalitions and reach compromises. An institutional perspective sees the organisation made up of cognitive, normative and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to staff (Schaumburg-Muller, 2005). Taking a largely rational perspective means that most existing work on organisational learning in NGOs and development agencies lacks analysis of the
interests and power of management and staff, and the importance of culture and structure.

Alnoor Ebrahim’s (2003a) comparative case study of learning processes in two national NGOs in India (Ebrahim, 2003b), in contrast, is one study that is not limited in the ways described above. Ebrahim undertook a longitudinal study of the learning processes of Sadguru and Aga Khan Rural Support Program India. He analysed the funding and information exchanges that characterised the interactions between these NGOs and their funders. Ebrahim’s analysis identified the importance of evaluation as a symbolic resource that justifies past decisions, rather than as an input to decision-making. His study illustrates how reporting tended to be skewed towards product rather than process data, simplifying the complex and intricate changes occurring through the intervention. Ebrahim’s study examined how learning was both generated and distorted given the concerns of upward-focused reporting to the donor.

Potential limitations of organisational learning theory in INGO contexts

It is important to consider the origins of organisational learning as a discipline when considering its applicability to INGO contexts. Interest in organisational learning was driven by industry needs of American manufacturing companies to better understand, and potentially replicate, new production and manufacturing systems developed by Japanese competitors. An example of the types of research that underpinned this industrial effort is the five-year MIT-led study of Toyota that resulted in the documentation of the lean production system popularised in the book *The Machine that Changed the World* (Womack et al., 1990).
Peter Senge’s (1990) work *The Fifth Disciple: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* was widely influential and based on the findings of much organisational learning research. His work popularised the concept of an organisation as a system within systems which needed to be studied, learned and adapted to changing external circumstances. Senge’s ideas became applied in businesses and mission-driven organisations and remain influential today. With the shift towards professionalisation in the NGO sector and the increasing premiums placed on development effectiveness, it is understandable that NGO executives looked to the business literature for answers and models. As this thesis contends, such a transference of practices across industry fields does not automatically lead to parallel practices and organisational outcomes. Business effectiveness and aid effectiveness are different concepts with different underpinning principles. As such, there remains a question as to the applicability of a field of research that was generated in the manufacturing sector for the development sector without testing or potentially modification of key concepts.

### 3.3 Conclusion

The chapter has outlined perspectives from the adult learning and organisational learning literatures that augment existing understanding of learning contained in evaluation use theory. Specifically, the chapter has shown how andragogy – or student-centred learning – and self-directed learning can help evaluators understand how staff are motivated to learn in order to address problems they encounter in their work practice. Treating staff as experienced adults reinforces their autonomous self-concept in learning situations. Engaging these adults involves ensuring they
draw from and question their experiences. Organisational learning theory highlights the importance of organisational systems and processes in embedding learning, and the need to develop a learning culture and consider how learning can support innovation. These key findings from the adult learning and organisational learning literatures will be applied to the analysis of the two cases selected for this thesis. However, the analysis will also keep in mind theoretical limitations. In particular, the analysis recognises the limitation of both literatures in their view of learning as primarily rational and cognitive, its blindness to issues of power, and its primary reference as Western culture.

While organisational learning theory has been applied to the analysis of NGOs and development agencies, the section has outlined four limitations to this application: the lack of empirical studies on the applicability of organisational learning to NGOs and development agencies; the focus on knowledge management, rather than collaborative knowledge generation, in the empirical work that does exist; the tendency to use the single case study as the research methodology; and the lack of political or institutional perspectives on organisational learning.
Chapter 4: Research design

4.1 Introduction

How best to understand how INGOs’ organisational learning is contributing to improvements in their work? In this chapter, I explain the research design and set out the logical steps implemented to capture data and enable comparisons to be made across the two case studies. The chapter starts by explaining the research design and rationale (Section 4.2) and the principles that underpinned the research (Section 4.3), then goes on to explain how the research was implemented (Section 4.4), the methods and process of data collection and analysis (Section 4.5), how I managed ethical considerations while conducting the research (Section 4.6) and the limitations of the research (Section 4.7). I have made the conscious choice to write this chapter in the first person as part of communicating my role in designing the research.

4.2 Design and rationale

I designed the research as praxis: using theory to inform the practice of my colleagues and myself, and using the practice I observed to inform theory. The research stemmed from my own enquiry question, sparked from experience: I wanted to know whether evaluations contribute to INGOs’ development effectiveness. And if they do, I wanted to know how. To answer the question, I needed to find practice settings where this question could be answered, as it is the practice site where larger organisational and sectoral issues are acted out (S. Gherardi, 2009, p. 357). While I focused the research at the site of practice, I also took into account important organisational issues that impacted on each learning
system, as described in Chapters 6 and 7, and the broader policy and program context of development, as described in Chapter 5.

I identified two INGOs, OAU and PIA, that were engaged in using evaluations and organisational learning, on which to base my enquiry. I identified these INGOs through purposive sampling. That is, these INGOs were identified by development professionals as being in the forefront of organisational learning for improved development effectiveness. I engaged with staff from each of the INGOs to design a collaborative enquiry. The collaborative approach evolved out of my interest in both constructivist and pragmatist approaches to knowing. As explained in the previous chapter, social constructivists assert that we come to know through engaging with others. The study also takes a pragmatist approach, emphasising that humans seek to know things in order to better adapt themselves to their environment (Rorty, 2007). Working with INGO staff on the problems they encountered in their practice while being based in the workplaces of the two INGOs reflects the praxis approach of the study.

I used the case study method as the basis for data collection and analysis for four reasons. First, the case study method is well suited to investigations into complex social phenomena (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 2). Second, it was important to understand the practice of the few Australia-based INGOs that were taking a systematic approach to organisational learning and evaluation use at the time, rather than surveying the practices of many INGOs (King, 1988, p. 292). Third, the case study approach allowed me to better understand the organisational context to learning (King, 1988, p. 293). The iterative, longitudinal, embedded case study approach that I took allowed for in-depth understanding of both organisations. The
case study design provided me with an understanding of the key contextual issues that impacted on each learning system through being embedded in each organisation. Fourth, the qualitative nature of the case study approach was appropriate to the research question, which is focused on process: “How did the case study organisational learning systems work?” (Yin, 2009, pp. 8-10). Being based in the organisations over a long period of time allowed me to observe and document their learning processes.

The case studies were iterative because the design necessarily changed over time, ensuring it was flexible enough to accommodate necessary changes in response to changes in the external environment and within each organisation. For example, I originally designed the research as a case study of a single INGO, OAU, which was identified by peer organisations as an innovator of organisational learning and evaluation use. Over time, another INGO, PIA, also began to innovate in the same area, based on learning from OAU. As a result, I added PIA to the research and incorporated a comparative approach to the project design. The iterative nature of the case study method is especially appropriate in new topic areas (Eisenhardt, 1989, p. 541).

The case studies were longitudinal, based on my research within each organisation over two years – rare access for an outsider to an INGO – and through continued engagement with each organisation after the research was complete. The longitudinal element of the design allowed me to take history, process and context into account when exploring the processes of change. However, I need to articulate my responses to the four known issues of the longitudinal approach (Van de Ven & Huber, 1990, p. 216). First, I acknowledge that I was a part of each system and had
an influence on the conduct of the system, given my involvement. I define my role as 'participant observer', which acknowledges my influence on the system through participation. Second, in relation to the issue of time, I chose to study each system from its beginning to its end, and I remained in touch with staff from each system after the research was complete. As will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, organisational learning in each organisation continued to evolve, and finishing the research at the chosen point in time meant the story remains incomplete. Third, in relation to the importance of clarifying research outputs, audience and presentation, I agreed with each organisation on the types of research outputs that were achievable (papers for internal use, PhD thesis, journal articles), the sequencing of those outputs over time and the intended audience for each output. Fourth, in relation to handling the problems of complexity and simplicity in longitudinal comparative studies of change, I engaged in cycles of expanding complexity and simplification as described by Pettigrew (1990, p. 282):

Periods of increasing complexity and openness are necessary to gain appreciation of the richness of the subject matter being investigated. However, the tension produced by such complexity requires periods of reduction and simplification which in turn require further verification through more data collection and then additional simplification through framework building and pattern recognition.

The case studies are explanatory (Yin, 2003, p. 141). That is, I used the case study approach to develop explanations about evaluation use and organisational learning in INGOs, rather than only exploring or describing these systems. This explanatory approach has meant examining what contributed to the success or failure of these systems.
The case studies are also comparative (Yin, 2003, p. 142). This has allowed me to see whether there were commonalities and differences across two different organisations. This approach draws from John Stuart Mill’s ‘method of agreement’ that examines a common factor along with the hypothesised causal factors and ‘method of difference’ where the phenomenon and hypothesised causes are present in contrast to negative cases where both are absent. This approach has been used in comparative historical analysis, as Skocpol and Somers (1980) show in their study. The organisational learning system of each organisation, the OAU Hub system and the PIA Reflective Annual Practice (RAP), including their similarities and differences, is described in summary here and in more detail in Chapters 6 and 7.

OAU set up its organisational learning system, known as the Hubs, in 2009. The Hubs were composed of staff from the organisation, either based in Melbourne or overseas, who were interested in understanding and improving the effectiveness of their work in one of the organisation’s key areas of focus: active citizenship and accountability (ACAC), economic justice (EJ), essential services (ES) and gender justice (GJ). Hub members engaged in research and learning activities as part of better understanding effectiveness in each area. The organisation provided access for the researcher to examine two of these in detail, the ACAC and EJ Hubs. The researcher also examined each of the four hubs at a higher level, through participation in an externally commissioned evaluation of all four hubs in 2013. The evaluation recommended the closing of two hubs, that the ES Hub discontinue and the EJ hub discontinue as a discreet budget line and continue to integrate its work into the GJ and ACAC Hubs. Finally, the organisation introduced a new system, Outcome Reporting, in 2015.
The International Programs section of PIA set up the RAP in 2009. The RAP included all staff of the International Programs Section in reflective practice in order to take stock of PIA’s programs, understand changes that had occurred and PIA’s contribution to effective development outcomes.

Both INGOs had recently entered into partnership agreements with (then) AusAID, which provided increased and longer term funding in return for evidence of impact. Part of the funding was a designated allocation for design, monitoring and evaluation. Monitoring could be conducted internally, but evaluations were required to be outsourced. Both organisational learning systems were funded through this allocation.

I compared the learning systems implemented by OAU and PIA to each other using a common analytic framework, further described in the next section, which examined participant responses to the learning system, what participants learned, changes to behaviour based on learning and organisational outcomes due to learning and behaviour change.

4.3 Research principles

I conducted research with each organisation guided by a set of three principles. First, the research needed to be mutually beneficial – the organisation and the researcher should both benefit from the enquiry. Second, no harm should be done by the research. And third, there should be clarity between my roles as a PhD researcher and the paid consultancies I performed for each organisation.

**Mutual benefit:** The research was intended to benefit both partners. To enact this principle, I ensured my findings were fed back to the management and
staff of each organisation at regular intervals. The findings were intended to inform planning, implementation and evaluation of each organisational learning system.

I developed the following research outputs for OAU:

- Follow-up survey on the Annual Review and Reflection, 2009
- Report on the findings of the Annual Review and Reflection survey, 2009
- Paper on the case study method in 2010
- Paper on action research in 2010
- Paper on evaluation synthesis in 2010
- External Hub assessment and reflection report in 2011
- Three vignettes for the Hub evaluation report in 2013

I made the following contributions to PIA:

- Input to RAP planning sessions, 2013–15
- Input to RAP sessions, 2013–15
- End of session paper in 2015

**No harm:** The research was intended to do no harm to organisation beneficiaries, learning system participants, the organisation or me. To enact this principle, each party agreed to act in accordance with their respective duties of care. My duty of care was to provide valid and reliable information to the organisation in order to improve the organisational learning system, and to safeguard the wellbeing of intended beneficiaries and the public reputation of the agency. The duty of the organisation was to consider my findings with the ultimate aim of improved organisational learning processes, being the increased wellbeing of beneficiaries, and to facilitate my PhD completion.
**Clarity of roles:** I ensured no conflict between my role as researcher and any paid consultancies with either organisation. Critical to this clarity was ensuring that I analysed and interpreted the data accurately without skewing results positively to ensure further paid consultancies. I crosschecked my analysis and interpretations with both colleagues from each organisation and my supervisors for validation. In addition, for any paid input I kept day logs of my activity and ensured that no PhD research time was charged to the organisation. It was inevitable, however, that there was some crossover in terms of insights from one piece of work to the other. That was to be expected and valued.

**4.4 Research approach**

The social constructivist and pragmatist approach I took to the research informed my collaborative work with the INGOs’ staff from each organisation to design, implement and analyse the data. My social constructivist approach to knowing supports the collaborative research design, as we come to know by engaging with others in enquiry (Gergen, 1999). My pragmatist approach helped to define the research focus – to concentrate on those areas identified by the INGO staff as problematic. Pragmatists define knowing as better adapting humans to their given environment (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18). In other words, knowledge helps us solve important problems that we face in our settings and has a future focus, as explained by Dewey (1977, p. 145):

> Thinking has a prospective reference, not retrospective: and the test of its worth is in successfully moulding the environment, not beholding it.

I engaged with staff from the two case study organisations in order to gain insight into their collaborative learning systems and sought to engage staff in
developing knowledge through conversation (Rorty, 2007). I designed the research in a way that would engage staff from each of the two case study organisations. Each organisation identified the staff to be involved in the enquiry: those responsible for managing each organisational learning system, and those responsible for the effectiveness function. I worked with the staff to develop the research questions. Staff were particularly interested in any answers to the questions that would help them improve their learning systems and what staff learned and did in each of the organisations (McKenna, 2003, pp. 8-9).

I am cognisant of the transformative-emancipatory critiques of the constructivist and pragmatic research approach that I have taken. Transformative-emancipatory theorists rightly question the singular definition of what works of pragmatism. These theorists explain that what works will differ by the positionality of each person in society (Mertens, 2003).

4.5 Research implementation

I conducted the research using an iterative case study approach that evolved over four phases (see Table 4). During Phase 1 I developed my research proposal, informed by a preliminary review of the development evaluation, evaluation and learning literatures. I proposed research into the tensions and workability between the two major evaluation goals in development: accountability and learning. My research question was framed as: Negotiating the tensions between accounting and learning in development evaluation: To what ends?

I proposed OAU as my case study site, as OAU aimed to evaluate programs for both accountability and learning purposes. I selected OAU after shortlisting a
range of organisations through both document review and purposive sampling. The unit of analysis at this point was individual evaluations. The evaluations were the entry point to examine change at three levels: individual, learning unit (Hub) and organisation. After engagement with OAU, the organization proposed that I study their learning system rather than individual evaluations which I agreed to do. From their perspective, evaluations themselves were not the important unit of analysis but, rather, the larger organisational learning system through which the organisation was attempting to understand progress and support progress improvement.

During Phase 2 I collected data from OAU. I reviewed documents and observed Hub meetings. I analysed the evaluations conducted within the Hubs, the interactions between staff and how information from the Hubs was provided to the Board. I analysed this data as I collected it and provided emerging findings to Hub management staff.

However, observations with OAU suggested that the research focus was too narrow. While evaluations were subject to opposing pulls from accountability and learning, the learning system was constrained by this as well as other issues. Given this, I broadened the focus of the study from one particular tension to the issues that constrain and support organisational learning. Phase 2 was expanded further with the inclusion of PIA as a second research site, where I explored the organisational learning system which drew from evaluations and the larger organisational context. Based upon learnings gained from OAU, I followed the same procedure.

During Phase 3 I shifted focus from accountability and learning to evaluation and organisational learning. During this phase, I placed greater emphasis on how the learning initiatives were designed and used in both cases, and the larger
organisational learning contexts of both OAU and PIA. This broadening of scope brought into view questions of management style, gender and power relations within each workplace. I analysed each case separately and fed back findings to each organisation.

During **Phase 4** I conducted comparative analysis between each case study and more detailed within-case analysis of each case using the analytic framework described in detail in Section 4.6. I coded data from interviews to develop explanations for findings which I tested through discussion with research participants, my supervisor and peers. This procedure helped ensure internal validity of the case studies (Yin, 2009, p. 41).

The main phases of the research are summarised in Table 4.

**Table 4: Research implementation overview**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Semester</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1 – Research scoping</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Commenced PhD February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Discussions with OAU about interest in being a case study in May. Invited to attend OAU’s annual review and reflection in June–July. Conducted a follow-up survey and developed a report for OAU in August–September at OAU’s request</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Developed papers for OAU on case study methodology on request, December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2 – Case study of OAU</td>
<td>2011</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Developed two papers for OAU on action research and evaluation synthesis on request, January and February. Collected data with OAU EJ and ACAC Hubs. Developed external hub assessment and reflection report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Re-engaged with OAU, December, after year of maternity leave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Collected data with OAU: participated in external evaluation of Hubs, March–April, and interviews with</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.6 Methods of data collection and analysis

Data collection

I collected multiple primary sources of evidence to increase construct validity, as advised by case study methodologists (Yin, 2009, p. 42). The four main methods of data collection were:

- **Literature review:** I reviewed over 400 pieces of literature related to organisational learning, adult learning and development evaluation.

- **Document review:** I reviewed over 100 organisational documents related to each learning system. This included annual reports, board papers, strategy papers, evaluation reports, reports to key funders, and minutes and preparatory materials for meetings.

- **Observation:** I conducted participant observation in the two organisational learning systems over a two-year period at each organisation. At OAU I attended formal Hub meetings and recorded observations of 10 formal meetings. I observed practice informally through weekly attendance and use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 2 – Case study of PIA</th>
<th>2013</th>
<th>1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Added PIA as second case study, May. Data collection with PIA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2014</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Collected data with PIA: involved in first home session of the year and conducted MEL system review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Met to close data collection period with PIA, February</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4 – Comparative case analysis</th>
<th>2015</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>Analysed data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2016</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Wrote and reviewed thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2017–2018</td>
<td>1 &amp; 2</td>
<td>Finalised thesis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
of a desk and email. At PIA I attended RAP meetings and planning sessions. I recorded observations of over 10 formal RAP meetings.

- **Interviews:** At OAU I conducted 18 interviews. I interviewed Hub leads, Hub facilitators and Hub participants. At PIA I conducted 14 interviews. I interviewed RAP facilitators, participants and managers. The interview questions are included in Appendix 1.

I developed an initial set of propositions, based on my preliminary review of the literature, to guide my observations and data collection. As the initial phase of the research had a discrete focus on learning and accountability, the propositions were:

- Development evaluation is accountability, rather than learning, focused.
- Accountability evaluation is driven by the needs of funders, rather than development practitioners.
- The privileging of accountability over learning limits the utility of evaluation for development practitioners.
- The privileging of accountability over learning limits the utility of evaluation for development organisations.

As the research broadened, I developed another series of propositions to guide data collection and observations based on the enlarged scope of the study:

- There are a number of other constraints, besides the tension between accountability and learning, that limit the utility of INGO learning systems in improving practitioner and organisational effectiveness.
- There are a number of enablers that support the utility of INGO learning systems in improving practitioner and organisational effectiveness.
Data analysis

I developed and used a framework to analyse the cases that examines the effects of learning activities which draw primarily from evaluative activities, conducted in organisations, over time. The framework combines the Kirkpatrick model of evaluating training, explained below, with concepts of evaluation use.

Donald Kirkpatrick developed his model for training evaluation in 1959. The model quickly became popular in training departments, in the field of industrial/organisational psychology, and has been widely applied in the development sector (Cascio, 1987, p. 45; WorldBank, 2008). Kirkpatrick developed his model to address the gap in evaluations of training programs of the effect of training on organisational results. He argued that most evaluations focused on whether participants enjoyed training, what he described as ‘reaction’. Kirkpatrick showed that some evaluations looked at whether participants learned or not. However, most evaluations did not track participants over time to see if their behaviour changed, nor whether this changed behaviour had any influence on organisational results. Kirkpatrick developed a simple evaluation model based on the gap he identified to focus evaluators’ attention on whether training returned results to the organisation and the process required to reach these results.

As explained briefly in the abstract, Kirkpatrick’s model has four levels: reaction, learning, behaviour and organisational results. Level 1 examines trainees’ reaction to training – that is, whether participants think the training was relevant and good quality, and whether they enjoyed the training experience (Guerra-López 2012, p. 49). Level 2 examines whether participants increased their skills or knowledge and/or changed their attitudes because of the training (Guerra-López
2012, p. 51). Level 3 examines whether trainees have applied the skills, knowledge or attitudes obtained from the training program in the workplace (Guerra-López 2012, p. 52). Level 4 examines whether there is an improvement in key result areas of the organisation based on participants’ learning and behaviour changes (Guerra-López 2012, p. 53). Key result areas may be organisational goals and objectives, or financial return due to improvements in trainees’ work practices.

I developed the analytic framework for this thesis by drawing from the strengths and addressing the weaknesses of Kirkpatrick’s four-level model and combining his model with concepts of evaluation use. The framework is depicted in Figure 4 and described further below.

Figure 4: Research analytic framework

Source: Author’s own work
The analytic model builds on the strengths of Kirkpatrick’s approach. The model, like the Kirkpatrick model, is simple and easy to understand (Bates, 2004; Guerra-López 2012). Its simplicity comes from the small number of interconnected levels. The fact that the levels are connected in a linear fashion and there are no feedback loops or influencing factors makes the model easy to understand. The simplicity of the model is taken as a strength. The second strength is that the model is outcome focused. The focus on outcomes contrasts with most evaluation of training, which focuses only on participant reactions and learning (Bassi, Benson, & Cheney, 1996, p. 38). The outcomes focus of the model specifically relates to the outcomes for the organisation (Bates, 2004, p. 341). The third strength is that the distinction between learning (Level 2) and behavior (Level 3) draws attention to the importance of active implementation of learning (Bates, 2004, p. 342). The fourth strength is that the Kirkpatrick model provides a useful heuristic (Alliger & Janak, 1989, p. 331) for all of the three reasons listed above. The model helps in thinking about how training links to improvements within an organisation (or not).

The analytic model modifies Kirkpatrick’s framework to address known weaknesses. For example, the model takes individual and contextual influences into account through prompt questions at each level, as depicted in Figure 4 (Bates, 2004, p. 342). The prompt question at Level 1 is to consider the relevance and quality of learning activity, at Level 2 it is to consider individual ability and motivation to learn, at Level 3 to consider the organisational learning culture and motivation to change, and at Level 4 to consider organisational and sectoral events. Kirkpatrick’s model ignores contextual factors such as the learning culture of the organisation, organisational or work unit goals and values, the nature of
interpersonal support in the workplace, and the adequacy of material resources such as tools, equipment and supplies (Bates, 2004, p. 342). Clearly, individual and contextual influences are important to outcomes of training. And Kirkpatrick’s model is rightly criticized for not treating these factors as important. For example, Holton (1996) identifies motivational, environmental and enabling elements that influence whether training results in individual behaviour change and organisational results, as depicted in Figure 5 (Holton, 1996, p. 17). The analytic model draws from the issues Holton raises, but keeps the simplicity of the original model.

Figure 5: Holton’s model of HRD evaluation research and measurement

Source: Holton (1996, p. 17)

The analytic framework combines the four levels with related concepts of evaluation use. That is, learning (Level 2) is related to conceptual use of evaluation. Behaviour (Level 3) is related to individual instrumental use of evaluation. And
organisational results (Level 4) is related to organisational instrumental use of evaluation. These additions help to show the ways in which organizational learning and evaluation use are interrelated.

**How the researcher used the analytic framework**

The analytic framework enabled me to identify and analyse the process and outcomes of the organisational learning systems of both case studies. To analyse the learning systems, the framework equates people’s experience in the organizational learning systems to more traditional training, which makes the use of the Kirkpatrick framework appropriate. Using the first level of the framework (reaction), I analysed the quality and relevance of the learning activities. Using Level 2, I examined the intermediate outcome of whether participants learned due to participation in the learning system at Level 2 (learning). I examined longer term outcomes at Levels 3 and 4. I examined whether participants changed their practice based on what they learned (behaviour), largely using participants self-reports, and whether those changes improved things for the organisation (organisational results). I examined types of evaluation use at Levels 2–4. I examined whether evaluations were used conceptually at Level 2, instrumentally by individuals at Level 3 and instrumentally by the organisation at Level 4.

I coded the data according to key questions at each of the four levels, as described below.

**Level 1**

- How did participants rate the quality of organisational learning system activities?
• How did participants rate the relevance of organisational learning system activities?
• Did participants react positively to organisational learning system activities?

Level 2
• Did participants learn?
• What did participants learn from?
• What supported learning?
• What inhibited learning?
• What are examples of participants’ learning?

Level 3
• Did participants change their behaviour?
• What prompted any change in behaviour?
• What are examples of changed practice?

Level 4
• Was there any impact of the learning and/or behaviour change on organisational results?
• What prompted any impact on organisational results?

As part of the analysis, I examined the data in response to these questions, whether positive or negative. I looked for patterns and themes, developed themes, and compared and contrasted findings to key literature. I developed and tested my conclusions with staff from each organisation based on initial findings (Miles & Huberman, 1994). As part of developing conclusions, I examined rival theories,
searched for disconfirming evidence and further tested theories with partners and staff.

To understand the cases, I analysed each organisational learning system using the framework (within-case analysis) and compared parts of each system (analysis across similar parts within the same case). Finally, I compared the organisational learning systems to each other (cross-case analysis). For example, in the case of OAU I looked at the experiences of individual participants of the Hubs. I examined the activity of three Hubs – the Economic Justice and Active Citizenship and Accountability Hubs in detail and the Gender Justice Hub as part of the Hub evaluation that I participated in – and compared these Hubs to each other. I then examined the influence of the Hubs on the organisation as a whole. In the case of PIA I looked at the experiences of individual RAP participants, examined the RAP, including comparing RAP working groups to each other in 2013 and 2014, and examined the influence of the RAP on the organisation as a whole. Finally, I compared the organisational learning systems of OAU and PIA to each other.

4.7 Research ethics

I have ensured that my research addresses and reflects the values and principles of ethical research conduct, as set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct In Human Research, 2007 (Updated May 2015). In designing my research, I presented the risks and benefits to participants. I provided each participant with a one-page plain English information sheet. The information sheet included details about the study and about their rights as participants. The research only proceeded when I had participants’ consent. The consent form I provided to each interviewee outlined the
rights of participants, including the right to answer or not answer any question, stop the interview at any time and raise issues about the conduct of the interview. During the ethics review process, I identified the level of risk in the research as low. I did not collect data from participants of any vulnerable groups. I have ensured that all data presented in the thesis is non-identifiable. That is, where I conducted interviews I de-identified the data (removed individual identifiers). I submitted details of my research to the RMIT Ethics Committee in October 2010 and received approval in December 2010. I modified my research proposal in May 2013 and made modifications to the consent form at that stage. There was no need to change the ethics classification at that stage. I also engaged with each organisation to agree on research protocols and only proceeded once I had organisational sign-off.

4.8 Limitations

This research is a qualitative case study of two organisations. The case study methodology has a number of strengths, outlined earlier in the chapter. It also has limitations. Case study is a qualitative technique that seeks to elicit knowledge of social phenomena from a discretely bounded case or series of related cases. Each of the two case study organisations was selected purposefully, rather than as a representative case. As such, it is important to note the ways in which each organisation is particular and specific. These findings can be carefully considered by other like INGOs for applicability, rather than being generally applicable.

My investigation was limited to the learning system in each organisation only, and no attempt was made to research wider internal workings for reasons of access
and research ethics. I had limited access to other information and was not fully cognisant of all of the internal workings of each organisation.

My position within each organisation was limited, to some extent, by the roles that I played. There was a danger that as a researcher I would, like many other researchers, seek positive findings rather than null results. Additionally, there was a danger that as a consultant I would seek to downplay any negative findings in order to be positively considered for future consulting work. I sought to address both of these potential biases by triangulating findings with staff and my supervisors.

The analytic framework draws from the Kirkpatrick model, which was specifically designed for training rather than performance improvement interventions more generally (Guerra-López 2012). The organisational learning initiatives of the cases covered in this thesis included a broader range of activities than training alone. For example, activities included action research and collective reflection sessions, in addition to training. The types of learning occurring within the case studies was more exploratory in nature than learning that might be expected from training. That is, staff were conducting learning enquiries into areas where they had no answers, rather than being involved in training sessions where a set body of knowledge was being conveyed to staff. For this reason, while the analytic framework has been broadened in focus, it remains one that was developed for training rather than broader learning activities. For that reason, it remains a useful heuristic, rather than a tailor-made framework for organisational learning initiatives.
Chapter 5: Historical contexts of the case study organisations

5.1 Introduction

What was the context of the two INGOs at the time of the study? The historic progression of development practice, from the 1950s to the present, helps explain the situation of each organisation at the time of study. Development has been thought about and measured differently over time by those engaged in the implementation of development plans, in both the state and non-government sectors. The history of these ideas and concerns informs the current concept of development effectiveness, which drove the two INGOs at the time of the study to learn in new ways and to demonstrate their learning as a measure of improvement.

Examining the context helps to better understand why the two case study INGOs used organisational learning in order to understand, communicate and improve their development effectiveness. This contextual chapter also helps to illustrate the external stimuli or drivers of learning from the organisational perspective.

5.2 The historical progression of how development has been conceptualised

The current definition of development is informed by the dialectic between statist and market-led approaches to aid and development thinking. The following section maps out the differences in how aid has been conceptualised and how its success has been measured since its inception in the 1950s in order to situate the current problem that the thesis addresses. The following categorisation summarises thinking in each decade. This is not to imply each phase was a singular era nor that any of the approaches mentioned in earlier eras disappeared. Rather, up to today, all the strands of evaluation practice mentioned remain.
Aid is a recent phenomenon existing in its current form for only about 60 years. The first large-scale aid efforts occurred with the reconstruction of Europe in the 1940s–50s under the Marshall Plan (Rapley, 2007, p. 1). The reconstruction of Europe was the first large-scale state-based aid program that occurred under the international architecture of the United Nations (Rist, 2014, p. 69).

1960s–70s: Modernisation

Aid during the 1960s–70s, the first “Development Decade” (Stokke, 2009, p. 137), was underpinned by modernisation theory. This theory understood development as predictable stages of economic progress (Roberts, Hite, & Chorev, 2007, p. 8). The focus of aid during this time was to facilitate economic growth, moving a country from one stage of progress to another. For example, the UN General Assembly set the target for the decade as a minimum annual growth rate of 5 per cent for underdeveloped countries (Jolly, 2004, p. 69). Aid during this time largely focused on infrastructure development, technical cooperation programs and technical assistance primarily provided by economists.

Development, born in the postwar reconstruction of economies in Europe, emphasised the role of the state – through planning and intervention – in stimulating economic growth (Payne & Phillips, 2010, p. 34). Modernisation theory saw the state leading development in countries of the ‘Third World’ on the same path of economic progress from tradition to modernity as the ‘First World’ had previously taken.

Modernisation’s assumptions of development as stages of economic growth, dependent on technical expertise, was contested at the time by Marxist
underdevelopment theory and world systems analysis. Marxist theories saw exploitation as the root cause of underdevelopment. Underdevelopment theory looked to external factors, such as the unequal structural relationship between core and peripheral countries, to explain underdevelopment rather than the internal factors that modernists used (Riddell, 2007, p. 136). World systems analysis, an extension of underdevelopment theory, saw underdevelopment as caused by the unequal relations existing throughout the world and within each country, rather than between only particular types of countries (Kiely, 2017, pp. 3-4).

Despite the differences between the two approaches, both modernisation and underdevelopment theories saw the state as the key development actor and understood development as occurring in a similar way across the world.

The main means of measuring the success of aid projects during this period was ex ante evaluation, or economic project appraisal. Given the focus on economic development, the use of this type of evaluation is not surprising. This type of evaluation focuses primarily on estimates of likely benefits and supports simulations of project reach or impact (Rogers & Fraser, 2014, pp. 6-7).

1970s: Focus on poverty

During the 1970s development thinkers and actors questioned economic growth as the goal of development, as it had become clear that aggregate economic growth was not benefiting all in society equally (Riddell, 2007, pp. 31-32). In response, donors began to focus their aid more on specific sectors and sub-sectors. Donors designed discrete projects – in education, health and water – to connect with and transfer knowledge to people at the ‘bottom of the pyramid’ or the world’s poor
(Chenery, Ahluwalia, Bell, H., & Jolly, 1974; Ghai & Radwan, 1980). Technical assistance broadened to include experts in education, health, agriculture and other disciplines. NGO aid activity expanded with growing numbers of official donors providing aid money to NGOs to conduct activities (Riddell, 2007, p. 9). The questioning of the 1970s changed the understanding of how the desired stage of development should be reached, and disaggregated the differing needs and perspectives of people in society. However, development theory during this period was still underpinned by modernist assumptions and still focused on economic growth.

Participatory evaluation approaches began to be introduced during this period, given the importance of engaging specific subgroups in society. This trend was also prompted by discussions in the wider evaluation literature about the value of involving project stakeholders in evaluation (Rogers & Fraser, 2014, p. 14). For example, Patton’s utilisation-focused evaluation, mentioned previously, emphasised the need to involve and respond to the primary intended users of an evaluation to ensure the evaluation is used (Patton, 2008, pp. 59-98). Participatory approaches, including beneficiary assessment and rapid rural appraisal, were designed to ensure aid recipients participated in evaluation (Rogers & Fraser, 2014, pp. 13-19).

However, there was much debate over what the term ‘participation’ means. For example, Cousins and Whitmore distinguish between practical participatory evaluation and transformational participatory evaluation. Whereas practical participatory evaluation aims to foster evaluation use, transformational participatory evaluation aims to address differences in power and transform existing exploitative social relations (Cousins & Whitmore, 1998, pp. 7-8). Similarly, Cullen and Coryn map
out a number of different forms and functions of participatory evaluation (Cullen & Coryn, 2011, pp. 35-40). The key characteristics that distinguish forms and levels of participation that both sets of authors identify are: control of the evaluation process, stakeholder selection and depth of participation. Beneficiary and program staff participation in evaluation depends on how evaluators and evaluation commissioners design evaluative processes in relation to these characteristics.

1980s: Neoliberal reform

The end of the postwar economic boom in the 1970s, and the recession that followed the 1973 oil crisis and 1973–74 stockmarket crash, undermined the collective faith in the staged theory of development of both modernisation and underdevelopment theories (Davis, 2003; Glyn, Hughes, Lipietz, & Singh, 1990; Ikenberry, 1986). US and UK governments, unable to change the rates of high unemployment coupled with high inflation, began to distrust the Keynesian economic approaches that had underpinned the ‘golden age of capitalism’ (Glyn et al., 1990, p. 116). In contrast, leaders and policymakers looked to neoliberalism, which emphasises individual entrepreneurial motivations and markets as the engines of industrialisation and development, as the potential solution for their own economic crisis and for development (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 14). The neoliberal approach to development focuses on stimulating the growth of the private sector through a range of measures, including downsizing the public sector, privatising state assets, cutting private sector regulations and adopting a more export-oriented trade regime (Riddell, 2007, p. 34). Recipients were ‘encouraged’ to adopt these policies as a quid pro quo for receiving aid.
The same period saw a huge rise in public awareness of, and aid money channelled to NGOs. For example, in the decade from 1982 to 1992 NGO aid almost tripled from 2.3 billion to top 6 billion, and overseas development funds flowing to NGOs more than doubled (Riddell, 2007, p. 38). The neoliberal economic policy agendas in the 1980s contributed to the growth of NGOs in two ways: NGOs were a way of providing services as the state rolled back, and NGOs constituted a site of resistance by some citizens to such policies (Opoku-Mensah, 2007, p. 250). This growth in the importance of NGOs as providers of development and humanitarian assistance had an influence on their internal dynamics. NGOs faced added pressure from donors to become more professionalised, institutionalised, accountable and efficient (Stein, 2008, p. 126). In this way, neoliberalism drew more organisational types, both commercial and voluntary, directly into the capitalist market economy (Barnett, 2005, p. 730).

Results-based management evaluation approaches were favoured by most of the bilateral donors and the UN system during this period, particularly using the logframe. Results-based management and logframe approaches cater to a focus on measurable outputs. Logframes, and the logical framework approach more broadly, have helped provide a structure for both planning and evaluation (Rogers & Fraser, 2014, p. 8). However, there are concerns about their lack of capacity to respond to the dynamic process of development. In addition, the focus on predetermined results contains a number of risks, including: gaming, data corruption and goal displacement (Rogers & Fraser, 2014, p. 11).
1990s–2000s: Sustainable human development and rights-based approach

The current definition of development as sustainable human development aims to support the wellbeing of individuals and the environment. This approach is encapsulated, for example, in the eight Millennium Development Goals and related targets, which had an end date of 2015 for reducing extreme poverty. The sustainable human development approach can also be seen through the current Sustainable Development Goals or SDGs, which seek to attain sustainable development by 2030 by balancing three dimensions of development: economic, social and environmental (UN, 2015). All 193 member states of the UN have agreed to work towards the 17 SDGs rather than primary focus of the MDGs’ on developing countries (Dodds, Donoghue, & Roesch, 2017, p. 128).

Those in support of the SDGs describe the agreement as connecting the major challenges of today (poverty, environmental degradation and sustainable economic growth) in a clear and compelling way (Dodds et al., 2017, p. 128). Critics of the SDGs point to their failure to address structural issues that will impede progress. For example, McCloseky (2015, p. 186) suggests how the SDGs fail to relate poverty and climate change to the dominant neoliberal economic model. Struckmann (2018, pp. 7-10) argues the SDGs are blind to the power asymmetries which lie at the root of poverty and the lack of attention the SDGs pay to indigenous knowledge. Supporters and critics of the SDGs agree, however, that reducing poverty remains a core element of achieving development. The contemporary definition of poverty is broader than the singular focus on income levels of the 1970s. For example, the UNDP’s Human Development Index consists of measures related to life expectancy, knowledge and living standards (Riddell, 2007, p. 39).
NGOs and UN agencies began to take rights-based approaches to development from the end of the 1990s onwards. The rights-based view sees development as the fulfilment of rights, rather than fulfilling basic needs (Ulvin, 2007, p. 602). It sees human beings as rights holders and development as a process of calling duty bearers to account regarding their responsibility to fulfil these rights and holding duty bearers accountable where these rights are violated.

The current definition of development adopted by UN agencies and development NGOs has evolved beyond the provision of economic aid and material advancement, and this can be interpreted as a response to the failings of neoliberal economic policies around the world, which led, for example, to economic crises in Latin America in the 1990s and disappointing economic performance elsewhere (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 141). Post-structural and postcolonial theories that emerged in the 1990s (Escobar, 1995; Rahnema & Bawtree, 1997; Sachs, 1992) added weight to the critique of the universalism of both development theory and neoliberalism. Post-structuralists critique modernism’s search for singular development solutions and, in contrast, advocate a focus on the local and particular characteristics of each community (Rapley, 2007, p. 180). Additionally, empirical studies by neo-statistists were better able to explain how the East Asian economies developed so well despite the state taking a role in driving the economy in opposition to the advice of neoliberals (Steger & Roy, 2010, p. 101).

However, as outlined above, critics of sustainable human development show how this approach continues to rest on the market logic of neoliberal globalisation, meaning that development theory has been influenced by the counter-hegemonic globalisation movement but not completely changed (Evans, 2005, p. 436). In this
way, the current period of development theory is much like the focus on poverty in the 1970s, which modified but retained the statist assumptions of that period.

Two different development evaluation approaches are important in the current phase of development: impact and theory-based approaches, the former reflecting the influence of neoliberal norms, through the accountability focus of the new public management approach, on development practice. Impact approaches to evaluation look at what differences development initiatives have made, while theory-based approaches examine how development initiatives go about making these differences (Weiss, 2007, p. 53). Impact evaluations are particularly useful to policymakers in making and evidencing decisions on the allocation of public funds (CGD, 2006, p. 1). Theory-based evaluations, on the other hand, are useful to practitioners in surfacing program strategies, testing how these strategies work in different circumstances and improving the strategies based on evidence and review (Rogers, 2007, p. 65). There is overlap between the two methods with many impact evaluations using theory based approaches. Some groups, for example USAID, define impact evaluations as only using certain methods and focus on answering the question “what works?” (USAID, 2013, p. 2). The alternative view, a realist view, uses multiple methods and seeks to understand what works for whom, where and how, to build more contextually appropriate portable knowledge (Westhorpe, 2014, p. 4).

The current development context is also influenced by the politics of evidence and results. Eyben et al. (2015), for example, sketch the origins and history of the evidence and results discourses from the public sector and the increasing influence of these discourses in the international development sector. Eyben (2013) explains how these ways of thinking display a desire for control, the need to
demonstrate that aid budgets are delivering value for money during a period of austerity, and the increasing influence of New Public Management approaches in the international development sector.

Table 5, which draws from Rogers and Fraser’s (2014) review of development evaluation, summarises the conceptualisation of aid over each major period and the ways that success was defined and measured. Table 5 summarises the historical progression of the concept of development and linked concepts of evaluation. In contrast, Dougan and Fraser categorise key development priorities and link these priorities to types of evaluation.

**Table 5: Changes to conceptualisation of aid and successful aid**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>What development means</th>
<th>How success is defined and measured</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1950s–60s</td>
<td><strong>Modernisation:</strong> Large-scale state-led economic growth</td>
<td>Successful aid contributes to country-level economic growth as determined by cost–benefit analysis of specific programs especially ex ante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970s</td>
<td><strong>Focus on poverty:</strong> Reducing the numbers of those living in poverty</td>
<td>Successful aid improves the economic status of the poorest as determined by participatory evaluation approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980s</td>
<td><strong>Neoliberal reform:</strong> Reform of the public sector and greater support to the private sector to improve economic growth</td>
<td>Successful aid contributes to country-level economic growth through scaling back of the public sector and improved performance of the private sector. Accountability for results of reform is determined through logframe approaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990s–2000s</td>
<td><strong>Sustainable human development:</strong> Reducing poverty in an expanded sense – improvements to life</td>
<td>Effective aid contributes to human development that does not deteriorate the environment. Impact-evaluation and theory-based approaches are important evaluation approaches during this period</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Aid and development effectiveness discourse

The ideas of ‘aid effectiveness’ and ‘development effectiveness’ are an important part of the current conception of development. For example, aid effectiveness was central to the 2002 Monterey Consensus, an agreement by over 50 heads of state, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to increase funding to meet the MDGs. The signatories agreed to increase funding if this money was spent more ‘effectively’ (UN, 2003). Aid and development effectiveness became central to discussions of development and development evaluation from this point forward.

While the aid sector became dominated by the effective aid and development discourse in the new millennium, there were two distinct definitions of effectiveness held by donors and civil society. Where donors and civil society agreed was that effective development involved a greater partnership between developed and developing countries. Where donors and civil society disagreed was what made development effective besides greater partnership. The differences in definition are detailed further below.

**Normative development effectiveness literature from development agencies**

Donors and governments understand development effectiveness in a normative and technical way. Effective development from the donor and government perspective, particularly as defined at the OECD-led High Level Forums on aid, can be summarised as ‘doing what is currently being done, but better’. The normative and technical
definitions of development effectiveness are set out in the OECD-led High Level Forums on aid, the 2003 Rome High Level Forum on Harmonization, the 2005 Paris Second High Level Forum, the 2008 Accra Third High Level Forum and the 2012 Busan Fourth High Level Forum (OECD, 2017), and now through the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation.

In this type of definition, national governments are considered the drivers of development, which reproduces a state-centric interpretation of development at odds with postcolonial critiques. While there are important critiques of donor and state-driven development, the benchmarks established at these high-level meetings are the benchmarks to which development INGOs are held accountable. Hence for this thesis, which is not intended to be a critique of development theory or a problematisation of development practice broadly defined, these benchmarks are set out below.

The definitions of aid and subsequently development effectiveness have broadened over time to encompass a larger range of actors, to describe effectiveness as including a range of activities rather than only donor-funded activities, and from being driven by OECD DAC donors to a global partnership. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness was the key agreement that first outlined aid effectiveness. Aid effectiveness is based on five principles (OECD, 2005). First, developing countries set their own strategies for poverty reduction and commit to improving their institutions and tackling corruption (ownership). Second, donor countries align behind these objectives and use local systems (alignment). Third, donor countries coordinate, simplify procedures and share information to avoid duplication (harmonisation). Fourth, developing countries and donors shift focus to
development results and results get measured (results). Fifth, donors and partners are accountable for development results (mutual accountability). The Accra Agenda for Action reviewed progress against the Paris Declaration and outlined areas for improvement (OECD, 2008).

The 2011 Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation marks a shift in the definition of effectiveness in three ways. First, the Fourth High Level Forum increased the range of participation in discussions of effectiveness. Non-traditional donors (the BRICS), civil society organisations and private funders all had seats at the negotiating table along with traditional donors and governments (Martini et al., 2012, p. 931). Second, the scope of discussion broadened. While the Rome, Paris and Accra agreements were focused on aid effectiveness, Busan discussions centred on development effectiveness (Martini et al., 2012, p. 932). The broadening of development meant that larger issues of domestic resource mobilisation and trade, for example, could be discussed as well as the effectiveness of development assistance. As well as the inclusion of new actors mentioned previously, development effectiveness takes account of new forms of development cooperation including South–South\(^1\) and triangular\(^2\) cooperation. Third, leadership of the development effectiveness agenda has moved from the OECD and OECD donors to a global partnership (Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation) that includes representation from the more diverse range of development actors outlined above (OECD, 2017).

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\(^1\) South-south cooperation is exchange between countries of the Global South for mutual development (UNDP)

\(^2\) Triangular cooperation is exchange between two countries of the Global South and a developed country or multilateral institution (UNDP)
The Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation has maintained the four principles of development effectiveness agreed at Busan: a focus on results; ownership by developing countries; inclusive partnerships; and transparency and accountability to one another. The development effectiveness monitoring framework developed by the Global Partnership and illustrated in Table 6 provides further detail on the current mainstream definition of development effectiveness (OECD/UNDP, 2016).
Table 6: Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation monitoring framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of development effectiveness</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Focus on development results</strong></td>
<td>• Countries have results frameworks in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Development partners are using existing country-led results frameworks in planning and designing interventions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Country ownership of development cooperation</strong></td>
<td>• Country systems are strengthened</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Development partners use countries’ own public financial management and procurement systems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Aid is untied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Annual predictability of development cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Medium-term predictability of development cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Inclusive partnerships</strong></td>
<td>• Civil society operates within an environment that maximises its engagement in and contribution to development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Public–private dialogue promotes private sector engagement and its contribution to development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transparency and accountability</strong></td>
<td>• Transparent information on development cooperation is publicly available</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Development cooperation is on budget and subject to parliamentary scrutiny</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Governments have systems in place to track allocations for gender equality and women’s empowerment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Mutual accountability is strengthened through inclusive reviews</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: OECD/UNDP (2016, pp 44–120)

**Critical INGO literature that questions the limited definition of effectiveness**

Civil society organisations (or CSOs)\(^3\) have contested the view of bilateral agencies, multilateral banks and UN agencies on what constitutes effectiveness, and have

\(^3\) I use the term ‘civil society organisations’ here rather than ‘INGOs’ to describe the groups that came together to advocate for changes to the definitions of ‘development
been successful in being included in the international high-level forums and thereby influencing the subsequent definition of development effectiveness. CSOs were largely excluded from deliberations at the 2003 Rome and 2005 Paris meetings, where donors and governments were the key participants. CSOs began to mobilise to influence the aid effectiveness discourse in preparation for the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness to be held in Accra in 2008 (OpenForum, 2011). CSOs, in addition to donors and governments, were included in the high-level deliberations for the first time in the Accra process – through preparatory consultations. And the Busan high-level forum was the first time CSOs were included as official participants in drafting the outcome document, rather than as observers (Martini et al., 2012).

CSOs are now a key participant in the global process for defining development effectiveness through membership of the Global Partnership for Development Effectiveness. CSOs also maintain outsider status through the CSO Partnership for Development Effectiveness (VANI, 2013).

The CSO definition of effectiveness, as outlined in the Istanbul principles, goes further than the mainstream definition of effectiveness in two ways. First, development effectiveness is defined as the achievement of human rights, environmental sustainability and democratic development, in contrast to the technical, largely mechanistic interpretation of the Paris development effectiveness principles (EU, 2011). Secondly, for INGOs, partnerships with civil society are as

---
effectiveness’ and ‘aid effectiveness’. I use this term because it is used by the key actors themselves and others in the literature. See, for example, OECD (2009) and VANI (2013). There are issues with the use of the term ‘civil society’ as it conveys a homogeneity that does not exist. There is not one civil society, nor is there one voice for civil society. However, I use the term in this specific context and in reference to the particular groups who were involved in the debate on development effectiveness and aid effectiveness.
important as partnerships with national governments in achieving development outcomes. Indeed, the singular focus on national governments as partners had potential negative consequences: the recentralisation of development and aid resources into the hands of governments without countervailing accountability; the politicisation of aid; the ‘instrumentalisation’ of civil society as subcontractors for service delivery; reduced space for CSOs in policy dialogue; a weakened capacity for CSOs to act as watchdogs; and decreasing financial flows channelled through CSOs (EU, 2011).

CSOs were successful in having the Istanbul principles considered as part of the formulation of the Busan declaration. However, there remain differences between mainstream and CSO definitions of development effectiveness. CSOs see the mention of rights-based enabling environments in the Busan declaration as too generic in nature. Also, CSOs contest the lack of explicit commitment to an equal role for CSOs and the fact that Southern partner commitment to the declaration is voluntary (VANI, 2013).
Table 7: Differences between mainstream and CSO principles of development effectiveness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of definition of development effectiveness</th>
<th>Details of definition of development effectiveness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Donors and government principles of development effectiveness | • Focus on development results  
• Foster country ownership of development cooperation  
• Establish inclusive partnerships  
• Emphasise transparency and accountability |
| CSO principles of development effectiveness | • Respect and promote human rights and social justice  
• Embody gender equality and equity while promoting women’s and girls’ rights  
• Focus on people’s empowerment, democratic ownership and participation  
• Promote environmental sustainability  
• Pursue equitable partnerships and solidarity  
• Create and share knowledge and commit to mutual learning  
• Commit to realising positive, sustainable change |

Source: Author’s own work, developed from Busan Principles of Effective Development (OECD, 2017, pp. 44-120) and Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles (Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles, 2010)

Influence of development thinking on evaluation practice

Current development evaluation practice is influenced by current trends in development thinking. The major influence on current development evaluation is the discourse on aid and development effectiveness, which is largely influenced by the results focus of new public management and the results-based approach of neoliberalism (Steger & Roy, 2010). The results-based focus is seen in the current focus on outcome and impact evaluations. A countertrend, and a response to postmodern critiques, is the downward-accountability approaches enabled by
technology that focus on empowerment and hearing the voices of the poor (Rogers & Fraser, 2014, p. 18).

These trends in thinking meant that INGOs were asking the questions ‘Are we effective?’ and ‘How can we improve our effectiveness?’ during this period. But what INGOs and donors meant by development effectiveness differed. Additionally, INGOs either drew from, or contested, the range of evaluation options favoured at the time outlined above: impact evaluation, outcome evaluation and downward accountability approaches.

**Definition of development in Australia at the time of the study**

Australia mirrored the international consensus of increasing aid funding to reach the MDGs. During the time of study (2010–15), the Australian Government increased funding for aid, including the amount distributed to NGOs, and increased its focus on aid effectiveness.

Australia’s aid program doubled in the five years leading to 2010, from approximately $2 billion to $4 billion, and was projected to double again by 2015 to $8 billion (Holloway, Farmer, Reid, Denton, & Howes, 2011). As part of this expansion of the aid program AusAID, the Australian Government agency responsible for development at the start of this study (2010), entered into multi-year partnership agreements with five Australian NGOs with high levels of community support and the greatest capacity to absorb funds, as part of managing the growth of the aid program (ODE, 2015).

AusAID increased its focus on aid effectiveness over this period, demonstrated by its setting-up of the Office for Development Effectiveness,
introduction of Aid Program Performance Reports and Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework with its associated monitoring and evaluation policy and standards.

AusAID set up the Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) in 2006, an operationally independent unit, originally within AusAID and now within the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to measure and report on the effectiveness of the Australian aid program. AusAID introduced aid program performance reports in 2008 (ODE). These reports assess the performance of the aid program and development effectiveness in each of the major countries and regions in which Australian aid is delivered.

AusAID introduced the Comprehensive Aid Policy Framework (CAPF), the Performance Management and Evaluation Policy, and Monitoring and Evaluation Standards in 2012. The CAPF links the aid program objectives and priorities to measures for efficient and effective aid delivery (DFAT, 2013). The Performance Management and Evaluation Policy requires all monitored aid initiatives (those valued over $3 million or with strategic or political importance) to be evaluated at least once every four years. The Monitoring and Evaluation Standards provide guidance for staff and evaluators on good-quality evaluation (ODE, 2014). AusAID’s definition of development effectiveness during the time of study was encapsulated in the strategic goals of the Comprehensive Aid Performance Framework. These goals are: saving lives; promoting opportunities for all; sustainable economic development; effective governance; and humanitarian and disaster response (AusAID, 2012).

The definition of aid effectiveness of the two INGOs that are the subject of the study differs from AusAID’s strategic goals as identified in the Comprehensive
Aid Management Framework, and this echoes the international debate between governmental technocratic approaches and civil society rights-based approaches. For example, PIA set out its areas of impact in the language of human rights. At the time of study, the eight areas of PIA’s intended impact were: the right to a healthy start in life; the right to sexual and reproductive health; the right to education; the right to water and improved sanitation; the right to economic security; the right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence; the right to participate as citizens; and the right to protection and assistance in emergencies and improved resilience to hazards. PIA’s programming was designed to contribute to the areas of identified impact.

OAU also described its strategic goals in the language of human rights and made clear in its strategic plan that it stood for working in solidarity with people living in poverty. OAU’s four change goals at the time of study were described in relation to justice and rights: economic justice; essential services; rights in crisis; and gender justice. OAU’s central commitments, to active citizenship and accountability, underscored its commitment to working in partnership in a transparent manner.

5.4 How learning has been thought of in development

Learning has been a central part of development since its inception. For example, technical assistance and capacity-building of counterparts have been key elements of development provision since the 1950s, as described earlier in the chapter. However, these approaches to learning conceive of the beneficiary as the learner. There has been a focus on donors’ learning since the 1990s onwards. The recognition of the importance of donors learning and improving their practice has
come about in the era of new public management and its emphasis on development results, as well as the increased interest in organisational learning described in Chapter 3.

However, researchers have identified a number of constraints to donors’ learning. For example, Cassen et al.’s (1994, p. 236) major review of aid effectiveness found that, where aid projects go wrong, it is due to the repetition of error. That is, agencies are not learning from their experiences. Cassen et al. cite the lack of information-sharing as the reason for this failure to learn. They found that, where projects failed, it was because agencies did not make information about project experience accessible, ensure that information was incorporated in work on new projects or engage in sufficient exchange of information among agencies (1994, p. 236).

Berg (2000, p. 6) describes aid organisations’ “slow and hesitant knowledge absorption” as being due to three additional factors to those raised by Cassen et al. First, aid agencies fail to learn due to external factors. That is, the complexity, diversity and change in aid country environments limits the applicability of learning from one context to another. Second, aid agencies fail to learn due to internal factors. For example, high staff turnover and limited information flows constrain learning. Third, aid agencies do not learn because of the failures of evaluations. For example, evaluations do not identify critical issues due to fears that findings will not be accepted, and evaluation reports are not read or used.

Suzuki (2000) describes three additional categories of obstacles to learning by development organisations and development practitioners: overemphasis on theoretical and decontextualised knowledge; perpetuation of power asymmetries in
learning models (beneficiaries as learners and staff as trainers); and lack of organisational support (for example, unwillingness to fund staff members’ learning or risk averse behaviour for the sake of maintaining the organisation).

While the obstacles to learning in development have been explored as outlined above, there are limited recommendations for how to improve learning outside of improved information sharing (Cassen, 1994). Additionally, as Cassen. et. al point out, there has been a lack of attention to methods or systems of organisational learning besides evaluation (Cassen, 1994, p. 89). This thesis provides a model to improve organisational learning of INGOs and INGO practitioners in order to improve their development effectiveness.

5.4 Conclusion

The questions that this research attempts to answer are influenced by its historical context. This chapter has contextualised the current period of research within the broader historical continuum of development and development evaluation thinking. The chapter has outlined the changes to definitions of development since the inception of development in the 1950s. Development moved from being about economic growth led by states, to poverty reduction led by states, to economic growth led by the private sector and a reformed public sector (neoliberal reform), to sustainable human development led by a global partnership including private and public sectors and civil society. Different forms of evaluation became salient in each stage of development in order to understand and communicate the success (or failure) of development initiatives. Evaluation has become more and more important, elevated during the high-level forums of aid and development
effectiveness to a central concern of development practitioners and policymakers. During the period of research, ‘effectiveness’ was of critical concern to donors, governments and NGOs. ‘Effective development’ was an important part of retaining political and public support for aid. As such, whether development organisations, particularly INGOs, were effective or not was a critical issue.
Chapter 6: Case 1 – Oxfam Australia’s Hubs

6.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, the rise of new public management and increasing donor emphasis on aid effectiveness forced a response from nongovernment development organisations. OAU approached the challenge of demonstrating its effectiveness by creating the Hubs, which were the pillars of its new organisational learning system, introduced in 2009. The Hubs were the learning centres at the heart of OAU’s program and policy investments for each organisational goal (known as a ‘change goal’) and its partnership with AusAID, explained further in Section 6.2. The Hubs were designed to assist staff to better understand what constitute effective programs and policy within each change goal area. And they were designed to assist OAU, and AusAID which funded OAU, to better understand what difference the organisation was making against each change goal.

So how did the Hubs work? Section 6.3 describes how the Hubs worked in relation to organisational context, at both international and national levels, thereby answering the first research question. The section discusses how the Hubs were infused by OAU’s approach to development and affected by the organisational restructures occurring at the time of study, the management structures and the previous organisational system. Section 6.4 discusses Hub membership, management, activities and progress over time. The section presents a detailed look at the workings of two Hubs: the Active Citizenship and Accountability Hub and the Economic Justice Hub.
The chapter then responds to the second research question by examining what helped and hindered learning in the Hubs. Section 6.5 indicates Hub members were engaged and interested in Hub activities (Level 1). The Sections explains the range of factors that supported and inhibited members’ learning (Level 2).

The chapter then responds to the third research question by examining the effects of the Hubs. Section 6.5 also illustrates how the Hubs were not designed to support practice change (Level 3). Where practice change occurred, this happened largely as an initiative of the individual Hub participant. Because of the lack of focus on practice improvement, there was limited impact on organisational results (Level 4).

6.2 Description of the Hubs

The Hubs were a key part of the new partnership between OAU and the (then) AusAID. OAU was one of the five Australian NGOs selected for the new, multi-year partnership mentioned in Chapter 5. The AusAID–NGO Cooperation Program (ANCP) partnership, signed in 2009, was a four-year agreement that replaced the annual block grants OAU had received from AusAID since 1974 (OAU, 2010d). The new funding agreement was significant: A$30 million over a four-year period with annual funding increasing by approximately 30 per cent each year. The large-scale funding agreement, increasing year by year, mirrored the external context of major increases in aid budgets under the Rudd Government and by international donors as agreed as part of the 2002 Monterrey Consensus (Day, 2016). The new partnership agreement supported predictable funding to OAU and thereby greater potential for impact as outlined in the partnership operational plan:
Recognising that both Oxfam Australia and AusAID are investing in this Partnership, this Partnership Agreement outlines predictable funding to Oxfam Australia over four years from 2009–10 to 2012–13 to facilitate the shared goal and objectives. (OAU, 2010d)

Funding predictability was designed to ensure greater progress towards the partners’ shared goals, objectives and areas of priority. The partners worked together towards the goal of reducing and alleviating poverty through accelerating progress towards the MDGs (OAU, 2009, p. 2). The partners’ five shared objectives were to: reduce poverty and injustice; build partnerships; be accountable; build community support; and demonstrate results and share experiences (OAU, 2009, p. 3). The priorities of the partnership were the four core areas where the organisation worked to achieve change: active citizenship and accountability, economic justice, essential services and gender justice (OAU, 2009, p. 4) described in Table 8. OAU agreed to involve AusAID in policy development and consultation, high-quality program implementation and reporting in return for the increased funding and increased predictability of funding that the partnership provided (OAU, 2009).

Table 8: Oxfam Australia’s four change goals

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change goal</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active citizenship and accountability (ACAC)</td>
<td>Support people and communities to exercise their civil and political rights, influence decisions and hold governments, businesses and decision-makers to account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic justice (EJ)</td>
<td>Strive to increase the realisation of women’s and men’s rights to secure and sustainable livelihoods, including greater access to and control of natural resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Essential services (ES)</td>
<td>Securing people’s rights to services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Justice (GJ)</td>
<td>Increasing the realisation of women’s and girls’ rights to be economically independent, participate in decision-making, hold positions of leadership and live free of violence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ANCP partnership was focused on impact and learning through specific funding for learning, innovation and design, and delivered through the four change goal hubs (OAU, 2010a). The investment allowed OAU to learn in ways that were more strategic and longer term than it had engaged in previously, as envisaged in the following internal reports:

The key difference about the program is the funding for long-term programmatic work and learning, which enables us to invest in these quality components – dialogue, reflection, and shared learning – and to bring about greater impact. (OAU, 2010c)

The first year of the new ANCP Partnership Agreement (2009/10) was a transition year, bridging the shift from implementing ANCP as discrete, annual projects towards developing a more strategic portfolio that reflects the intent of the new partnership modality. In the second year of the Partnership (2010/11), a more deliberate ANCP MEL framework is needed to ensure that Oxfam is able to demonstrate impact and cumulative learning over the four-year contract. (OAU, 2010b)

The Hubs were thus a mechanism for OAU staff to focus on the organisation’s change goals from a more strategic and organisational perspective. For example, the Hubs engaged staff from both International Programs and Public Engagement in learning and quality improvement. By including staff from each section of the organisation, the Hubs were a way to build connections. In this way, the Hubs helped bridge what had been described as “operating silos” between different divisions within the Melbourne organisation, the International Programs and Public Programs sections in particular. The Hubs were also intended to connect field office staff and move analysis of what works and why away from a Melbourne-centric view (Sann,
The hubs were thus the centrepiece for improving quality through learning in the ANCP partnership, as in the following presentation slide shown to staff on the ANCP partnership in Figure 6.

**Figure 6: ANCP Program overview**

Source: Oxfam Australia, 2009

As outlined above, the Hubs were set up to help OAU understand, improve and communicate its impact as a key part of its enhanced relationship with AusAID. The Hubs became a space where staff from different parts of OAU could engage in their work from a longer term and more strategic perspective. These Hub design principles align with key elements in organisational learning theory, as propounded by Senge, of the learning organisation as a system. To work effectively, all parts of the system must recognise their place within this larger whole. The design of the Hubs set out to encourage a systems view of programs.
6.3 Key organisational factors that influenced the Hubs

While the Hubs were set up to serve a purpose in OAU’s new partnership with AusAID, a number of contextual factors influenced how the Hubs operated and their effects. Key factors that affected the Hubs, outlined below, were staff commitment and motivation, structural changes that limited staff capacity to engage in organisational learning, the silo management approach and the learning system that preceded it.

OAU’s transformational development approach increased the commitment of staff who shared the organisation’s core values. Oxfam’s transformational development approach is neo-Marxist, as explained in Section 5.2, concerned with identifying and transforming structural relations that keep people in poverty (OI, 2013). Oxfam’s determination to enact its development approach, by supporting the sustainable livelihoods of poor people as an alternative to the capitalist growth agenda attracts staff who share these same values. (OI, 2013). Staff are thus highly motivated to achieve the organisation’s higher order goals by enacting these values through their daily work (Bass & Avolio, 1990).

While OAU staff were undoubtedly highly motivated, their capacity to engage in organisational learning was limited by the impact of three major structural changes that occurred over the period of study. The effect on OAU of a global restructuring was significant over the 2008–12 period. Oxfam was transitioning to what it called the Single Management System, or SMS. This was arguably a consequence of the absorption of corporate management principles across the development sector in pursuit of greater and more demonstrable ‘effectiveness’ – which in this case translated into an attempt to achieve efficiencies. Previously each
of the 17 independent affiliates ran separate programs within a country and reported back to their own headquarters. Under this rationalisation measure, the SMS identified one of the 17 affiliates as the Managing Affiliate for each country program, meaning that one Managing Affiliate had overall management responsibility in each country, supported by up to three other affiliates (Implementing Affiliates) to deliver on the country strategy (Jayawickrama, 2012). OAU went from having offices in 12 countries to being Managing Affiliate in only 4 countries (Indonesia, Timor Leste, South Africa, Sri Lanka) (OAU, 2008). Significantly, OAU handed over management of programs in several countries where it was not selected as Managing Affiliate: Cambodia, Laos, Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu.

The SMS represented a major step forward in eliminating problems for the international organisation of duplication, wastage and ineffective use of resources – human, material and financial. However, many OAU staff reported the process as confusing and complicated, with the result of a loss of staff and field intelligence and connections for their affiliate. The structural change process that the international organisation was going through, while making it more efficient and potentially more effective, also alienated staff at OAU and was disruptive to internal reporting and social structures.

The second major structural change occurring at the time of study was the 2009–10 restructure of the International Programs Section (IPS) of OAU as a result of the introduction of the SMS (A. Brown & Roche, 2010). The restructure had a significant effect on staffing. The Australia-based workforce decreased from 322 in 2011 to 265 by 2013. In addition to this reduction, the restructure shifted staffing
from generalist to specialised functional positions. Previously staff were generalist development administrators who worked in a geographically specific area, for example the East Asia section. After the restructure, staff members had specific responsibility for a technical area: funding, program finance, program management or quality (Management consultant interview, July 2013). This reflected pragmatic decision-making in a context of diminishing resources, but also the generic, technocratic, and functional tendencies of neoliberal management theory.

The third major set of structural changes at OAU was due to a significant loss of revenue in 2011 through OAU’s trading arm due to the delayed effects of the Global Financial Crisis (GFC), which in turn led to budget cuts, reviews and restructures. OAU implemented major budget cuts in December 2011 which reduced the funding available for organisational learning significantly, conducted a review of the whole organisation in February 2012 known as the ‘Fit for the Future Review’, followed by an ‘Organisational Restructure’ in September–October 2012. In 2012–13 OAU conducted a Strategic Investment Plan review process (known as SIRUP) that set about defining the priorities of IPS specifically, which then led to a 2013 IPS Review.

In summary, OAU was an organisation going through continuous change during the period of study. This often meant that staff were focused on the proposed changes or concerned about whether they would have a job. Additionally, the budget cuts of 2011 reduced the funding available through the Hubs. The internal structural changes and budget cuts meant this was not a conducive internal environment for a large-scale learning initiative.
The Hubs were designed as one way to break down the silo culture of OAU. Despite its GFC-related financial difficulties, OAU remains a large and complex transnational organisation. For example, in 2011 its annual budget was A$68.6 million and it employed 573 staff (OAU, 2011c). Its leadership structure then comprised a CEO and six Directors, collectively known as the Program Management Group (PMG), who managed three core areas: the IPS that delivered long-term development programs; the Program Policy and Outreach (PPO) section that ran campaigns and advocacy; and the Humanitarian Support Unit (HSU) that provided emergency support. While its management structure was designed to achieve efficiency, it contributed to a silo mentality. Each unit or section worked in isolation from others and had developed separate cultures and priorities over time. OAU management had identified this phenomenon as an issue to be addressed and had developed the ‘one-program approach’ in response. The ‘one-program approach’ was the selective integration of OAU’s long-term development, humanitarian and advocacy interventions, in which coordination and collaboration were linked operationally to the priority of “impact” (OAU, 2011b, p. 6). The Hubs were to be a forum to bring different sections of the organisation together and develop shared projects.

In addition to the interests and requirements of the donor, there were a number of contextual factors that affected the way the Hubs were implemented and how staff responded to them. AusAID was looking for a learning system to help OAU understand, document and improve its impact. The Hubs were inescapably influenced by the organisational learning system that came before them, known as the Annual Review and Reflection (AR&R). The AR&R was implemented over the
period 2007–09 and involved staff developing and reflecting on a set of case studies within each change goal area. The Hubs incorporated the annual reflection from the AR&R but broadened the evidence base considered during these reflective events.

In summary, the Hubs benefited from staff commitment and motivation. But this was limited by the structural changes occurring at the international level, which had significant ramifications at the national level. The restructure processes left many Australia-based staff with limited ability to engage with anything above and beyond their day-to-day tasks. Additionally, to be successful the Hubs had to break open the operating silos, but this required staff commitment at a time of disruptive and distressing change. In response to these contextual factors, the Hubs drew from the learning history within the organisation and started by using the model that had developed from the previous learning system, with case study reflection as its main learning methodology.

6.4 How the Oxfam Australia Hubs worked

The Hubs operated as institutionalised communities of practice (CoPs). The Hubs were composed of groups of 30–50 Australian and overseas-based staff who convened regularly in the Melbourne office (overseas members dialed in via phone or Skype). The Hubs were resourced by the organisation – provided with supporting technical and administrative staff, and institutionally condoned time – and the governance structure of the CoPs was determined by the organisation, with staff assigned to a CoP. For example, each Hub was managed and facilitated by an Advisor from the Program Development Unit (PDU) and led intellectually by a Thematic Lead whose role it was to determine the priorities of the Hub. The Hubs were supported
by a PDU Officer and Research staff from the Research Unit. Hub spending was overseen by the PDU staff member who managed ANCP partnership reporting. The Program Management Group as the group that made the decision about funding/defunding particular Hubs.

Learning in the Hubs was generated through annual research, evaluation and design projects. Hub members identified potential research, evaluation and design projects which aligned with Hub learning priorities, and these then went through a selection process managed by the PDU Advisor and Thematic Lead. The selected projects were outsourced to consultants and reviewed by Hub members. Project outputs served as learning stimuli for Hub members in meeting discussions and at annual reflections. Annual reflections, held in Melbourne every year and offshore every three years, included all OAU staff working towards the change goal. Staff from other Oxfam Affiliates, as well as partners and community members, attended offshore reflections.

The PDU Advisors and Thematic Leads managed the Hubs according to a set of principles that sought to encourage cross-unit collaboration, be responsive to members’ learning needs, and be nimble and agile. The Hubs were able to solicit membership from across different units in the Melbourne office and other Australia-based offices. The Hubs were unable, however, to solicit large-scale input from country and regional offices. Membership from country and regional offices made up less than 10 per cent of Hubs overall.

The Hubs were responsive to members’ learning needs, but were limited in their capacity to support all activities sought by members due to limited budgets, the high administrative burden of acquitting funding and the short-term nature of
funding. For example, tendering processes were used in the first year to ensure Hubs were assessing and resourcing members’ learning projects, referred to above, in a fair and transparent way. However, budgets were cut in the second year and the Hubs switched to a more selective process, given the excessive administrative burden of the tendering process. The administrative requirements, particularly regarding bidding for, reporting on and acquitting ANCP funding, were onerous and took large amounts of PDU staff time. While AusAID funding provided the learning space, the administrative requirements of reporting on the learning activities was high and this hindered the achievement of the learning and change objectives set. Additionally, Hubs were unable to support long-term activities because of their short-term funding agreements with AusAID. Consequently, most Hub activities were short term: under one year. The administrative realities of managing the Hubs worked against the overall goals of supporting learning.

The Hubs worked primarily to report on organisational progress. This can be seen in the decision for the PDU to manage the Hubs, rather than the Quality and Impact Team. These two units had a close overlap between their roles and it was questionable which unit was better placed to manage the Hubs. Both teams were responsible for collecting and analysing data. However, the PDU used data to make assessments of effectiveness, while the Quality and Impact Team used data to analyse where regional teams required more support to ensure greater impact. The decision for PDU to manage the Hubs illustrates the emphasis on effectiveness reporting over program improvement, which in turn resonates with the development sector’s increasing concern to demonstrate aid effectiveness to satisfy donors in a tightening fiscal environment globally.
PDU’s management of the Hubs was constrained by the lack of seniority of the PDU Advisors and the pervasive silo mentality mentioned above. Specifically, the PDU was part of IPS’s reporting and management structure, but was managing input from the Public Policy and Outreach (PPO) and the Research Unit, and had one of its main Hub outputs (the Annual Review report) delivered through the Effectiveness Unit. PDU capacity to manage the Hubs was constrained by the requirement to manage a range of input from across a number of units without the seniority or authority to require this input.

**Progress of the Hubs over time**

OAU set out its plan for Hub development in relation to the partnership agreement with AusAID (OAU, 2011a, p. 11). The plan was to progress over time from ‘Transition’ in year one to ‘Establishment’ in year two to ‘Implementation’ in year three and ‘Assessing Progress’ in year four. Assigned to Hubs in 2010, each PDU Advisor managed development of the vision and strategy for the ANCP partnership, Hub management systems, planning and budgeting, and design work for the Hubs in the first, ‘transition’ year. This included specifying their own roles and responsibilities, and those of the Thematic Lead and the PDU support officer, and seeking research input from the Research Unit. The PDU Advisor established meeting frequency for each Hub and determined the process for accessing funding. In their first year, Hubs evolved in line with expectations.

Hubs had to respond to a range of circumstances beyond their immediate control. For example, the first year of the Hubs was extremely pressured because of AusAID’s requirement to disperse funding in the first six months and spend it by the
end of the next six months. The project tendering process required new systems for transparent selection and allocation of funds for learning projects, which was time consuming and, as mentioned, the process was subsequently scaled back. Pressure also came from the internal decision in 2010 to expand the focus from only ANCP-funded activities to any OAU activity. External and internal pressures meant the Hubs were unable to follow the predicted path of progress outlined in the AusAID partnership agreement.

Table 9 summarises Hub activities over the 2010–13 period, when most funded activity occurred. Originally a similar amount of funding was planned for disbursement each year. However, the Hubs faced major budget cuts in 2011–12 due to aforementioned funding shortfalls and consequent financial management issues within the agency. While all four Hubs continued during 2011–12, funds to EJ and ES were severely cut in 2012–13 and the 2013 Hub evaluation recommended that these Hubs cease functioning, discussed further in the next section. Table 8 summarises the key elements of Hub progress over time.
Table 9: Progress of Hubs over time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td>$711,905</td>
<td>$721,000 cut to $250,000</td>
<td>$220,000 Funds to EJ and ES Hubs minimised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staff</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategic Lead/s</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategic Lead/s</strong></td>
<td><strong>Strategic Lead/s</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>PDU:</strong> 2 Hub Advisors</td>
<td><strong>PDU:</strong> 3 Hub Advisors</td>
<td><strong>PDU:</strong> 2 Hub Advisors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Hub Support Officers</td>
<td>1.2 Hub Support Officer</td>
<td>2 Hub Support Officers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ResU:</strong> 2–3 Research Officers per Hub</td>
<td><strong>ResU:</strong> 2–3 Research Officers per Hub</td>
<td><strong>ResU:</strong> 2–3 Research Officers per Hub</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Funding process</strong></td>
<td>Bidding process open to all Hub members</td>
<td>Hub Strategic Lead and PDU Advisor solicited and supported funding proposals based on priorities of Hub members</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Reflection process</strong></td>
<td>Annual review and reflection for each Hub based on commissioned case studies and analysis of reports and evaluations. EJ Hub held field-based reflection and planning process ‘EJ week’ in Indonesia</td>
<td>Annual review and reflection for each Hub based on commissioned case studies and analysis of reports and evaluations.</td>
<td>Annual review and reflection for each Hub based on commissioned case studies and analysis of reports and evaluations. ACAC Hub held staged reflections in country and regional offices and a Headquarter reflection in Indonesia</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own work
Table 10 provides a more detailed overview by Hub: the number of members in each Hub, the percentage of members based overseas, the frequency of their meetings, the number of research, evaluation or design projects conducted each year, and annual expenditure. As can be seen, the Gender Justice Hub had the most members (60–90) and the most international members (just over 50 per cent). However, the Gender Justice Hub’s activities and meetings reduced in frequency over the three-year period along with a reduction in budget. The Economic Justice Hub had the second-most members (30–40) and the second-most international members (approximately 25 per cent). However, the Economic Justice Hub’s activities and meetings also reduced in frequency over the three-year period, but at a more rapid rate than the Gender Justice Hub along with a much more severe reduction in budget. The Active Citizenship and Accountability Hub had the third-most members (approximately 30) and the third-most international members (none in the first two years and 14 per cent in the third year). In contrast to the Gender Justice and Economic Justice Hubs, the Active Citizenship and Accountability Hub maintained the frequency of its meetings through the three-year period and returned to its original number of activities in the third year along with additional funds after the budget cuts in the second year. The Essential Services Hub had the fewest members (20–25) and the fewest international members (approximately 10 per cent). The frequency of meetings, activities and funding reduced over the three-year period to almost nothing.
Table 10: Overview of Hub activity 2010–13

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Active Citizenship and Accountability (ACAC)</th>
<th>Economic Justice (EJ)</th>
<th>Essential Services (ES)</th>
<th>Gender Justice (GJ)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10/11 11/12 12/13</td>
<td>10/11 11/12 12/13</td>
<td>10/11 11/12 12/13</td>
<td>10/11 11/12 12/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of members</td>
<td>30 28 28</td>
<td>40–45 40–45 34</td>
<td>24 24 22</td>
<td>64 62 87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% OS based</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>25% 25% 26%</td>
<td>10% 10% 9%</td>
<td>50% 52% 53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting frequency</td>
<td>Month Month Month Mon Qua Event spe ific Mon Bi Rare</td>
<td>Mon Bi 1–2/ M 3/M 3/M</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No. of projects</td>
<td>7 3 7</td>
<td>10 2 2</td>
<td>4 3 1</td>
<td>7 5 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project expenditure (,000)</td>
<td>14 4 100</td>
<td>288 32 10</td>
<td>44 20 5</td>
<td>135 89 80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own work drawn from Sann, 2013

Vignette of two Hubs

Here we examine two Hubs in more detail, the ACAC and EJ Hubs. To better understand how the Hubs worked, each vignette includes a descriptive overview, a table with Hub activities by year and a short illustrative example.

Active Citizenship and Accountability Hub

The ACAC Hub increased in importance over time. When the Hub started in 2009, active citizenship and accountability were considered ways of working rather than ends in themselves. However, active citizenship and accountability became a change goal in 2010 based on a recommendation from the mid-term review (A. Brown &
Roche, 2010). They then became the first change goal in the 2014–19 strategy, known as the ‘Right to be heard’. This increasing priority was reflected in the fact that, while all Hubs were hit by financial cuts in 2011–12, the ACAC budget was the only one to return to original levels in 2012–13.

The fact that active citizenship and accountability were new commitments and were evolving conceptions of ACAC meant that Hub participants were focused on defining what these terms meant and how they would be achieved. In the first year, Hub members focused on understanding ACAC in different country contexts and from different perspectives within the organisation. The preliminary ACAC theory of change facilitated by the Director of Effectiveness at an ACAC Hub session is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Preliminary ACAC theory of change
Source: Roche (2011, 3)
A management consultant working with OAU described the interconnection between local-level work and national and global level policy change:

Basic theory of change is that change happens not only at the community level but is magnified at the national state as well as global. You wouldn’t have work on the ground without advocacy to drive change.

Consultant Interview, 2013

In the second year, with budget cuts, the Hub focused on developing theories of change that could potentially be applied across a range of contexts through its collaborative research with the University of Melbourne, ‘Valuing Citizen Led Change’. Finally, in the third year, with increased budget, the Hub explored new areas through innovation and design activities and South–South learning workshops. Details of the Hub projects and budgets are given in Table 11.
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<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case studies</strong></td>
<td>Strengthening People’s Voices to Demand Accountability from Power Holders (IPS/South Asia/Sri Lanka)</td>
<td>Valuing Citizen Led Change</td>
<td>Valuing Citizen Led Change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Effective Accountability: the ADB Mechanism and its value for communities in Cambodia (PPO/Advocacy/Mekong)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Make Poverty History (case studies as part of evaluation) (PPO/Advocacy/Australia)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fostering active citizenship around COP 17 (IPS&amp;PPO/South Africa)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Annual reflections</strong></td>
<td>Regional Annual Reflection (IPS/Southern Africa)</td>
<td>Annual review analysis and synthesis</td>
<td>Annual Reflection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Regional youth program reflection (IPS/Pacific &amp;PPO/Youth)</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Annual review analysis and synthesis (IPS/PDU)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literature review prepared for annual review</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Innovation and design</strong></td>
<td>EJ food justice campaign market research (PPO/Campaigns/Australia)</td>
<td>The Welcome MAT – Digital Technologies</td>
<td>In-Australia Community Engagement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Completion and Socialisation of Social Accountability Research in conjunction with Melbourne University (Agency/Global)</td>
<td>Development of vision and theory of change for In-Australia Community Engagement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Case studies</strong></td>
<td>Valuing Citizen Led Change</td>
<td>Annual review analysis and synthesis</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Annual reflections</strong></td>
<td>Regional Annual Reflection (IPS/Southern Africa)</td>
<td>Annual review analysis and synthesis</td>
<td>Annual Reflection</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Regional youth program reflection (IPS/Pacific &amp;PPO/Youth)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Annual review analysis and synthesis (IPS/PDU)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Literature review prepared for annual review</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Innovation and design</strong></td>
<td>EJ food justice campaign market research (PPO/Campaigns/Australia)</td>
<td>Development of vision and theory of change for In-Australia Community Engagement</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Development of vision and theory of change for In-Australia Community Engagement</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>South-South learning</strong></td>
<td>ACAC/EJ Joint Workshop on Risk</td>
<td>Regional Theory of Change workshop</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Project expenditure</strong></td>
<td>$144,678</td>
<td>$25,165</td>
<td>$100,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 1 gives detail of one ACAC Hub project to provide more insight into the Hub’s activities and outcomes.

**Box 1: Tuning in to active citizens**

**Background:** Farmers in Western Kenya use their mobile phones to trade directly with exporters, increasing their income dramatically. Community members in Tombadouro, Brazil, used video blogging to demand that local authorities dispose of waste properly. Citizens in Kenya used Google Maps to track violence and destruction during the ethnic riots and spread awareness. OAU was aware of the potential of digital technologies to promote active citizenship. But prior to 2012, it had no comprehensive understanding of how these technologies were being used in its programs or of the general trends or issues for ongoing use of digital technology.

**Hub Response:** The Hub funded a study on the use of digital technologies in the promotion of active citizenship and government accountability. This study surveyed OAU staff and partners on their existing use of technology, reviewed the literature and developed six case studies of digital technology use in OAU programs. The report provides information on the use of digital technology in active citizenship, notes lessons and issues to consider, and provides a series of recommendations to expand and improve OAU’s use of digital technology.

**Results:** OAU shared the report at an aid roundtable of the FWD Digital Conference that the Hub co-financed. 20 agencies attended the roundtable and shared project plans. The roundtable led to cross-agency collaboration on the Good Aid Works <http://goodaidworks.com.au/> project. Good Aid Works shares videos, stories and photos to contribute to Australian public understanding of aid. In addition, the report informed the Engaging South African Partners and communities with Australian supporters project.

The report’s recommendation to increase staff digital technology capacity aligns with Oxfam’s priorities. The new OI Strategic Plan has a strong active citizenship focus that relies on upscaling affiliates in-country on the use of digital technology. OAU agreed to contribute to this through redeveloping the Social Media for Advocacy guidebook into a teaching resource for affiliates in-country.

Source: Fleming (2013, 4)
Economic Justice Hub Vignette

The economic justice goal decreased in priority over the time of study. As a consequence, the budget of the EJ Hub reduced as the organisation faced financial pressure and the Hub was eventually closed in 2013. Economic justice was OAU’s first change goal in its 2007–13 Strategic Plan. But this reduced in importance in the 2014–19 OAU Strategic Plan. The decreasing priority of economic justice as a goal corresponds inversely to the increasing priority placed on active citizenship and accountability.

The EJ Hub was primarily concerned with assessing progress across the diversity of the portfolio of work against this change goal. The mid-term review of the 2007–13 Strategic Plan showed how the enormous breadth of EJ work made it hard to understand this work:

‘Seeing the whole’ has always been difficult in our economic justice work. Oxfam Australia has an enormous breadth of work across the Economic Justice change goal. This work has spanned rural livelihoods programming, labour rights, climate change, natural resource management, trade policy and more recently research on emerging issues such as the Global Financial crisis, food price hikes and biofuels. (A. Brown & Roche, 2010)

The diversity of EJ work, and the lack of emphasis on bringing the work into perspective, relate to the activist work culture of the organisation. The following quote from a management consultant indicates the activist culture remained, despite moves to professionalise, resulting in individual staff having strongly held reasons for programming decisions and a lack of capacity for management to question or change these decisions:
They [OAU] didn’t have a lot of folk with organisational experience. They had a lot of people in management positions who had community development [experience] ... The skills needed to run the org were different ... in Oxfam, what you see has been done is the result of far more organic processes, like roots going off down these paths, than a systematic approach, whether it be a systematic approach to management or its management. There is something about the nature of the people who are, perhaps in the program areas, are less interested in the systematic approach and more in going with the flow. It is the conflict with the organisation needs and program needs. It is a contested domain between the nature of the work and the organisation, and a resistance at management level to systematic approaches to management.

Consultant Interview, 2013

The second concern for Hub members was to better understand how to link programming and policy work at the local community and village level to national and international level for improved outcomes, as outlined in the mid-term review report:

Oxfam has had difficulty articulating its economic justice work at the local level in a way that enhances leverage in the advocacy and campaigning work that targets the trade, aid, rural and urban development policies of key development actors. Similarly, the agency’s experience in economic justice advocacy and policy work has not been adequately leveraged to assist community groups. Due to the myriad of issues involved in our economic justice work, people working in different programming areas have ‘come at’ economic justice from different perspectives. After developing program areas, expertise and relationships for a number of years, it has sometimes been difficult for staff to work collaboratively with each other to leverage the agency’s broad experience in economic justice for greater change. (A. Brown & Roche, 2010)
The offshore annual reflection event, held in Jakarta in 2010, brought together OAU staff from a number of affiliates, partners and community members. Interviews and reports show the annual reflection helped to address the lack of coherence across the large portfolio of EJ work and to link programs and policy (more detail is provided in Box 2). However, the reduction in funding to the EJ Hub resulted in a loss of momentum and in the final year the Hub held only collaborative events with the ACAC and GJ Hubs. Detail of Hub activities and funding is given in Table 12.
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<td><strong>Annual reflections</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Case studies</strong></td>
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<td>Climate change – information management systems, procedures, tools and resources for OAU CC plan and DRR</td>
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<td>Climate change, women’s economic empowerment – case studies(A, B)</td>
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<td><strong>Innovation and design</strong></td>
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<td>Natural Resource Management Scoping and Program Design (India)</td>
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<td>Development of a DRR/CC Framework (India) (B)</td>
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<td>Urban livelihoods scoping (Port Moresby)</td>
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<td>Completion of design process for Mekong Program</td>
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<td>Support for Women at Table Initiative (Indonesia) (A)</td>
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<td>OI GROW Campaign research</td>
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<td>Urban Programming mapping and learning event</td>
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<td><strong>Innovation and design</strong></td>
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<td>GROW – peer-to-peer learning and strategy development</td>
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<td><strong>Innovation and design</strong></td>
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<td>Risk workshop Bangkok+ (co-financed by ACAC)</td>
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<td>Gender and GROW WebEx meetings (held with GJ)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Project expenditure</strong></td>
<td>$288,292</td>
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Box 2 provides detail of three interrelated EJ Hub projects that assisted Hub members take a more integrated approach to their work.

**Box 2: Fewer people going to sleep hungry**

**Background:** OAU’s contribution towards economic justice has been mixed. A 2010 review found that the agency’s work in the area was so diverse that impact was unclear. The agency required focus to adequately effect policy change. The Oxfam Grow campaign was selected to drive an integrated approach across the agency.

**Hub Response:** The Hub funded three activities: Economic Justice Week, a Grow campaign workshop and a Personal Risk Workshop. EJ Week brought together staff from programs, campaigns and advocacy from several countries to share information and reflect on progress in the area of economic justice. The Food Justice workshop brought together staff from several countries to provide training on developing theories of change and theories of action, and to provide the opportunity for each country program to share its theories. The Risk Workshop addressed the issue of personal risk faced by country staff and teams based on Grow advocacy work.

**Results:** By bringing all those who work on economic justice together, EJ Week helped catalyse work on the Grow campaign. EJ programming thereby developed a narrative and programmatic coherence. The OAU narrative focuses on the key statistic that every night 1 in 7 people go to bed hungry. This statistic is the entry point for discussing how the food system isn’t working for everyone. Campaigns, advocacy and program staff now work together on the interlinked issues that keep people hungry: food and oil prices, climate change, unfair trade, failing markets, gender inequality and land grabs. The Food Justice Workshop assisted each participating country to clarify its theories of change and action through exchange with others and identified key impediments to achieving EJ goals. The Personal Risk Workshop resulted in the drafting of five case studies. Once reviewed by country leadership teams, they can be considered for circulation to OAU and Oxfam to influence policies and practices in relation to personal risk.

Source: Fleming (2013, 4)
6.5 The effects of the Hubs

This section answers the second research question: What factors supported and inhibited learning? The section illustrates that the Hubs had positive effects at the lower levels of the Kirkpatrick framework. That is, members reacted well to activities (Level 1), although there were differences in members’ responses to the two Hubs (described in Section 6.5.1). Members learned (Level 2) from the Hub activities (shown in Section 6.5.2), supported by three factors: self-directed enquiry; making tacit knowledge explicit; and bridging the different ‘cultures’ within OAU of programming, campaigns and advocacy. The section also examines the six factors that inhibited learning, including three limitations related to how learning was conceived and three limitations of learning support processes.

This section also answers the third research question: What was the effect, if any, of the organisational learning system? While the Hubs performed well at the first two levels of the Kirkpatrick framework, they had low impact on Levels 3 and 4. Section 6.5.3 examines the lack of impact of Hub member learning on their practice (Level 3) due to a lack of focus on practice in the design of the Hubs and in Hub activities. Section 6.5.4 examines the limited contribution of participants’ behaviour change to organisational results (Level 4) due to the lack of focus on improving organisational results in the design of the Hubs and a number of gaps in the OAU performance management system.

Level 1: Reaction

Members of both Hubs reacted well to Hub activities as assessed against the eight engagement criteria below. Aggregate member reaction was positive; however,
there were differences in member reactions to each of the two Hubs. ACAC members had a growing positive reaction to the Hub activities. In contrast, the EJ Hub started from a point of high engagement with members which declined over time.

**Alignment with organisational priorities:** Both Hubs were aligned with organisational priorities. However, as explained previously, ACAC increased in importance while EJ declined. Evidently, there was potential for the work of the ACAC to impact on organisational practices. Momentum had been generated and senior management interest in both the ACAC Hub and the goal was accorded a higher priority.

**Membership:** Both Hubs had approximately 30 members, most of whom were based in the Melbourne office. ACAC had 30 members to start and this number declined slightly to 28 over the period. The EJ Hub started with 40–45 members and declined to 34 in 2012–13. The decline in EJ membership relates to reduction from the ‘high point’ of EJ week in Jakarta in 2011. At its peak, the EJ Hub was marginally more ‘internationalised’ with 25 per cent of its members based outside Australia, while ACAC had 14 per cent (or roughly 4 of the 34 members) based overseas.

**Funding:** Both Hubs started with large annual budgets for learning. ACAC’s budget in 2010–11 was $144,678 and EJ’s budget was $288,292, most of which was allocated to the EJ offshore reflection. As outlined previously, while the organisation reduced funding to both ACAC and EJ Hubs in 2011–12, only ACAC’s funding returned to its previous level in 2012–13. The reduced funding levels, which reflected the lessening importance of the change goal in relation to other change goals, translated into a reduced numbers of activities, which in turn reduced the interest of members.
**Dispersal of funding:** Both Hubs dispersed the full allocation of funds available to them. This indicates the interest of staff, who competed for resources to advance their activities.

**Meeting attendance:** ACAC maintained a regular number of meetings annually over the 2010–13 period, while the EJ Hub meetings reduced in frequency. ACAC held approximately nine meetings a year over the period. EJ held nine meetings in 2010–11, reducing in frequency to four in 2011–12 and three in 2012–13.

**Activities:** Both Hubs engaged in many activities in 2010–11, which reduced with budget cuts in 2011–12. The ACAC Hub conducted nine activities in total in 2010–11: four case studies, three annual reflections (two offshore reflections and one in Melbourne), and two innovation and design activities. ACAC’s activities reduced in 2011–12 to four activities: one case study, one annual reflection, and two innovation and design activities. The EJ Hub conducted ten activities in 2010–11: two case studies, one annual reflection (held offshore), and seven innovation and design activities. As with the ACAC Hub, EJ reduced its activities in 2011–12. In EJ’s case it conducted one case study and one innovation and design activity.

ACAC increased the number of activities in 2012–13 with increased funding, while EJ continued its reduction in activities. In 2012–13 the ACAC Hub increased to six activities: one case study, one reflection, and four innovation and design activities. However, EJ activity in 2012–13 reduced further with only two innovation and design activities, both of which were held with other Hubs. The level of activity of each Hub reflected the amount of funding allocated, which aligned with organisational priority. While ACAC rebounded from the 2011–12 budget cuts, EJ continued its decline.
**Level of communication:** Hub communication was conducted almost entirely in meetings. Neither the ACAC or EJ Hubs produced any newsletters. Both Hubs sent out minimal numbers of direct emails to members (two) outside of correspondence regarding meetings. Members shared documents and engaged with other members via the SUMUS system, discussed below. As can be seen, communication was centred on the activities conducted in Hub meetings. While the system had the capacity for discussions, hosting events and videos, these functions were only used minimally by EJ Hub members. For example, there were only two conversations – that is, two times where online asynchronous discussions were conducted.

**Document usage:** Both Hubs uploaded documents onto the OAU intranet system, SUMUS. The ACAC Hub increased the number of documents uploaded between 2010–11 and 2011–12 and then reduced the number between 2011–12 and 2012–13. In the first year, the Hub uploaded 11 documents. In the second year, it uploaded 18 documents. In the final year, it uploaded only two documents. The EJ Hub uploaded 51 documents at its peak in 2010–11. However, the Hub reduced the number of documents in 2011–12 (to 17) and again in 2012–13 (to 2). Hub members used SUMUS mostly for sharing documents. The level of document sharing, discussions and events related directly to the organisational support and resources and, consequently, EJ activity fell away.

The data indicates ACAC and EJ members both engaged with their Hubs. However, engagement differed according to the organisational priority placed on the change goal, as well as the timing. The EJ vignette above illustrates that the offshore annual reflection was a high point of engagement for that Hub. It is not surprising that engagement would drop from that peak. In contrast, the engagement of ACAC
members grew over the period. Again, this is unsurprising, given the increasing priority of the change goal and the imperative for staff to better understand what active citizenship and accountability mean and ways to go about achieving these goals. The lack of member-generated communication, discussions and events, however, suggests a lack of deep engagement. Rather, the data indicates members were most interested in their own particular learning activities.

**Level 2: Three factors that supported learning**

Three factors supported learning in the Hubs: self-directed enquiry; making tacit knowledge explicit; and bridging the different ‘cultures’ within OAU of programming, campaigns and advocacy.

**Self-directed enquiry**

The self-directed nature of the Hub enquiries increased members’ learning. As discussed previously, Hub members competed for funding for learning activities in the first year. This process ensured members were interested enough in their proposed learning activity to apply for funding and go through a selection process. Activities selected matched priorities directly related to the regular work responsibilities of those involved. For example, the Advocacy Unit wanted to understand the outcomes of its work supporting communities to access their rights for recompense from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) due to forced relocation for a major highway project, Highway 1 in Cambodia. The following quote from an interview with the Advocacy Unit ACAC Hub member indicates deep and sustained learning from this activity:
If I was going to rate it [the learning from the evaluation] from one to ten, it was about eight. It has been really valuable to formalise our thinking and use an independent analytic approach. The reflection, formalised discussion and independent review have been very useful and will continue to be.

ACAC Interview 1, 2013

Another example is the clear value of the Hub-supported learning activity to the Pacific Program, as illustrated by this quote from another ACAC Hub member:

the Regional Youth [Reflection] was funding a regionally owned process. We found it immensely valuable.

ACAC Interview 2, 2013

In some instances, learning activities showed where OAU’s work had been successful and where there were gaps. For example, the Highway 1 evaluation showed how community members’ expectations differed from those of OAU. The project failed to meet community expectations while being successful against its original goals:

Our aims in the Highway 1 project were that we’d help the community achieve land title, get free from debt and access other outcomes that were their rights under ADB policy. Measuring our efforts, we could claim success. A significant number got land titles and were not forced off their land. When the evaluation came, the communities said, ‘Despite these successes, we’re still impoverished’. I still feel those aims were right within the context of what we were able to influence. But within the broader context of our support to the communities, there is a question. I think we need to look at what success would look like in the broader context. We have to remember the psycho-social context of resettled communities. These are traumatised communities.

ACAC Interview 1, 2013
Hub processes increased members’ direction of their learning enquiries by encouraging them to take ownership over Hub outcomes, tied directly to their organisational roles. Members had to develop requests for funding, which ensured member motivation and commitment to the learning enquiry. Interviews demonstrate that the Hub members who commissioned the learning enquiries valued their learning outcomes.

Self-directed enquiry was evidently a factor that enhanced learning in the Hubs, which is consistent with the importance of self-directed learning, as emphasized in the adult learning literature, as reviewed in Chapter 3. Self-directed learning was useful for learning in the Hubs as learners knew what they wanted to learn, could manage themselves well and could accept findings that were contrary to their expectations.

*Making tacit knowledge explicit*

A second factor that supported learning in the Hubs was making tacit knowledge explicit. Here the Campaigns Director and Strategic Lead of the ACAC Hub describes how the process of engaging in the Hubs helped him articulate his own approach, helped others articulate their approach and facilitated mutual learning:

I should say that I started off as a complete sceptic. **What brought you around?** Being involved. Feeling the benefit of having conversations about how I worked. I had a better understanding about how other people work and how I could work.

ACAC Lead Interview, 2013

Once tacit approaches were articulated, Hub members could use these as the basis for future plans and approaches. In the GJ Hub, members discussed and
conducted research on the transformational women’s leadership approach. Once this approach was better articulated, it began to be used as the basis of a shared agency-wide approach. As one Advisor reflected:

the Hubs have been an effective site for staff to come together, share approaches, and generate momentum for programming priorities.

(Advisor1, 2013)

The Hubs were a forum for members to articulate some of their embodied, tacit knowledge through engaging with peers. Once articulated, this explicit knowledge was combined with other knowledge and trialled in new situations. This drawing out of tacit knowledge has been identified as important, in Chapter 3, by organisational learning theorists.

Bridging cultures of programming, campaigns and advocacy

The third factor supporting learning in the Hubs was bridging the different cultures of programming, campaigns and advocacy. Here the Hub manager and Hub Advisor describe how the Hubs bridged the different cultures of OAU:

There is nothing else that sits across, no other way in which we link – there is the potential for Hubs to be asking and answering strategic questions. There are benefits to looking at the links between programming, campaigns and advocacy ... The Hubs are a culture builder.

Manager Interview, 2013

What has worked well is that the Hubs have been an important meeting point and space for people to come together and meet across the agency. We face some challenge about working across programs and ways of working. The Hubs provide an open space for people to come together and examine how we collectively contribute to changes in people’s lives.

Hub Advisor 1 Interview, 2013
Hub Advisors and members also described the Hubs as a bridging mechanism, as shown in the following interview quotes:

I have been involved formerly in two hubs – EJ and ACAC – at times with the GJ Hub. For me, they’ve been a reason to talk with other people who I don’t sit down and talk with.

ACAC Advisor Interview, 2013

the Hubs has [sic] brought me into contact with others who I wouldn’t have. I’ve been able to make contacts.

ACAC Interview 2, 2013

Here, one Hub member describes how she took the same bridging approach and applied it to the regional program that she worked for:

In terms of the Pacific, we did it with the Youth Engagement Team. There was a cross-team approach. We weren’t just looking at our Youth Engagement strategies, but also the Oxfam International Youth Program strategies.

ACAC Interview 2, 2013

While the Hubs supported members to reach out across unit silos, one Hub participant cautioned that this remained an individual approach, rather than an institutional one, and was thus ad hoc rather than systematic:

We’re getting better at cross learning. We can do more. But again, it is all related to my passion, or X’s or Y’s or Z’s. Institutionally it is poor. If you take those people out, it is poor. Even the Country Directors don’t share.

ACAC Interview 2, 2013

Thus, in summary the Hubs provided a forum where staff from different silos could come together and engage in joint activity. Interviews show that staff benefited from engaging with other staff and there were instances of staff extending
these new relationships by taking a cross-team approach. The Hubs facilitated the building of mutual trust and open communication identified in Chapter 3 as important to a learning culture. However, while the Hubs acted as a “culture builder” they remained situated in the larger siloed organisation. Consequently, members interacted mainly/only at set times and in specific forums or events, rather than spontaneously in multiple informal social settings. This hard reality presented one of many significant impediments to the formation of a deeply embedded learning culture and community of practice.

**Level 2: Six factors that inhibited learning**

While learning in the Hubs was supported by the three factors described above, it was limited by how learning was conceived and by a lack of learning support processes, as described below. This reflected a lack of depth of educational expertise within the organisation, specifically in relation to the diverse learning needs of adults.

**Limiting conceptions of learning**

The lack of differentiation between the diverse learning needs of Hub members was a factor that limited learning. Hub members needed to learn different things. This was partially addressed through the self-directed nature of learning described above. But the outputs of the self-directed learning enquiry were then shared with all Hub members. The outputs were thought of as valuable resources that could apply to all members equally. But this did not acknowledge the divergent learning needs of staff. An example of the differences between how issues were defined and
learned about at the national and global level comes from an EJ meeting in March 2011:

interpretation of issues in documents and in the countries is different. For example, [in documents] ‘land grabs’ is defined as an issue between ‘corporations’ and ‘good food’. On the ground this is defined as ‘land grabs’ by national governments and elites – this is a wider interpretation. ‘Climate change’ at the policy level is a ‘good global deal’ but this is not an issue at country level … At the country level issues are ‘changing rainfall patterns’, ‘increased droughts and floods and disaster risk reduction’ and ‘inappropriate mitigation measures by governments’.

Comment from EJ Hub meeting, March 2011

An example of the divide between IPS staff and the PPO staff comes from the same EJ meeting in March 2011. In this case, PPO staff felt that their work was not being acknowledged or therefore learned from. The Hub members were reviewing the draft ACAC chapter for the Annual Program Report. The draft had been developed by an external consultant after a review of reports and evaluations of ACAC work. The reports and evaluations had been identified by the Hub manager and support staff, and reviewed by Hub members. In the review of the draft chapter, Hub members who worked in PPO were disappointed by the lack of visibility of advocacy work:

Disappointed that advocacy work is missing. Climate change framework is missing from this … Over the next few weeks, let’s work hard to capture the work that is new and innovative … Let’s make sure the climate change framework gets incorporated. Having seen another process in the organisation that had no advocacy work included, let’s learn from this.

Comments from EJ Hub meeting, March 2011
These examples indicate that participants had different learning objectives and priorities. Learning outputs needed to be tailored to the learning needs of each set of members, or else understood to only apply to particular members as activity outputs were not considered resources by all members. This lack of differentiation of learning needs is not surprising given those in charge of the Hubs, the PDU Advisor and the Thematic Lead, were not qualified in education or training.

The second limiting conception of learning within the Hubs was the emphasis placed on formal, written documents. The written products generated from the learning activities (for example, evaluation reports and research papers) were intended to cater to all members, as outlined above, but these generic products did not appeal to all members equally. For example, the ACAC Hub had commissioned a set of case studies of active citizenship and accountability in a range of programs and countries. But the case studies were too long for the average staff member to read. As the ACAC Hub Manager stated:

The case studies from Valuing Citizen Led Change – are excellent – but not accessible (forty pages). We’re thinking about developing four to five page learning notes.

Hub Manager interview, May 2013

The following quote from a Hub member exemplifies how the members thought the emphasis on learning outputs tended to limit learning, rather than fostering wider application:

In terms of formalised thinking and learning, that has been stop-start, event specific and report specific. Which may be good. But it is not something that is necessarily fostering a broader learning across the agency. The learning has stayed individualistic.
The emphasis on written documentation draws attention to the bias towards a formal conception of learning over the informal:

I think there is something, [we] utilise a learning style that is very dry. We rely on the development of dead documents that nobody has the time to engage with. On the other level, our learning is conversational style, iterative, where real information is processed, worked through and passed on. But we don’t record that. And in some ways we don’t value that.

ACAC Hub Participant 2 interview, July 2013

Again, the emphasis on written documentation over other learning methods reflects a lack of teaching experience on the part of those responsible for managing the Hubs. Equally, the terms of reference for both the PDU Advisor and the Thematic Lead were not developed as Hub ‘teachers’.

Third, the lack of donor interest in learning about advocacy limited Hub participants’ ability to learn about it. This was an issue for members in every Hub, as advocacy was a key part of the organisation’s central commitments – active citizenship and accountability. Advocacy was a tool that OAU promoted for use by citizens and organisations in accessing quality services and demanding accountability from duty bearers. The difference in interest between Hub members and AusAID wanting to learn about advocacy highlights the differences between INGO and donor definitions of aid effectiveness discussed in Chapter 5. The ANCP contract specified that no funds should be used for lobbying the Australian Government:

They have a problem with putting pressure on the Australian Government or asking the government for money.

ACAC Hub Strategic Lead interview, April 2013
However, there were instances where AusAID staff reacted negatively to active citizenship and accountability more broadly than only in relation to advocating to the Australian Government, as illustrated in the quote below:

anything to do with ‘active citizenship’ is a ‘dirty word’ with AusAID.

Hub Support Officer interview, April 2013

In the opinion of one Hub member, AusAID’s hesitation to hear about active citizenship limited the internal conversations that could go on about the topic:

What is difficult, as we become more reliant on ANCP funding as an agency, is that often AusAID will be a filter on our work. We’re not allowed to talk about advocacy and campaigning. For that reason, it is hard to have open and honest reflections that permeate out and up. That constraint is not necessarily from Oxfam. The issue is largely with AusAID. [But] those risk filters feed into Oxfam. There are people within the agency who sensitise what we do and don’t reflect.

ACAC Hub Participant 1 interview, July 2013

An example of how this internal sensitivity played out in practice is the collaborative proposal from ACAC and EJ Hub members to run a risk workshop in Bangkok for regional staff. The idea was to examine the types of risks that staff were facing when engaging in advocacy work and the ways in which the organisation could support staff. However, when the ANCP staff became aware of the proposed workshop, they would not support the proposal. In their minds, this was clearly an area that AusAID would not want to fund or be associated with. On the other hand, the EJ Hub Strategic Lead thought that the decision of ANCP staff to not fund the workshop was dangerous self-censorship. They claimed:

There is confusion about what ANCP funds can be used for. In my opinion the [risk] workshop was perfect – we were doing South–South learning.
We’re not doing anything controversial – if you look at the guidelines, it fits perfectly. But there are people who are scared or wary. That is worrisome in a way. If we can have some sort of way to get some guidelines to have it more clearly articulated, that would be better. I was worried – if we are backing away from something like that.

EJ Hub Lead interview, April 2013

For the Hub Support Officer, the decision to not support the risk workshop was not a case of self-censorship but, rather, about the differences between capacity building (which should be funded by programs, not by the Hubs) and reflective or organisational learning (which could be funded by the Hubs):

The risk workshop ended up being a capacity building thing, which is not organisational learning. Because it is a new area, our question is, How do you turn this into reflective learning? We need to be striking that balance in meeting the ‘extra’ things that people want in programs that they can’t get from other streams, but considering how it fits into learnings for our work and links into strategy. The idea was that we would try and understand from a Southern perspective what the gap is from program quality processes and systems that don’t mitigate certain types of risks (personal risks, for example – abductions). The idea was to identify gaps. People were stepped through a process. What there should have been, but what there wasn’t, was a reflection from the participants on that stuff. Because it ended up being more of a capacity-building exercise, there is this unforeseen next stage, which is to draw out the learning. Part of the push-back about training versus learning versus reflection is that AusAID are saying we don’t want training to be in reflection, that needs to be part of a program. The Hubs were originally meant to be innovation.

Hub Support Officer interview, April 2013

As can be seen, AusAID’s hesitation to fund advocacy work filtered into the organisation’s decision-making processes. There were different interpretations over
whether OAU self-censored or not in relation to learning about advocacy. However, this leads us back to the first limiting factor discussed earlier: different Hub members needed to learn different things. A critical issue was who got to define the type of learning that was legitimate.

Limiting processes of the Hubs

Three Hub processes limited learning and thereby constrained effectiveness. First, management and meetings were highly administrative in nature, and meetings were not facilitated as learning events. One ACAC Hub member describes how the experience of Hub meetings prioritised discussions of project management over content:

> My experience was that the Hub meetings were overly concerned with the project management of Hub-funded activities. It is not that they didn’t try to engage with content. For example, the Digital Mapping piece of work, there was an attempt to have a discussion of the findings. X started to try to map a framework for ACAC work. The thing was that the rhetoric in the Hub was hardly ever translated into action.

ACAC Hub Participant 2 interview, July 2013

Hub support staff were aware of the overemphasis on project management and administration. But they were “overloaded” with these tasks and unable to find the time to manage meetings in a way that focused on the learning content. As the EJ Hub Manager observed:

> My experience of the Hubs is that we’ve been constantly overloaded, constantly scrambling. They started in late twenty-ten when we were already partway into the financial year. At the beginning they had no funding. We needed to come up with a proposal, develop appraisals and start implementing. We only got the funding process through in January,
which meant we only had six months to implement. By March, we had enquiries about what to undertake the next year. So we thought ‘We’ll make something up’. There was pressure to spend, pressure to implement. There was all that work on getting EJ week happening, it was successful, then it was disempowering to see it deprioritised.

EJ Hub Manager interview, April 2013

A sense of the overwhelming demands placed upon staff is conveyed by one Hub Support Officer:

On a day-to-day basis, I’m managing four projects – the consultants and Monash University who are producing the case studies, the regional workshop that is happening in Timor Leste, input into the reflection (have I missed one?), and all of the budget and day-to-day administration and finances and reporting.

Hub Support Officer interview, April 2013

The Hub evaluation found that there was an overemphasis on Hub administration over learning. One of the pressures on the Hubs, and the reason that the Hub management became highly administrative in nature, was the need to disperse and manage large amounts of funding, particularly in the first year:

the initial budgets were enormous [$800,000/year] that effectively had to be spent in six months. (Sann, 2013, p. 16)

The large amounts of funding translated into many projects that Hub support staff needed to manage. This meant that their focus was on these administrative and project management tasks, rather than on facilitating learning:

Some of the Hub Support team have spent, and continue to spend, significant time [currently 100 per cent for the ACAC and EJ Hub support team member] ‘managing projects’, rather than focusing on Hub socialisation, communication and learning. The Hubs have been described
as ‘document heavy’ when their intention was to be knowledge sharing and generation in all of its forms. (Sann, 2013, p. 16)

The fund management requirements have made the Hubs paper and administratively heavy. (Sann, 2013, p. 23)

Also, as Sann reports, learning facilitation was not factored into the position description of Hub support staff roles:

Hub leads often don’t have this role in their position description. It is something they do out of interest, on top of their core work, rather than a mandated function. Leading Hubs can be a significant time commitment and doing it well takes time. To reinforce the value of learning, it is important to make sure it is given the time and recognition within people’s personal performance plans. (Sann, 2013, p. 24)

The Hub Support should focus on learning, not project management. This includes defining, trialling and using appropriate web-based and digital technology with a focus on keeping South–South and North–South connected. Networking, brokering relationships and focusing on building the capacity of in-country team members is central to keeping people connected. The supports are still the heart of the Hubs. (Sann, 2013, p. 30)

The second support factor that inhibited learning was technology. The types of technology used on the Hubs were primarily one-way transfers of information, rather than discussion or engagement (SUMUS, intranet and email). While teleconferences and Skype conferences were able to support discussion, the quality and connectivity of telephone and Skype calls were generally poor. Also, it can be assumed long teleconferences or Skype meetings did not easily fit into the work schedule of field offices, given the poor attendance rates from field office staff.
Towards the end of the Hubs, a Facebook page was set up as part of the EJ Hub. This page was well used by participants. But by and large, social media was not used.

The technologies used were not able to facilitate engagement well. There were continual issues with lines dropping out during teleconferences and Skype conferences:

Actual engagement has been quite difficult. We still have meetings run out of Melbourne, and it is challenging to phone in to that. Whilst we’ve had different people on the line at different times, there are probably issues about field and head office.

Hub Manager interview, April 2013

The intranet and SUMUS systems relied on people reading existing material, but less on talking about these materials with each other. The SUMUS system did have the capacity for conversations, but this capacity was not well used. Here a Hub Coordinator reflects on how the Hubs could make better use of technology to engage members:

you should invest in trying to build up online capability. Not limited to just uploading stuff onto SUMUS. There are more proactive ways of keeping engagement going. Uploading documents is more an accountability thing than an engagement thing. All you get is the number of people who open documents, but that doesn’t tell you much. I don’t think we really did that very well.

Hub Coordinator interview, April 2013

From the perspective of the EJ Strategic Lead, the lack of engagement of Hub members was linked to a lack of organisational understanding or interest in how to use technology, particularly social media, in a way that suited staff, and especially staff based in field locations. As the Lead observed:
My perspective is to use the tools that people like using. From a Southern perspective, email lists are sometimes used, but most people share on Facebook. World Vision had active South–South e-learning spaces. We used Web-Ex, where we used to have seventy people at a learning event. That was almost too many. I spent time mapping out technology to support the Hub – I documented twenty types of software people are using. I was a fan of Web-Ex – but I was told ‘Link is what we’re using’. It sucked. I gave up the idea of an online learning space. I’ve seen it work really well. It can. But it didn’t work here.

EJ Strategic Lead interview, April 2013

For the Strategic Lead, using social media should build on interactions developed in person:

It is also important to build exchange visits between countries. When I went to East Timor, I took the GROW campaign coordinator from Indonesia. Since then, they have kept going with each other. There have been some exchanges. I’m copied in on emails.

EJ Strategic Lead interview, April 2013

Other staff noted the need to find the technology that best suited staff needs and particularly to use technology that suited two-way information flows. As one Hub participant stated:

We need to engage more on an instantaneous way, for example through online platforms. When there was WASH programming previously – they had a platform called Hubble that worked really well. Again, the program finished and that concept of learning disappeared. Hubble was an external platform – the PNG team had said it was the instantaneousness of it. The social media – ‘Hey, has anyone got any thoughts about this?’ and get twenty responses straight away. Which is not how the intranet works. That is all one-way information flow.

ACAC Hub Participant 2 interview, July 2013
The third support factor that inhibited learning was the tensions between the Program Quality Unit and the Development Effectiveness Team (the revised name of the Program Development Unit or PDU). These units should have been working closely together to identify and support necessary practice change. However, a management consultant with a long history of working with OAU noted the tension between the two units:

Between DET and PQU there were deep seated enmities where they sometimes surfaced and then you’d just retire to your own corner.

Management Consultant interview, July 2013

Some of the tension may have stemmed from the connection between the mandates of the two units but their different placements within the organisation and different reporting lines. The differences between the teams were to do with the tensions between providing services to operational teams and supporting assessments of effectiveness for accountability purposes. The Quality Team had a specific focus on providing services to operational teams – through supporting improved design, implementation and MEL. The Quality Team was operational in nature, providing guidance for practitioners for example. The Program Development Unit, on the other hand, had more of a strategic and assessment focus. For example, the Global MEL Advisor sat within the PDU. And the PDU had the mandate to produce the Annual Performance Report. At the same time, however, the PDU also ran the Hubs, which had more of a service function:

There was a disconnect between Program Quality and Effectiveness, with competing and at times overlapping mandates. After the six-month review of Fit for the Future – Development Effectiveness has now moved back to IPS. There is now a stronger connection with PQU.
DET Director interview, May 2013

The lack of a strong working relationship between these two units inhibited the application of learning to practice.

In summary, learning in the Hubs was inhibited by the ways learning was thought about. The implementation of the Hubs was delegated to staff who did not have qualifications in education and training, and lacked specification for any educational responsibilities in their roles. As a result, the learning needs of different Hub members were not differentiated, the focus of learning was on developing formal, written documents, and AusAID’s lack of interest in learning about advocacy limited the Hubs’ learning about this topic. Learning was also inhibited by a lack of learning support processes. Hub meetings were largely administrative in nature, rather than focused on learning, and technology tended to distract from, rather than enhance, learning. Equally, the application of learning to practice was inhibited by the tensions between the Development Effectiveness team, which facilitated the Hubs, and the Program Quality Unit, which provided support to operational teams to improve the quality of program implementation. The same staff that ran the systems provided information to senior managers on the progress of the system. It is not surprising that these same staff were only able to identify and respond to problems within their area of expertise. The more fundamental review of the system was only available in 2013 with an independent evaluation of the Hubs.

Level 3: Mixed evidence of practice change

Learning generated in the Hubs did not consistently translate into practice change. This was due to a lack of focus on practice change in the Hub design, terms of reference for consultants and interviews with OAU staff. The Hub evaluation, on the
other hand, showed that members reported practice change at individual, team and organisational levels. However, these assessments were not corroborated by others. On balance, this section concludes that the Hub support for practice change was minimal.

There was a lack of focus on practice in the Hub design. For example, one of OA’s documents related to Change Goal Hubs Management places the primary focus was on prioritising and planning, gathering and analysing information (OAU, 2010e). This lack of focus on changing behaviour was noted by a Hub Manager, who observed:

The Hubs are about furthering the ‘agency’s’ knowledge of what works. But in terms of being explicit about whose behaviour – no.

Hub Manager interview, April 2013

The lack of focus on practice change in the design became mirrored in the terms of reference for commissioned research and evaluation pieces, as noted by the Hub Support Officer and Global Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor. The Hub Support Officer stated:

**With the ACAC Hub, which activities would you fund?** I think you’d need to be clearer about outcomes and a clearer link into what they’d be used for. There is a lot of stuff up front about methodology etc. but not so much about socialisation and strategies – that is weak in most of the projects. Even the ACAC reflection, so much work has gone into the projects – seven case studies and only a half page will be used. Yes, it’s great to have the evidence and people can read if they can, but who is going to?

Hub Support Officer interview, April 2013
This critique was echoed by the Global Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Advisor:

Another issue is the utility of Hub work. Where does it go, what is done with it and how does it relate to what is done in other contexts? How does it relate to PQU? The Hub terms of reference have no consideration for utility. That needs to be addressed. The workshops that are being run at the moment, what is going to happen with that? The risk work in Bangkok and theory of change workshop in Timor. There is no PQU person in Timor, so who is going to take it up? How does it relate to the agency level?

Global MEL Advisor interview, April 2013

The Hub manager pointed to the need to focus on the use of support to applying learning through connections to PQU and Program Management Advisors:

We need to link more strongly into PQU. And be transparent to some of the work they’re doing. We’d also need to communicate findings to Program Management Advisors so they can take that into their planning.

Hub Manager interview, May 2013

In the following quote, a Hub member notes how the focus on learning outputs in the form of reports takes away from considering how to apply that learning:

The formal ways [of learning through producing reports] I don’t see as having had any real benefit. Unless there is someone to translate that. I really like those [the Brown Bag talks and DETalks]. The issue then is where does that learning go? It is great for the sixty minutes. It is around that individualised learning and stretching of your concepts and practice. Then ding ding, the bell goes and we walk away. It is up to us to take that learning further. I’d be interested to hear how DET is thinking of taking that learning further.
The following quote is from an ACAC Hub member who had a role as a Regional Quality Officer for the Pacific. She contrasts how learning and practice was interrelated in her role as a Quality Officer with the “dead” process that the Hub used:

The Regional Quality roles in the Pacific, we’ll have a catch-up. Ostensibly it is about sharing learning. What has evolved is bits of learning that can be applied in different countries. It is up to individuals to take up bits of learning and apply those. For me, that has the most flow-on influence. I get feedback from PQ officers. You don’t really see that from the dead reflection docs.

The Hub evaluation, on the other hand, found changes to practice based on survey results as noted below:

There is evidence that the Hubs have changed practices in Oxfam ... The work of the Economic Justice Hub has changed the way that organisation and teams have worked, primarily as a result of EJ week and the GROW work. The survey produced mixed opinions about ACAC, but there are pockets that feel that it has changed individual and organisational behaviour.

(Sann, 2013, p. iv)

Most EJ respondents responded that they had observed changes to organisation practice (6) and team practice (5). ACAC Hub members, on the other hand, were more circumspect. As many members responded that they had observed no practice change (6) as those who reported observing changes to organisation practice (6) and team practice (6). Details are given in Table 13.
Table 13: Reported changed practice as a result of Hub work

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Change</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>Team</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>CoPractice</th>
<th>Beneficiary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Essential Services</td>
<td>100% (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Justice</td>
<td>36% (4)</td>
<td>27% (3)</td>
<td>45% (5)</td>
<td>55% (6)</td>
<td>18% (2)</td>
<td>18% (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACAC</td>
<td>40% (6)</td>
<td>40% (6)</td>
<td>27% (4)</td>
<td>40% (6)</td>
<td>13% (2)</td>
<td>20% (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Justice</td>
<td>24% (4)</td>
<td>65% (11)</td>
<td>65% (11)</td>
<td>65% (11)</td>
<td>29% (5)</td>
<td>35% (6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: (Sann, 2013, p. 14)

However, the conclusions regarding practice change are based solely on self-reports, with no supporting perspectives from peers or managers. Additionally, the survey used in the Hub evaluation to measure practice change had a smaller sample size (100 of 180 members) and response rate (22 per cent) than required to ensure valid results. Both of these limitations are noted in the evaluation report itself.

Taking these limitations into account, and the previous data presented on the lack of emphasis on practice change in the design and activities of the Hubs, the research concludes that the Hubs were limited in their ability to support the translation of learning into practice change.

**Level 4: Lack of impact on organisational results**

There is no evidence to show the Hubs impacted on organisational results. This was due to the lack of emphasis on organisation-level outcomes in the Hub design, the lack of connection between team, section and OAU priorities, and the misalignment between planning and budgeting cycles. In other words, the benefits for OAU in
terms of its achievement of more effective project and program implementation were assumed, rather than planned for.

The Hubs were not explicitly designed to impact on organization-level results. For example, the four goals of the Hubs were focused on improving the process of programming through learning and coordination, rather than making a difference to organizational outcome or impact measures. Two of the four goals focused on working better across the various units of OAU were: sequential and coordinated program priority setting, and better cross-agency collaboration. One goal focused on producing the annual program report: delivery of the annual program report to the Board. And one goal was focused on learning: facilitating greater learning from work on the external change goals. As outlined above, the Hub goals reference no organisational results to be improved through the Hubs. It could be argued that, as the Hubs were each established around an organisational goal, any improved learning and coordination within the Hub would mean improved organisational results for that goal. However, that line of reasoning is not argued in any of the documents or papers written on the administration and management of the Hubs.

A number of evidence sources point to systemic barriers within OAU to achieving improved results. The Hub evaluation notes a number of institutional obstacles which were also substantiated through interviews with Hub participants subsequent to the evaluation. These had to do with: the gap between organisational priorities and priorities at the section and team levels, and the lack of mechanisms to translate organisational priorities into section and team priorities across levels. As the Hub evaluation (Sann, 2013) pointed out:
• the long-term strategic plan does not have clear tangible outcomes (other than high-level statements)
• there is no Annual Corporate Plan to give a steer on Annual priorities
• there is no organisation-wide performance framework to align planning, activity and performance

This translates into:

• a relatively ‘siloed’ approach to planning, with sections and teams setting their own priorities.

The other issue was the lack of coordination between PMG members, as evidenced by interview data. For example, one Hub Manager explained:

The annual reporting process, in theory, provides the link to the strategy development process. The Program Management Group is meant to use what comes out of the report to identify priorities. That’s what we were starting to see. And in many cases it did translate. The trouble with the prioritisation processes was the reality of PMG being totally dysfunctional, so the managers would go off and establish their own priorities.

Hub Manager interview, April 2013

The way the Hubs were supposed to have an impact on organisational results was through priority setting. The annual Hub reflections were meant to bring up the key issues assisting or constraining success in each change goal area. Future plans were meant to be based on this evidence. There are specific examples of where this was the case. For example, the Hub evaluation notes:

the Gender Justice Hub has helped to inform future gender priorities for the new OAU Strategic Plan through the SIRUP process. This is a tangible example of hub contribution to strategic direction.

(Sann, 2013, p. 20)
But in general, this was not what happened. One reason was that the planning and budgeting cycles were misaligned, as found by the Hub evaluation:

Budgets for ANCP batches for the following financial year are due by the 30th June. However, aligned to the APR process, Hub priorities are not approved until September. This effectively means Hubs are asked to make decisions about priorities that have not been informed by the APR analysis nor endorsed by the organisation. For this to work effectively in the future, budgets need to be tied to multi-year priorities.

(Sann, 2013, p. 19)

As can be seen, the Hubs had limited impact on organisational results due to design flaws, gaps between organisational priorities and priorities at the section and team levels, and misalignment between planning and budget cycles.

**6.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that Hub members reacted positively to the Hubs and that they facilitated learning. However, the Hubs were not focused on facilitating changed individual practice or improved organisational results. This was a flaw in the design of all of the Hubs, rather than one Hub doing well or poorly. For that reason, the Hubs were unable to translate learning into action. This lack of changed action on the part of staff meant that learning did not translate into improved organisational results. One important question raised by these findings concerns the extent to which these issues are either isolated to this case study or widespread across the international nongovernment aid and development sector. As the OAU experience evidences, donor-dependent NGOs are hostage to the shifting priorities of major funders. If challenges to organisational learning are primarily systemic, then
the focus for remedial action has to be on system-wide change and not just the reform of management practices in resource-constrained aid agencies.
Chapter 7: Case 2 – Plan International Australia’s Reflective Annual Practice

7.1 Introduction

As with OAU, Plan International Australia (hereafter PIA) initiated its organisational learning system in response to AusAID’s development effectiveness agenda. PIA’s learning approach also reflected a shift in policy from Plan International (PI). This shift was initiated to better measure the impact of the activities of the entire global PI confederation and also increase the confederation’s impact by improving the effectiveness of its operations.

This chapter follows the structure of the previous exploration of organisational learning at OAU. It describes PIA’s learning system, the Reflective Annual Practice or RAP (7.2), and the factors that affected the development of the learning system (7.3). The chapter answers the first research question by describing how PIA’s RAP worked in general and describing the 2012–13 RAP learning enquiry in detail (7.4). It examines the factors that supported and that inhibited learning (7.5). As with the OAU case, most RAP participants reacted positively to the opportunity to view their work differently. As with OAU, there were organization-level factors that inhibited and that supported learning. However, in answer to the third research question, participants did not apply their learning and consequently the RAP impacted only lightly on organisational results. This reluctance to apply learning is attributable to the disconnection of the RAP from other PIA organisational...
systems and processes, and the cognitive conception of learning embedded in the RAP design.

7.2 Description of the RAP

The RAP was a key part of PIA’s new partnership with the (then) AusAID. PIA was another of the five Australian NGOs selected for the new, multi-year partnership mentioned in Chapter 5 (ODE, 2015, p. 21). The new funding agreement was significant to PIA, doubling funding from A$3 million in 2009 to A$6 million in 2012 (PIA, 2009, p. 8). To secure the partnership funding agreement, PIA undertook a range of internal reforms to improve and demonstrate its development effectiveness. This included the International Programs Director recruiting staff and developing existing staff for a new Program Effectiveness Team (PET) and these PET staff developing a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework and working with an external consultant to develop the annual reflective system.

The RAP was considered a key element of PIA’s commitment to effective development practice and the continual improvement of its programs (PIA, 2011b, p. 12). The original aims of the RAP were for the Programs Department of PIA to take stock of its programs, reflect on the quality of its work and any changes that resulted, and make an assessment about its contribution to effective development outcomes at both thematic and programming levels. Learning from the RAP provided the basis for the Annual Effectiveness Review, an annual report to AusAID, PIA’s Board and broader stakeholders. Equally, conclusions on PIA’s contribution to

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4 The five initial partners were World Vision Australia, Oxfam Australia, Plan International Australia, Caritas Australia and ChildFund Australia. AusAID subsequently partnered with three other organisations in addition – CARE Australia, CBM Australia and TEAR Australia.
change were intended to inform program improvement. Over time, RAP learning enquiries became focused on program improvement without maintaining the initial focus on assessing PIA’s contribution to change.

As can be seen, the RAP was driven by PIA’s new partnership with AusAID and the need to report on the changes that had resulted from PIA’s work. However, there were also internal drivers for how the RAP developed which emphasised learning and program improvement over upwards-focused accountability. How this tension played out is examined in more detail in following sections.

7.3 Key organisational factors that influenced the RAP

There were three factors at national and international levels that influenced the development of the RAP. First, PIA changed the way it related to National Offices based in developing countries. Second, PIA also changed the types of activities it was managing – from discrete projects to programs. And third PIA, along with the international organisation, moved from a service-delivery to a rights-based programming approach. These changes meant PIA staff needed to learn about these three areas: partnership; how to describe change at a programmatic and thematic, rather than project level; and how to describe the impact of rights-based programming. The RAP became the forum where this learning could occur.

PIA made a major strategic change from raising funds, primarily through sponsorship, to managing large and complex grants which were implemented by PIA National Offices (PIA, 2010a). To better understand what this change meant, let us first explore the role of each actor within the PI global confederation. The global PI system is made up of: National Offices in countries that raise funds; Country Offices
in countries that disburse funds; a small number of newly formed National Country Offices that both raise and disburse funds; and PI and Regional Offices that coordinate activity and develop policy. Each National Office is an independent entity and has a role in governance of the global confederation through representation at the Members’ Assembly (PI, 2009). The Members’ Assembly sets high-level strategy and direction for the global organisation, approves global standards, financial budgets and audited accounts, and elects the PI Board of Directors (PI, 2009). The International Board of Directors approves policies and procedures in line with the strategy (PI, 2009). Country Offices are subsidiaries of, and under the direction of, PI (PI, 2009). As can be seen, PIA was a large INGO that was a part of a large, complex confederation. Structural inequality was built-in to this system, which emphasised the independence of National Offices, such as PIA, over Country Offices in developing countries. This inequality was not recognized by PIA’s leadership team.

PIA described its shift from raising funds to managing large and complex programs as one from “resource provider and support agency to partner in development” (PIA, 2010a). This move to grant management and provision of technical expertise required new organisational and staff capacities and a change to its internal structure to align with the change in strategy. To do so, PIA created a thematic structure composed of technical specialists, for example Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (or WASH) and Education specialists, rather than geographically focused teams providing project management support to particular geographical areas. The new structure meant that staff needed to engage more deeply in their technical areas. For example, staff now needed to learn about WASH issues that applied
across a variety of country contexts, rather than issues that were particular to one country.

PIA had also changed its implementation approach and the way it measured its achievements. PIA had previously used focused on managing projects but moved to a programmatic approach, given its purported flexibility and suitability to the complex programming context of development. The programmatic approach involves agreeing on an overall goal for a sector or area of change and a predicted means for arriving at this change, while being open to and documenting necessary changes from the planned path. PIA adopted this approach for two key reasons. First, it viewed development problems as increasingly complex, requiring greater flexibility and increased collaboration between partners. For example, the agency saw an increase in complex and intractable problems like climate change and an increase in the number of partners working in development, including private companies, philanthropic organisations and non-traditional donors. Second, there was a series of pressures that called into question the role of INGOs and the impact of their largely project-driven approach. Donors, governments and citizens were calling for greater accountability and transparency of INGOs at the time (Costa et al., 2012). And increased financing for development from diaspora communities, as well as net-based direct matching of sponsors to projects such as the online investment portal Kiva (www.kiva.org), provided alternatives to INGOs and their development approach. PIA’s move to a programmatic approach was one way of increasing the relevance of its work.

However, taking this new approach meant that staff needed to learn how to describe the change they were achieving in different ways. It was no longer sufficient
to talk about changes brought about by single projects. Rather, donors wanted to understand what the organisation as a whole was achieving and how each thematic area was contributing to that change.

PIA, as part of a shift of the global organisation, moved from a service-delivery model to rights-based programming in 2003 called Child-Centred Community Development (CCCD) (Betts, Barnes, & Espasa, 2010). The rights-based approach focuses on the fulfilment of the human rights of those in poverty, rather than the delivery of services (PlanVietnam, 2010, p. 70). The organisation identified the absence of child rights as the structural cause of children’s poverty. The rights-based approach focuses on advocating to duty bearers to fulfil their obligations, and building the awareness and capacities of communities to claim their rights (PlanVietnam, 2010, p. 70). Plan International identified eight areas where it would contribute to the realisation of child rights and PIA identified five of these impact areas where it would work, as shown in Table 14.

**Table 14: PI’s impact areas**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PI impact areas</th>
<th>PIA programs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The right to a healthy start in life</td>
<td>Early Childhood Care and Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to sexual and reproductive health, including HIV prevention, care and treatment</td>
<td>Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to education</td>
<td>WASH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to water and improved sanitation</td>
<td>Rights &amp; Community Resilience and Livelihoods &amp; Food Security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to economic security</td>
<td>Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to protection from all forms of abuse, neglect, exploitation and violence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to participate as citizens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The right to protection and assistance in emergencies and improved resilience to hazards</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The shift from service delivery to rights-based programming required a shift in monitoring and evaluation practice. Outcome and impact became understood as improved realisation of rights among rights holders, improved fulfillment of rights by duty bearers and the creation of an enabling environment in which children’s rights are fulfilled, rather than access to and delivery of services as a direct result of PIA’s programs (PlanVietnam, 2010, p. 96). PIA’s monitoring and evaluation systems became focused on identifying the association between the improved realisation of rights and PIA’s programs initiatives (PlanVietnam, 2010, p. 96). The RAP started as the forum to investigate the outcomes of PIA’s rights-based programs.

7.4 How the Reflective Annual Practice worked

The RAP changed in form and emphasis over its four years. RAP practice can be considered in two main phases: the assessment phase and the program improvement phase. The assessment phase occurred over the first two years of the RAP (2009–10) and coincided with establishing the system. During this period, the RAP (or ARP as it was known in 2009) was primarily an assessment exercise undertaken by Programs Department staff in their thematic teams (for example, WASH and Education). These teams examined their programs to identify what constituted a quality approach, what changes had occurred as a result of programs and what contribution PIA had made to those changes. The assessment phase responded to AusAID’s development effectiveness reporting requirements.

Program staff provided feedback on the first two years, which led to a revised model implemented in the second phase (2011–13). This revised RAP can be characterised as participatory research and knowledge creation undertaken in cross-
thematic teams. That is, staff undertook research and knowledge creation on agreed topics with members from other thematic teams. This phase responded more closely to the learning needs of staff and less to the reporting requirements of AusAID. A more detailed description of the changes to the RAP is outlined below in narrative form and summarised in Table 15.

The RAP was facilitated by two PET staff and an external consultant who was a major contributor to the RAP design. The researcher provided inputs into the RAP, was responsible for facilitating some group sessions, and provided input and feedback to the two RAP facilitators 2011–13.

In its first year, in 2009, the external consultant and PET manager designed the RAP/ARP in the form of a two-day event referred to as the ‘dry dry run’ designed to explore the question, ‘What makes for a quality Plan Australia approach to development and change?’ Practitioners examined the evidence for change, primarily document review and some interviews, from four perspectives that PIA described as its four key “locations”: changes that had occurred for rights holders, duty bearers, civil society and PIA itself. As can be seen from the focus of enquiry, the ARP was primarily an exercise in examining PIA’s work and its contributions to improved rights of child beneficiaries.

Participants and designers responded to the ‘dry dry run’ by recommending improvements to data collection, analysis and assessment. The RAP Facilitators, the two PET staff, and the external consultant accommodated these recommendations that participants collect data throughout the year on positive and negative change for rights holders, duty bearers, civil society and PIA itself through M&E, research and other enquiry, use an analytic framework called ‘the 13 questions’ and work
with stakeholders to collaboratively assess PIA’s contributions and hence effectiveness (PIA, 2010a). The approach helped PIA staff further interrogate PIA’s impact for each key stakeholder. The approach stressed inclusiveness, voice, and power within PIA, and engagement with people of power outside the organisation, but tended in emphasis towards measuring the improvement of internal processes. The 13 questions used to build the analytic framework were organised around PIA’s key locations.

With respect to changes experienced by rights holders:

1. How did the vision of the rights holders lead the activity? Were the values of rights holders incorporated and their perspectives acknowledged?

2. How well did the strategies include the marginalised groups? How did it address issues of power?

3. What strengths were built on by the project/activity? And what capacity remains to sustain the change?

4. How is our global agreement to use a child rights approach being followed across all we do?

With respect to changes experienced by duty bearers:

5. Have we adequately assessed duty bearers, identified their roles and responsibilities, and planned our engagement with them?

6. How has Plan influenced duty bearers to change? What has changed in relation to awareness and commitment to child rights?

With respect to changes in civil society (acknowledging that changes in civil society might be beyond what Plan is focused on in Plan programs and Plan partners):

7. What is civil society in this context?

8. In whose image are we building civil society capacity?
9. Whose voices are not being heard – why or why not?

10. To what extent have capacity-building efforts facilitated cooperation between various actors, organisations and networks?

With respect to changes in Plan itself:

11. What types of information are we collecting, whose voices are being listened to and what mechanisms are or should be in place to collect information?

12. How is Plan ensuring that we are able to respond in projects/programs; are we open to reflection, what are the mechanisms for adaptation?

13. Are we using our work to demonstrate best practice to duty bearers?

(PIA, 2010d)

The RAP ‘dry run’ was held in 2010 using the previous year’s two-day reflective workshop as its foundation and the RAP facilitators and external consultant agreed to add three main elements based on feedback from staff at the end of the 2009 ‘dry dry run’ to improve data collection, analysis and assessment. First, teams engaged in activities (developing a RAP plan, collecting data, conducting analysis, developing a report and engaging in a final two-day reflection workshop) across the year, May–December 2010. Second, each team explored its theories of change and analysed the changes brought about for rights holders, duty bearers, civil society and PIA itself using the analytic framework. Third, there was a final workshop where staff and a range of stakeholders who were external to PIA, including Country Office representatives and PIA Board members, undertook collective analysis. In addition to the changes listed above, the RAP team supported thematic teams by providing: a timeline, RAP plan template and guidance on data collection and analysis. RAP
facilitators met with each thematic team to assist with the enquiry process, track progress and address gaps. The RAP team summarised thematic enquiry reports to aid in the analysis and reflection process.

The 2010 RAP continued the primary emphasis on assessment of change through its analytic focus on the 13 questions. Participants responded both positively and negatively to the use of these questions. The questions were seen as useful for focusing attention on change for each important stakeholder group. But as a number of staff pointed out in their evaluative comments, the number and disjointed nature of the questions became unhelpful in understanding change (PIA, 2010b, 2010c). As a consequence, the RAP team decided to drop the 13 questions, with the primary focus on assessing PIA’s contribution to change.

The 2011 RAP marked the change from the assessment to the program improvement phase. The RAP team designed the 2011 RAP so that thematic teams identified learning enquiries that corresponded to a common objective – gender equality. The focus of enquiry was on team learning priorities related to gender equality, rather than the previous emphasis on assessing quality, change and PIA’s contribution to change. The learning enquiry was staged over the year in four phases: planning, work in progress, theme-level learning, and program-level learning. RAP workshops were held in each of the four ‘At Home Weeks’ in the year. These At Home Weeks were designated times held in February, May, August and November when all Programs Department staff were in the Melbourne office.

The RAP team introduced a number of processes to improve the quality of enquiry. For example, RAP staff introduced ‘givens’ which aimed to improve the quality and consistency of data collection and analysis, RAP staff provided support
through face-to-face sessions through the four At Home Weeks, RAP staff facilitated capacity-building sessions for participants, a small reference group was established to support the process, there were opportunities for teams to feed back to each other on progress (May), theme-level learning (August) and program-level learning (November), connections were made between one year’s RAP and the next, and staff were given access to an external gender specialist. In addition, the Director of Programs and CEO were briefed at the end of the RAP to increase organisational buy-in. As can be seen, the emphasis of the RAP shifted from assessment to learning about and improving programs in relation to an agreed topic, gender, from 2011.

The 2012–13 RAP was a continuation of the program improvement phase introduced in 2011. The RAP team designed the 2012–13 RAP as a program-level reflection and enquiry on partnerships. The questions that guided the RAP were focused on how learning could inform future practice. For example, the enquiry process questions were: What is our current partnership practice? Where do we want to be? And what needs to change to get us there? The Programs Department split into three groups, based primarily on interest, to examine partnerships with Country Offices, other National Offices and civil society groupings in Australia. The 2012–13 RAP continued the phased approach begun in 2011 with activities spread over the course of the year, capacity-building inputs in the area of partnerships and an external RAP advisor who supported participants in design and analysis, as well as providing specific inputs on the context of partnerships in international civil society. Table 14 summarises how the RAP developed over time.
Table 15: RAP development over time

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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus of enquiry</td>
<td>What makes for a quality PIA approach to development and change among rights holders, duty bearers, civil society and PIA?</td>
<td>What are our program theories of change?</td>
<td>Gender equality</td>
<td>Partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Enquiry conducted in Program Department thematic teams:</td>
<td>Enquiry conducted in Program Department thematic teams:</td>
<td>Enquiry conducted in Program Department thematic teams with a cross-team enquiry into gender equality:</td>
<td>Cross-thematic team enquiry conducted in three groups:</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• ECCD</td>
<td>• ECCD: Principles/standards of quality education</td>
<td>• DRR: Actively including children and women</td>
<td>• ANO–National Office</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• DRR</td>
<td>• DRR: ANO contribution to the broader global DRR strategy</td>
<td>• ECCD: Does community-led action for children lead to quality changes in ECCD?</td>
<td>• ANO–Country Office</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• RCR</td>
<td>• RCR: Community cohesion and social capital in bringing about change</td>
<td>• PET: Does working through a process of partnership building increases PIA’s contribution to program effectiveness?</td>
<td>• ANO–External partners</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• PET</td>
<td>• PET: How it has contributed to PIA’s development as an effective donor agency</td>
<td>• R&amp;CR: How increased GE and protection of women’s and girls’ rights was realised in two projects</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• WASH</td>
<td>• WASH: The participation of women and children</td>
<td>• WASH: How GE was advanced in two projects</td>
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<tr>
<td>Enquiry conducted by team from other department:</td>
<td>Enquiry conducted by team from other department:</td>
<td>Enquiry conducted by team from other department:</td>
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<td>• CCCD, Brand &amp; Communications: developing better ‘integrated campaigns’</td>
<td>• CCCD, Brand &amp; Communications: developing better ‘integrated campaigns’</td>
<td>• CCCD, Brand &amp; Communications: developing better ‘integrated campaigns’</td>
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<td>Processes</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>Two-day reflection event</td>
<td>Two-day reflection event held in November during At Home Week workshop</td>
<td>Two-day reflection event held in November during At Home Week workshop</td>
<td>Two-day reflection event held in November during At Home Week workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>Planning</td>
<td>Collaborative planning process</td>
<td>Feb At Home Week planning group work</td>
<td>Feb At Home Week planning group work</td>
<td>Feb At Home Week planning group work</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>Supported by the Program Quality team</td>
<td>RAP Coordination Team established with a focus on design and management of reflection process</td>
<td>Analysis framework developed by external advisor</td>
<td>RAP Coordination Team</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive analysis framework developed</td>
<td></td>
<td>External partnerships mentor</td>
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<td>available throughout process</td>
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<tr>
<td>Staged process</td>
<td>July At Home Week progress check</td>
<td>RAP sessions held at every At Home Week once a quarter</td>
<td>RAP sessions held at every At Home Week once a quarter</td>
<td>RAP sessions held at every At Home Week once a quarter</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Enquiry group activities conducted over the year</td>
<td>Enquiry group activities conducted over the year</td>
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<td>Capacity-building inputs</td>
<td>March support on RAP plans by external consultant</td>
<td>March gender analysis and ToC training</td>
<td>May At Home Week input on power, networks and partnerships</td>
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<tr>
<td>Capacity-building inputs</td>
<td>May At Home Week update on progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building organisational buy-in</td>
<td>August At Home Week to exchange learning and session on Oxfam’s reflective practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>Building organisational buy-in</td>
<td>Briefing to Senior Management Team including CEO</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| Supporting documents | • RAP guidance  
• RAP Plan template  
• Analytic framework  
• RAP individual guidance  
• Indicative timeline  
• RAP TOR template for engaging external support | • RAP guidance  
• RAP Plan template  
• Analytic framework  
• RAP summary report template | • RAP guidance  
• RAP Plan template  
• Analytic framework  
• RAP milestones |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| Supporting personnel | • Internal RAP team  
• External facilitator  
• CO, IH, PAC and CEO participation at November workshop | • Internal RAP team  
• External facilitator  
• CO, IH, PAC, CEO and external specialist participation at November workshop  
• External input: gender consultant and advisor from Oxfam | • Internal RAP team  
• External facilitator  
• CO, IH, PAC and CEO participation at November workshop  
• External input: partnerships expert, power expert and external partnerships advisor |
| Products | • ARP Report  
• RAP report  
• Plan Annual Effectiveness Report  
• Five thematic case studies | • RAP report  
• PIA Annual Effectiveness Report | • RAP report  
• RAP model documentation  
• Series of externally focused learning products on partnerships |
| Influence | • Initial development of RAP model  
• Findings influenced 2011 CCCD strategy review | | |
RAP partnership enquiry 2012–13

This section provides a detailed description of the 2012–13 partnership enquiry to provide insight into the functioning of the RAP as directly observed by the researcher.

Aside from the incentives to meet AusAID’s funding requirements, PIA had two key motivations to learn about and improve its ways of partnering. First, PIA had started to partner directly with Country Offices rather than relating only with the International Office. Second, PIA had received feedback from Country Office partners that it needed to change its partnership approach. This feedback was amplified by negative partner feedback the Plan Confederacy had received through the Keystone Partnership survey – a global comparison of INGOs by civil society partners.

Internal context for needing to learn and improve ways of partnering

PIA had begun to secure funds through grants which, in contrast to sponsorship funding, provided PIA with financial power and a degree of autonomy. This also required PIA to develop and maintain a direct relationship with Country Offices in order to allocate grant income. PIA–CO funding agreements documented the roles and responsibilities of each partner, thus requiring new practices and processes to manage financial and legal technicalities. Grant funding involved partnering not only with COs but also with other National Offices, Field Country National Offices (a new type of PI office established from 2012 onwards, which included fundraising and program management functions) as well as other INGOs and civil society in Australia. All of this demanded changes in the skill sets required of staff employed by PIA to
manage these relationships. This pattern of increasing organisational complexity was replicated across the confederation, creating an “enormous machine” with “70 offices, 9000 employees and 38,000 partnerships” mostly with CBOs (Management comments from 25 November 2013 RAP session).

*Listening to feedback from partners*

PIA received partnering feedback through the survey of Country Office perceptions of National Offices, which revealed there were a number of areas where PIA ranked poorly. In addition, the wider PI confederacy received negative results from partners through the Keystone Survey, which amplified the sense within the organisation of the importance of improving partner relationship management.

The Country Office survey was instructive. Country Offices ranked PIA well in the provision of technical support and funding, and PIA was also ranked as the most constructive National Office to work with. However, there were a number of areas where Country Offices ranked PIA poorly, as summarised by a PIA manager:

> They don’t value our micro management ... In some cases they don’t value our attitude. If we’re rated fourteenth on respect – that is discomfiting ... The other one that worries me is that we’ve been rated poorly on their ability to question us.

Management comment, RAP workshop, 12 November 2012

The Country Office survey results were further amplified by the negative results from the Keystone Partnership survey report of 2011. Each INGO received their own confidential report, which identified how Southern NGOs rated their performance in relation to partnership (Jacobs, 2011, p. 4). Overall, PI as a global confederation ranked low on the survey, at 51 out of 62. There were a number of
areas where PI scored well: integrity and accessibility of staff, transparency in the
organisation, and communication. However, of particular concern was the fact that
PI was ranked below a neutral score in six areas and partners ranked PI low on issues
that were most important to them. As one ANO manager stated:

things that are really important to partners: nature, extent and structure
of financial support and things like added value outside of financial
support – capacity support and issues of relationship management – they
rated Plan low on. They say: you communicate too much, you are asking
too much from us, the late payments is a very big issue, contribution to
core cost, inflexibility once entered into the agreement. Across the board,
what they are saying to us is that your management and partnership
practice is not enabling for us.

Management comment, 2 September, RAP 2013 At Home Day

The PI team and Country Directors decided that the report required a high-
level management response. PI’s initiative was to start to develop a set of
partnership standards for use across the organisation and for these standards to be
implemented within a set period of time. PIA Program staff were, however, hesitant
to take the findings of the Keystone Survey at face value. A number of the key
findings were not in their areas of control for example, issues to do with the financial
structure of partnerships and timing of financial payments. In areas where they
should have control through their role, they were under pressure from the funding
agency. For example, a number of staff raised the issue of the new, non-negotiable
standards that drove reporting under the partnership with AusAID. This may have
contributed to a sense of inflexibility once partners entered into the agreement. As
can be seen, management and staff had different perspectives about what needed
to be learned in relation to partnerships.
Three partnership enquiries

As described, PIA had begun to engage in a new set of partnerships with Country Offices. It had also received feedback that it needed to improve some aspects of its partnering approach. Given this context, PIA needed to better understand ways to partner well and how to assess partnership effectiveness, that is, the contribution of partnerships to development outcomes. To do this, PIA through its Program Department launched three partnership enquiries in the RAP. The Program Team split into three groups to examine how working in different types of partnership assisted PIA to bring about more positive change for children. The enquiries were continuous over the two years, but some members changed enquiry groups and a number of new staff joined in the second year. The three enquiry teams wanted to understand: (1) how PIA should work with Country Offices to achieve better development outcomes; (2) how PIA should work with other National Offices to achieve better development outcomes; and (3) how ANO should work with Civil Society Organisation (CSO) groupings to better influence the Australian Government.

To focus the enquiry, each group developed a working hypothesis. These were short, preliminary statements of each group’s assumption about how each partnership should be conducted and the expected outcome of that particular type of relationship. The statements drew on research on the topic of partnerships and are included below:

- National Office–Country Office relationships that are built on transparency, equity and mutual benefit lead to more effective development outcomes.

(Plan Australia and Plan Country Offices Partnerships)
National Office–National Office relationships deliver benefits which lead to better development outcomes.

(Plan Australia and other Plan National Offices Partnerships)

Civil society in Australia has a greater impact on government and public opinion when collaborating for influence.

(Plan Australia and civil society groupings/working groups in Australia partnerships)

To test their working hypothesis, each group developed an enquiry process. This included similar stages of identifying relevant data sources (key reports and informants), collecting data, analysing and reporting. Data collection processes varied among the three groups. The CO enquiry group designed a survey for three Country Offices: Timor Leste, Ethiopia and Vietnam. The NO group conducted semi-structured interviews with select individuals involved in PIA–NO collaborations from two National Offices, two Regional Offices and two Country Offices. The External CSO group compiled case studies, based on interviews and a document review, of four types of external relationships illustrating CSO groupings focused on funding or policy influence and supported by or independent of the peak NGO body in Australia, the Australian Council for International Development.

What the groups learned

The groups found that there needed to be individual and systemic changes for each of the three types of relationships. Each group made necessary changes in individual competencies to facilitate better ways of working between organisations and foster wider systems and structures that support (and conversely, their absence threatens) their type of partnership.
Required individual competencies

The competencies important in the PIA–CO partnership had to do with intercultural communication and effective work habits. The key elements cited by COs as supporting positive intercultural communication were: empathetic behaviour; listening and valuing the perspective of the other; having a respectful attitude; and trust. Empathetic behaviour, described as necessary by COs, was defined as “the willingness and ability to self-consciously put oneself in the position of the other party within the relationship and to try to understand things from the perspective of the other party” (PIA, 2012c, p. 2). Listening and valuing the perspective of the other does not mean having to agree with the other perspective but, rather, trying to understand the other perspective as a basis for healthy dialogue and negotiation. As well as listening, one CO emphasised the need for a respectful demeanour within a partnership. This is demonstrated through respectful dialogue in all types of discussion – both positive and negative; “notwithstanding any problems or issues that need to be dealt with, it is important to exhibit a pre-disposition to respectful dialogue” (PIA, 2012c, p. 2).

The addition of trust as a core value/principle to effective partnerships is supported by data from all three COs. One CO described a number of behaviours and actions that demonstrate the presence and absence of trust. For example, entering into a funding relationship indicates trust: “Funding a CO to deliver effective development indicates a level of trust in the capacity of a CO to manage these resources” (PIA, 2012c, p. 3), while micromanagement indicates the absence of trust: “In one case, staff were being contacted almost on a daily basis by a NO for a
3-month duration on relatively minor issues indicating a lack of trust and also taking
time away from implementing effective development” (PIA, 2012c, p. 3).

Team members reflected on factors that impacted on how their behaviour
aligned with or was discordant from those listed above. One major issue cited was
the new, non-negotiable, AusAID ANCP reporting requirements and templates: “I
have had to take quite a demanding, detail oriented and compliance focused
approach” (PIA, 2012c, p. 3).

The PIA–NO group identified communication and a commitment to
partnership as the key competencies and the need to have a shared vision.

The PIA–CSO group identified technical skills, a personal passion and
commitment to the issues, and knowing when to act collaboratively or competitively
as the competencies needed for this type of partnership. The group identified skills
required that are particular to individuals rather than generic – individuals matter in
this type of partnership. The particular combination of skills exhibited by each PIA
representative in their given external partnerships was not easily duplicated. For
example, other members of the WASH Reference Group described PIA as a strong
and active member: “[The Plan Representative] as the co-chair did a good job,
largely as she has a diplomatic approach which is professional and strategic, and was
a real asset to the group, e.g. communicating to AusAID” (PIA, 2012b, p. 8).

However, this level of activity was not actively maintained while the PIA
representative was on maternity leave. PIA’s participation in the group was reduced
at this time.
Ways of working

Each group identified ways of working necessary to make their type of partnership more effective. The PIA–CO group found that to work effectively, each partner needs to be clear about its role, responsibilities and accountabilities. The PIA–NO group found that each partner needs to be open to new ways of working, value collaboration and focus on program quality rather than only funding. The PIA–CSO group found that PIA needs to more consciously consider its interest and consider how each external CSO partner or group enables the organisation to enact this interest. As the PIA–CO group provided more detailed findings, these are discussed below.

The PIA–CO group worked to articulate those responsibilities and accountabilities that were shared or specific for a CO and NO – at both individual and organisational levels – as shown in Table 16. Understanding the responsibilities and accountabilities of each party was an important step towards improving PIA’s partnerships with COs, given this was the major issue raised by COs. As one CO representative/participant explained, understanding each party’s role relates to partnership accountability: “The importance of clarity in terms of the deliverables for which each party to the partnership makes itself accountable” (PIA, 2012c, p. 3).
Table 16: Responsibilities and accountabilities of NOs and COs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common NO and CO responsibilities:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Shared understanding and analysis of rights deficits and the appropriate response to those deficits in the areas of collaboration (priorities as documented in Country Strategic Plans and aligned with the National Office program strategy)</td>
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<td>• Collaboration on project/program design, including proposal development</td>
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<td>• Collaboration on wider resource mobilisation process</td>
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<td>• Need to identify decisions that are shared</td>
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<tr>
<th>CO organisational responsibilities:</th>
<th>NO organisational responsibilities:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Managing programs</td>
<td>• Managing grants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Partnering with local NGOs, District Offices (or PUs) and communities to implement programs</td>
<td>• Providing high-quality technical support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Monitoring, evaluation and learning for continuous improvement</td>
<td>• Providing funding that provides essential resources to deliver effective development</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Need to identify decision rights of the CO</td>
<td>• Supporting media communications that promote examples of effective development</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Support to M&amp;E and reporting</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Need to identify decision rights of the NO</td>
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<th>Required individual behaviours:</th>
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<td>• Approachability</td>
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<td>• Respectful dialogue</td>
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<td>• The ability to empathise</td>
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<td>• Timeliness</td>
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<td>• Professional conduct</td>
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Source: NO–CO Enquiry Group RAP Summary Report, p. 5

Systems and structure

Each of the three partnership enquiries yielded information that exposed shortcomings in organisational systems to support partnership in PIA and PI. The CO partnership enquiry found that PIA would need to improve management of its
human resources to better manage partnerships with Country Offices. That is, the organisation would need to enhance the capacity of existing staff to manage partnerships, provide additional human and financial resources, and provide greater clarity on accountabilities in partnerships. The findings highlighted a number of required changes to the human resource system to place greater emphasis on partnership: induction of staff who manage partnerships and changes to position profiles, selection criteria, and KPIs to place greater emphasis on partnership management. The import of these findings in terms of staff development and recruitment was far reaching.

Enquiries found that, at the global confederation level, PI would need to improve its brokerage of partnerships between National Offices and its contracting support for partnerships between National Offices and external partners.

The NO partnerships enquiry group found that systems and structures did not support collaboration but were, rather, premised on National Offices working independently or with Country Offices. For example, International Headquarters did not have a system of information sharing about what different National Offices were doing, areas of expertise of different staff within NOs and/or across PI. Indicating an untenable lack of organisational self-awareness, when approached for support on collaboration IH was largely non-responsive or did not prioritise it.

The CSO partnership group found the time the organisation took to generate contracts for some partnerships – especially those based on joint funding – as a weakness. The organisation needed to strengthen its capacity to generate supporting legal documentation for financially based partnerships, which were increasing in number as National Offices like PIA began sourcing and allocating funds
independent of PI. These findings showed how PI needed to improve its processes for facilitating partnerships between National Offices and a new range of groups.

7.4 The effects of the RAP

The RAP process was a welcome opportunity for PIA to review its partnerships strategy. Section 7.3 has described the enquiry process and findings. This section explores the differences that the process and findings made to staff and the organisation. Following the Kirkpatrick model, this section presents evidence that indicates staff valued the chance to view their work in a different light (similar to OAU). In contrast to OAU, however, learning at PIA was supported by an awareness of power and gender dynamics, and a willingness to draw on external support (Level 2). Efforts were hampered by the lack of definition of development effectiveness and by the tension between learning and demonstrating expertise to the AusAID. The RAP also had limited success in regards to behaviour change (Level 3) as application of learning in work practice was not a focus of the RAP. However, despite this, some participants engaged in practice change. Whether and how practice change occurred was dependent on the personal style and preference of participants. As with OAU, data from PIA indicates limited impact of the RAP on system-level results (Level 4).

Level 1: General positive response to the RAP

This section examines participant responses to the RAP. It indicates that most participants responded positively to RAP sessions. Most RAP participants valued the RAP as a space that allowed them to reflect on their work. The RAP encouraged staff to engage in values-based discussions and learning enquiries related to important issues and problems of relevance to their practice. In this way, RAP sessions called
on staff as development professionals, rather than administrators. The space allowed participants to consider their development practice in its complexity—including positive and negative aspects. External inputs allowed staff to take new perspectives on old or current problems. There were some participants, however, who did not respond positively to the RAP. These staff describe the RAP as too theoretical and disconnected from practice.

The data and criteria used to understand RAP participant response differ from those used to assess the reaction of OAU Hub members to their organisational learning system. This is because participation in the RAP was mandatory for all International Program staff, in contrast to the opt-in approach of the Hubs. For this reason, participant response to the RAP is assessed by generating themes derived from interviews and feedback form data, rather than the criteria used to assess the Hubs such as participant attendance at meetings and number of learning enquiries (both of which were mandated) or funding levels or disbursement (as there was very limited budget for RAP enquiries).

The RAP demonstrated PIA’s legitimisation of thinking, reflection and learning on the job. For example, PIA dedicated one day to the RAP during each three-monthly At Home Week, where no Program staff engaged in duty travel but, rather, engaged in collective activities while in Melbourne. This dedicated learning space allowed participants to explore content conceptually, as illustrated in the following quote from a RAP participant:

What has been good is blocking out time during At Home Week. One day is blocked rather than twenty minutes here and there. You can’t switch from doing something administrative to something conceptual. If you do try to do it, you are doing it at a cost.
Taking time at work for thinking about learning enquiries also produced tensions for participants. Some noted the difficulty of trying to fit RAP requirements into busy travel and program needs. However, most participants valued the space to engage as development professionals outside their routines of responding to the pressing administrative duties of the job. As a second participant explained:

often a lot of the work we do is fairly operational, so for me I welcome that opportunity to think conceptually about things I’m interested in, with the benefit of that additional input and discussion with other people.

Participants valued inputs from guest experts provided during the RAP which allowed them to view their work from different perspectives. A third participant stated:

We’ve learned so much from others: C, D, E. You get inspired and go back and do some work.

I think some of the presentations by external resource people introduced a new element. For example, we had a woman from AusAID who talked to us about partnership. She made the point that it wasn’t important to have a common objective to have a partnership, it was important to identify each partner’s different objectives. That was good – that is a different approach. That was really good.

There were a minority of participants who reacted negatively to the RAP. These participants responded in feedback forms that the RAP was too abstract and
removed from practice, specifically from partnerships with Country Officers. One participant stated:

I think we should be working more closely with COs rather than concepts. Supporting their processes. Looking at where their RAP intersects with ours.

RAP Participant 1, 2013

However, the design and funding of the RAP did not include a focus on practice. This point is discussed further in the analysis of Level 3. For those reasons, there was no review of the RAP to increase its relevance to practice or partnerships with COs.

Level 2: Factors that supported and inhibited learning

This section examines the two factors that supported learning and the three factors that inhibited learning.

Three approaches that supported learning

Learning in the RAP was supported by addressing rank and gender within groups, self-directed learning and scaffolding learning by external experts. Each of these approaches is supported by the literature on learning, adult learning and organisational learning. Each approach is described in more detail below, along with connections to the literature which are explored further in the next Chapter.

Addressing gender and rank within groups to improve ability to learn

PIA had a set of internal divisions that inhibited learning. The lack of a trusting environment was demonstrated through: poor results in employee surveys; discontent among some staff due to perceived gender inequality, which often intersected with rank; and staff mistrust related to a restructure process. These
internal issues were reflected in RAP group work. One RAP group was able to surface and manage these issues in a way that supported learning.

PIA’s employee surveys, which it implemented regularly, captured employee discontent. For example, the results over the time of the RAP showed employees had low levels of trust (RAP November meeting, 2012). Reasons cited for these low levels of trust related to gender inequality and staff responses to a number of restructuring processes. For example, some staff reported a lack of gender equality in internal management practices. While this issue was identified by staff and was discussed among female staff more broadly, it was not raised explicitly in whole program team discussions until 2013. Staff perceptions of gender inequality in the organisation and in the broader sector are illustrated in the three quotes below:

We didn’t explore the gendered dimension of partnership. In Plan there is a majority of men in high positions giving feedback on women in program management positions.

RAP Participant, RAP At Home day, 2 September 2013

Recommendation for stronger GE [gender equality] within Plan ANO: women in leadership, mentor, success planning, gender action plans for each department, review some of the HR recruitment, as well as influence the wider Plan international.

RAP Participant, RAP meeting, 25 November 2013

There is a reticence in the NGO field in Australia to discuss the issue of the lack of gender balance in leadership. It is named in the public sector as well as the private sector. The NGO sector is about 70 per cent female but there are very few women CEOs.

RAP Participant, RAP meeting, 25 November 2013
Gender inequality often intersected with differences in rank. In the following quote, a female RAP participant describes how power differences of rank impeded learning in the RAP groups, given the management of teams by Program Management Team members, almost all of whom were men. The description of power in this example clearly links with the idea of ‘power over’ developed by Miller, Gaventa and Veneklasen (2009, pp. 1-2) which excludes and privileges rather than ‘vital power’ which that nourishes and advances a more egalitarian, caring notion of agency and action:

Partly the issue I had with the cross-teams is with a PMT person leading it. It reinforced certain dominant behaviour. They’ve addressed it this year, saying what the role of the PMT is – not to manage the group but to connect with the SMT [Senior Management Team] and be a focal point of the RAP. Last year we didn’t know why they were the lead. Even our little external group, we certainly had one very dominant senior manager in our group.

RAP Participant

The lack of a trusting internal environment was exacerbated by the process of organisational change that went on over 2012 and increased individual staff members’ sense of vulnerability, as illustrated in the following quotes:

There was not time scheduled to go through the Department Review at this At Home Week. [This meant there were] vulnerabilities about what we’re thinking about the Department. Even knowing when we might talk about it [the Department review] could have changed things. There was an assumption that there was a safe space, but that is not the case. There wasn’t a safe space, which undermined our ability to address issues like power and gender.

RAP Participant, RAP meeting, November 2012
That is the other thing about the RAP, reflection is personal. When we were talking about power dynamics, I don’t think anyone was comfortable to critique the restructuring process. It was too personal.

RAP Participant 2, 2013

The fact that these issues were known to inhibit learning is illustrated in the following two quotes:

Some of the themes came up in the employment survey. We know we have low levels of trust. Researchers in Washington identified ‘four horses of the Apocalypse’ which identify if the relationship is doomed: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling. I see a lot of those behaviours in our organisation and here. We have to call that. Otherwise we can’t develop a productive relationship.

Management comment, RAP meeting, November 2012

Hadn’t got as far as we wanted to, comes back to sense of guardedness and difficulty of having some of the conversations that we need to have. This morning, I felt bogged down. Same conversations in the GESA and Employees survey.

RAP Participant, RAP meeting, November 2012

The lack of trust was a specific constraint to RAP group work, as foregrounded in the following quotes:

We have made executive decisions but because of the dynamics of our group, people have said that won’t be useful for them. We need to have greater trust and accountability in the group – need to trust that those in the group will make a decision that is good for the group.

RAP Participant, RAP At Home Day, 2 September 2013

there were issues of rank, gender and power that were prominent in our own groups. We needed to work on and understand these before we could apply these to our partnerships.
RAP Participant, RAP meeting, 25 November 2013

The RAP facilitators became aware of this issue of the lack of trust after it was raised at the public forums noted above. Facilitators tried to address the issue and discussed the need to ensure “the space is conducive to learning, safe conversations, and open” in the RAP planning meeting in October 2013. RAP staff understood the need for safe spaces to have discussions about areas of practice that required improvement. As part of trying to build a safe space, the facilitators agreed to not make a competition of the presentations, not invite outsiders and not require a management response on the day. While these techniques could build a safe space in the plenary sessions, enquiry groups had to be cognisant of the issue internally and address it to improve their group sessions.

The group that was most successful at learning was the one that developed a set of ways of working that addressed the lack of trust internally. We will refer to this group as the ‘power-conscious group’. The power-conscious group developed agreements on how they would behave in group sessions, including that what was shared in the group would remain confidential unless the staff member provided consent for the content to be shared. Significantly, this group’s work sessions were facilitated by a staff member, rather than a management representative. Other groups had a PMT member manage the group, which inhibited learning by participants deferring to the perspective of the PMT member (RAP participant comment, November 2013).

The power-conscious group used the ORID framework for analysis, enabling improved analysis within the group of their own data by separating out the data from emotional and interpretive responses to it. This framework reinforces the
separation of different elements of data analysis: O stands for objective; R stands for reflective; I stands for interpretive; and D stands for decisional. Another way the group addressed rank and gender was through splitting into sub-groups during a period of analysis. One of the power-conscious sub-groups had members who were of the same rank and the same gender. The following two quotes show that the group members felt their sessions were improved through the use of these techniques:

The ways of working helped create that space to work in the group. Also, having a facilitator helped. That was really useful. We used generic group work methodology that could be used by any group.

RAP Participant, RAP session, 25 November 2013

I found when we broke into triads we had a big deep discussion at a coffee shop, it was a useful and validating process. Because we had agreements on trust and confidentiality that allowed us to say things in the group what we wouldn’t say, for example, in the RAP last year.

RAP Participant, RAP session, 25 November 2013

The learning of the power-conscious group aligns with the recommendations of critical pedagogy for learners to engage in problem posing and identification of the power relations and structures that impede solutions to these same problems (Friere, 2007). The group was able to identify the internal issues that impeded their own learning and develop a range of techniques to address these issues and support their learning. Additionally, the enhanced trust in their small group helped group members identify power issues within the broader organisation that impeded work practice. The critical challenge for PIA, however, was to reproduce this learning environment across the organization as a whole.
A number of questions arise from the approach taken in the power-conscious group. Why did the power-conscious environment of PIA lead to such low levels of trust? And why was PIA more aware of the issues of gender inequality than OAU? There are two potential explanations here. One is that the low levels of trust were due to inequalities in power rather than power consciousness, leading to the lack of trust. Staff were faced with either leaving, not raising the issues or raising the issues. A small number of staff in the power-conscious group chose to raise the issues of gender inequality, while the majority chose not to raise the issues formally. Second, staff at OAU raised similar issues of gender inequality informally and could be said to be equally aware of the issues. However, no Hub participants raised the issues formally as part of their enquiries.

Self-directed learning

One factor that supported learning in the RAP was the self-directed nature of learning. While the overarching focus was determined by the organisation each year, teams could identify their own specific focus within the broader theme. This design encouraged teams to direct their own learning. The DRR and WASH teams were successful in identifying their own learning needs and are exemplars of self-directed enquiries, explored further below.

A member of the DRR team describes identifying the focus of the team’s learning enquiry in 2010:

In 2010 we did the supply chain aspect of humanitarian logistics. We looked at whether our strategy of placing capacity in the field – i.e. a professional humanitarian logistician in Indonesia, rather than flying one in and out, was a good operational model. This model was based on one of the lessons learned from the Padang earthquake. We decided to test
this learning by placing people in the field. This has become a positive example within the Plan DRM sector.

DRR Staff, interview, 2013

A member of the WASH team describes deciding to engage in learning and identifying the problem that was most important:

In 2010, when A was leading the WASH group we saw the RAP very much as an add-on component. While we thought it was useful, we didn’t think we had the time to do it. We outsourced the RAP to B, our program officer, because C and I were so busy. We fed into interviews but in terms of analysis we gave to that to B. That wasn’t the best decision. So then in 2011 when it was focused on gender, that was the time A got her promotion, we co-led the RAP and we made the conscious decision to make it useful to our work. That gave us the space to think about, if we are trying to ask COs to be gender responsive, we need to know what our expectations are.

WASH Staff, interview, 2013

The WASH team articulated its increased knowledge of gender-responsive WASH through a paper:

We produced a paper on the WASH RAP ... the main practical aspect was the diagram on ... what gender responsive WASH would look like through the program cycle.

WASH Staff, interview, 2013

Findings from the research process were not only about what gender-responsive WASH would look like, but also how to engage with COs to introduce gender-responsive WASH:

we found that, in Vietnam, because there was that strong intention to put the policy in place, the partners didn’t feel ownership or understand the policy. The finding was they needed to be involved from the start.
WASH Staff, interview, 2013

The DRR and WASH teams’ positive learning results can be related to the self-directed nature of their enquiries. The description of learning above mirrors Tough’s description of a self-directed learning project – a major, highly deliberate effort to gain a certain knowledge and skill (or to change in some other way) (Tough, 1971). The DRR team was clear in its intent to learn whether field placement of a logistics officer improved the supply chain in humanitarian logistics. Equally, the WASH team engaged deliberately in their learning project on gender-responsive WASH.

Learning scaffolded by external experts

A third factor that supported learning was scaffolding by an external expert. For example, the WASH team members increased their knowledge of gender-equitable programming through the RAP gender advisor inputs and the enquiry during the 2011 gender-focused year. The WASH team drew from this external support to better understand and test its findings, and refine the focus of enquiry as it progressed. As one WASH team member explains:

Because we didn’t have a gender advisor at a time, E played such a critical role to ensure some validity to what we were finding and challenging our findings.

WASH Staff, interview, 2013

We focused on two WASH projects – C did one and I did one. We used our own existing gender framework developed by IWDA. This framework has four principles. We used that to test our WASH programs from practical to strategic. Once we did that, E suggested doing some further analysis, which we did. She advised that we have a mandate in Plan, in terms of following our gender policy, which is so good and robust. The question was, how much of these programs are responding to our policy?
Is our gender policy driving our programming or the other way? It was in those broader areas that she guided us.

WASH Staff, interview, 2013

The WASH team sought out the support of the external advisor at mutually convenient times and in a manner that worked for the team. The support provided by the gender advisor was described as most relevant as it extended the team’s learning by engaging at their current level. This type of support was contrasted with external support that was inaccessible or too high level. As a RAP participant recalled:

The other thing with last year, I felt, J and K weren’t critical friends – J and K weren’t operational. Rather, they were high level. J didn’t have enough time to go through the documents. This could have improved our analysis. Then we ended up thinking ‘This was too hard’, then we outsourced the analysis to L, but I’m not sure that was the right thing to do or perhaps we should have done it earlier.

WASH Staff, interview, 2013

These experiences confirm the sociocultural approach to learning where an experienced other extends the learning of a learner on matters directly relevant to learner practice. The WASH team used the external gender expert to extend their understanding of gender-responsive WASH. This approach supported their learning in ways that other experts, who did not engage with learners at their level, could not do. Responses recorded for this thesis again highlight the challenges posed by organisational constraints, especially paucity of time and the tendency to outsource anything deemed ‘too difficult’ or time consuming.
Level 2: Four factors that inhibited learning

There were four factors that inhibited learning in the RAP. These were the mandatory nature of the RAP, the lack of definition of effectiveness, the tension between learning and demonstrating expertise, and the tension between output-oriented and process-oriented learning styles.

Mandatory nature of the RAP

All Program Department staff of PIA were required to participate in the RAP. The mandatory nature of the RAP inhibited learning of some participants. For example, RAP staff commented on how difficult it was to develop a learning process where participants didn’t have a choice of whether to participate or not. Expressing some frustration, bordering on exasperation, a RAP participant asked, rhetorically:

How do you run a process that the organisation is saying we must run?

RAP Staff

Each RAP participant was faced with a choice of how they would engage with a process that was forced upon them. As one participant stated:

There is a question of whether you’re going to comply with participation in the RAP in a way that is rewarding/challenging or only compliant.

RAP R&CR Staff, interview, 2013

These responses, brief though many of them are, underscore the level of distrust and disengagement felt by RAP participants. The mandatory nature of the RAP worked against a number of principles of andragogy outlined in the review of adult learning literature (see Chapter 3). Determining the overarching goal of enquiries worked against the ‘need to know’ principle. Determining the timeline of enquiries worked against the ‘readiness to learn’ principle. And finally, the overall
mandatory nature of the RAP worked against the adult self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and lives.

Lack of definition of effectiveness

Part of the difficulty we had was the need to define effective development.

(Comment from 25 November 2013 RAP meeting)

This lack of definition of ‘development effectiveness’ inhibited learning within the RAP and, at an organisational level, made it hard to understand how to measure effectiveness and how to improve it. For example, while the 2010 Effectiveness Review mentions the Istanbul CSO Development Effectiveness Principles, the use of these principles was not mainstreamed across PIA or PI. And the principles were also not mentioned by PIA staff during RAP sessions. In lieu of an agency-wide definition, staff worked using their own definitions, as illustrated by the quotes below:

We defined this [effective development] as reaching the most marginalised.

Comment from 25 November 2013 RAP

Results and how that related to what we promised.

25 February 2014 RAP AHW meeting

Seems to be the quality of the output was reflective to the amount of time people had to give to the process.

25 February 2014 RAP AHW meeting

As can be seen from the quotes above, there were a range of definitions of development effectiveness held by staff. One definition was linked to who the difference was made for (the most marginalised), another had to do with impact as
compared to original design, and the final definition related to one dimension of effectiveness (quality), taking into account the time available to implementers.

Staff questioned dimensions of effectiveness at an RAP meeting held in February 2014. Questions raised included:

- Where are children and youth [in the definition of effectiveness]?
- Are there some givens?
- Are we aiming for an ideal or a practical approach we can use?
- What do we do if things aren’t effective?
- Is there a threshold for minimum effectiveness?
- How does this relate to the field?
- Where is the link to Champion to Child Rights?

(RAP meeting, February 2014)

RAP facilitators noted the questions; however, there was no agency response to them, either at the meeting or afterwards. Some within the agency even contested whether a single definition of effectiveness would be useful, as seen through the following questions raised at the same meeting in February 2014:

- Effective development, does it matter that we don’t have a definition?
- There is no one definition, so why are we striving for it?
- Do we need to have the same definition, and how useful would it be?’
- Would it be useful to have a definition of effectiveness?

(RAP meeting, February 2014)

The range of definitions of ‘development effectiveness’ within PIA mirrors the range of definitions held across the development sector, as described in Chapter 5. Absence of an agency-wide definition hindered communication on all
matters related to organisational learning because, whenever management used the term, its meaning was interpreted differently by staff. Developing shared ideas or models of practice, including shared or common terminologies, is prerequisite to effective communication and hence effective organisation. This is one of the arguments made by Douglass C. North and Art Dednau (1994) in their seminal study of ‘shared mental models’. Institutions (or organisations) depend upon a certain degree of commonality in the symbols, discourses and expectations used that bind people together, in what Wenger (1998) terms ‘communities of practice’. At an organisational level, this would suggest a disconcerting degree of incoherence within PIA that both reflected on and fed into the culture of mistrust revealed through RAP enquiries.

Tension between learning and demonstrating expertise

The learning of PIA staff involved in the RAP was constrained by the tension between open-ended enquiry and the need to demonstrate expertise to the funding agency. PIA’s contracting arrangements, standard in development, perpetuated the focus on the funding agency and the need to demonstrate expertise in order to secure future grants. The majority of PIA’s development programs were funded by AusAID and contracts were struck directly between PIA and AusAID. PIA was engaged to deliver services to communities but was contractually responsible to AusAID. This contractual arrangement meant that PIA was engaged with the needs of AusAID (through data collection, financial acquittal and reporting) and concerned with retaining its reputation as an expert grant manager.

The tension between learning and demonstrating expertise of the organisation was built in from the design of the RAP. For example, the Effectiveness
Report was an output of the RAP from its inception (RAP Terms of Reference, 2010). Here two RAP participants explain the tensions in the RAP of needing to meet the reporting requirements of the funding agency and the learning needs of thematic teams:

I think there remains a tension regarding the purpose of the RAP – it seems to be trying to both establish some aggregate summary that Plan ANO can use to describe its development contribution [to an agency level ToC and against the four domains of change] and a technique by which thematic teams can reflect upon and learn about their own work. These twin aims did not sit easily within the 2010 RAP. My thinking is that unless the purpose of the RAP is clarified, and participants clearly understand what they’re trying to achieve – and how they are contributing – the risk of staff resenting the process remains high.

WASH Team evaluation feedback, 2010 RAP

Tension comes from needing to be curious and a learning organisation and then marketing as if we know the solutions.

RAP Participant, RAP November Workshop 2012

The focus on funding agency needs can distort the relationship between the grant contractor (in this case, PIA) and those it partners with to deliver the grants (in this case, PIA Country Offices). PIA is obligated to meet the contractual requirements of the grant agreement. These requirements are mirrored in agreements with Country Offices regarding the grant. But execution of requirements related to reporting and financial acquittal is dependent on the actions of staff in each context. Australian Program staff feel the pressure to ensure their counterpart Country Office staff comply with these requirements. Levels of compliance in each Country Office may differ depending on the history of where funds are drawn from – sponsorship or
grants. In those countries that have historically gained funding primarily through sponsorship, Australian Program staff can focus a lot of their time on ensuring compliance with funding agency requirements to the detriment of the relationship, as shown in the following quotes:

Legacy of sponsorship, the requirements of donors and sponsors are different – AusAID is much more compliance focused. Depending on the culture in the CO [sponsor or donor] means the culture of compliance is different.

RAP Participant, RAP November Workshop 2012

Wanting to develop better partnerships is undermined by compliance.

2 September 2013

The pressure to demonstrate expertise also influences relations between PIA and civil society in Australia. There are situations where working collaboratively and learning from other agencies in the civil sector in Australia is beneficial to PIA. And the agency spends much of its time engaging domestically with other agencies. But this collaboration and learning can be impeded by the funding agreements initiated by the funding agency, as shown in the following quotes:

We’ve talked many times about how AusAID talks collaboration but incentivises competition.

Comment from RAP participant at December meeting of RAP Group 2

a lot of the way we think about the [civil society] group is in relation to AusAID compared to thinking about the collective of civil society.

Comment from RAP participant at December meeting of RAP Group 2

The potential distortion of the development contracting relationship has been raised in the development literature over a long period of time. As far back as
1969 when the Pearson Commission undertook the first large-scale assessment of official development aid, a key message was that technical assistance needs be adapted to the needs of the recipient country and focused on building sustainable institutions (Riddell, 2007, pg. 29-30) The focus on recipient country needs and sustainability is distorted while agencies contract with funding agencies directly and depend on ongoing grants for their existence.

INGOs and the way they work – including use of existing contracting models – have come under pressure through the availability of a number of development approaches that involve direct transfer of funds or goods between funding agencies and poor people, rather than the provision of services by an intermediary. For example, conditional cash transfer programs involve the targeting of poor people and transfer of funds directly to recipients within the family (often to the mother). Funds distribution is based on particular conditions often related to education and/or health. The use of conditional cash transfers has grown explosively over a short period of time, from use in approximately two countries in 2007 to use in over 25 countries in 2008 (Fiszbein & Schady, 2009).

Another example of direct transfer of goods is the ‘housing first’ approach to addressing chronic homelessness. This approach involves providing housing to consumers experiencing homelessness and substance abuse. Services can be offered in tandem with housing provision, but housing is provided as the first step. Evaluations of the ‘housing first’ approach show that recipients of this approach obtained housing earlier, remained stably housed and reported higher perceived choice (Tsemberis, Gulcur, and Nakae, 2003).
Tension between output-oriented and process-oriented learning styles

The tension between staff who were action oriented and others who were process focused inhibited learning in the RAP. The tension between these learning styles is illustrated in the quote below:

The majority of the group want a practical outcome so reflection is not useful ... At this point we haven’t done anything of use. We need guidance on how this is practical and relevant to the new people. We have been having difficulties over the last couple of months and have reached an impasse ... We’ve also had tensions in the group between those who want practical outcomes and others who are willing to explore.

RAP participant, September 2013 RAP At Home day

One participant noted that the difference in learning styles was held by different positions within the agency. While staff were interested in process-focused styles, management were more output oriented:

Trying to work around different learning styles. Both groups had PMT leaders who were output focused and group members who want to be more organic and process driven. Need a structure at the start ... about how the group will operate.

Comment in RAP 25 November 2013 meeting

While some critiques of the RAP said there was too much focus on reflection, a review of the criteria for evidence and analysis highlights RAP guidance calling for the use of a range of types of evidence and a range of perspectives in analysis. While ‘practice experience’ is one source of data for reflection, the 2010 RAP guidance noted other existing sources of data: program designs and/or design processes, regular monitoring reports, review or evaluation exercises, and research activities or
papers. In addition, the guidance encouraged the collection of primary data through, for example, surveys, focus group discussions, and
interviews.

The 2011 RAP guidelines emphasised a number of principles regarding the quality of evidence and analysis of RAP enquiries. Evidence was to be gathered from more than one data source, be disaggregated, and include the voice of the beneficiary (partner, rights holder etc.) and an independent voice (peer, critical friend etc.). Analysis should be based on the internal voice (participant’s own reflection) and an independent voice (peer, critical friend etc.), and gender implications should be considered (outcomes for men, women, boys and girls considered). Despite these guidelines to consider a range of types of evidence and perspectives for analysis, there were still RAP participants who found the process too focused on reflection rather than analysis:

I’m not a reflective person, I’m an analytic person. My process is ‘can you send a report, can I have some facts? And then I can reflect on that?"

Comment from RAP 25 November 2013 session

The RAP facilitation team was aware of the different learning styles within groups and the need to facilitate the RAP in a way that catered to both learning styles. For example, a comment made at the April 2012 planning meeting was that:

Process needs to be grounded in the ‘real world’, with tangible outputs/outcomes for teams

However, there were no changes to the RAP process to cater for different learning styles despite acknowledging the different learning styles within groups.

As described above, four factors inhibited learning in the RAP: the requirement to be involved in the learning system; lack of agreement over what was being learned; lack of agreement about what this learning was for; and lack of
agreement about how this learning was to occur. This thesis does not argue for coming to a single definition of any of these factors. Rather, it is useful to tease out each element of learning to surface discussion on the multiple perspectives held.

**Level 3: Limited impact of learning on behaviour change**

There is limited evidence of wide-scale practice change as a result of the RAP. This section argues that the lack of practice change was due to a lack of focus on practice change in the RAP design and lack of attention to practice change during implementation despite comments from participants. While there is some evidence of practitioners changing behaviour, these changes were dependent on the inclination of the individual, rather than an intended and facilitated outcome of the RAP.

There was a lack of focus on practice change in the design, as shown in the RAP guidance documents. For example, the 2010 guidance only focused on data collection and analysis. While the guidance was expanded in 2012, this was only to include a component on recording, but still no focus on practice. Individualised guidance provided to each team also had no focus on practice change. Practice was also not mentioned in the RAP plan template or the RAP report template.

There are three mentions of practice in the RAP guidance documents. The first is a statement that the 2011 RAP would have a “Greater focus on continuous improvement“ but there are no details provided about how the RAP of 2011 would focus more on continuous improvement. One of the points in the 2011 Action Plan is that Program Unit Teams would “Develop a high level action plan (program focussed)”. There is no similar practice focus for management, however, with
responsibilities focused on reporting. Management responsibilities are to “Develop reporting and communications / including focus on organisation and guest learning” and “Effectiveness report strategy”. Milestones for 2012 include a mention of “Sharing … prospective practice implications for program level” in November.

Rather than focusing on practice, the documents point to an emphasis on assessment. For example, the key RAP questions of 2011 were concerned with understanding and demonstrating effectiveness rather than improving:

- What change has happened and was it the change we wanted to see? Across the four locations of change?
- What work has been undertaken and what is the quality of this work?
- What relationship exists between the two (i.e. how did the work contribute to the change)?

The 2011 RAP PowerPoint continues the assessment orientation as seen in the statement regarding the scope of the RAP:

**The scope:** The Reflective Annual Process (RAP) is … an annual process designed to enable ANO to:

- take stock of its programs;
- capture reflections on change and quality and the relationship between these in selected program domains; and
- make an assessment about its contribution to effective development outcomes at thematic and programming levels.

The progression of learning envisaged is upward, through levels from team learning to thematic learning to program-level learning, rather than about embedding that learning in practice. The upward progression of learning is illustrated in Figure 8.
The lack of focus on practice change in the design of the RAP is also identified by comments made by participants:

Are we reflecting because reflection is good as professionals? Or are we reflecting to improve our practice? I think at times we’ve struggled with that ... I don’t think the emphasis was on practice improvement to begin with ... We’ve never really had a solid plan for following up on action points. We talk about it but don’t plan to do anything about them.

Without that plan in place, it falls over.

RAP participant

Some RAP participants wanted to focus on practice, as illustrated in the comments from the 2011 RAP workshop below:
• Process needs to be grounded in the ‘real world’, with tangible outputs/outcomes for teams
• Some kind of accountability mechanism/process needs to be put in place to observe how teams are taking the learning forward/making practice changes as a result of the RAP
• Suggestion that this could be integrated into the AHW RAP sessions (i.e. team’s feedback on practice changes in June)
• Also need to track the ‘intangible’ quality changes/attitudes/behaviours

Again, in October 2013 the RAP facilitation group met and discussed its expectations for the November session, which included a focus on practice outcomes:
• Every RAP group to have practical outcomes they could apply to their work
• Strong emphasis on how to take the work forward

The lack of focus on behavioural change was brought up by one RAP participant in feedback on the 2010 process:

Setting oneself timelines and questions around intended timelines to achieve results (milestones maybe?) and intended change might help depict some more tangible results, both good and bad.

DRR Team evaluation of 2010 RAP

However, there was no systematic revision to the RAP design to either include a focus on practice or track practice changes over time.

One of the difficulties of facilitating practice improvement may be because it involves other people, sometimes from other parts of the organisation. In this way, practice change involves convincing others of the need for revision and working collaboratively towards a solution. The RAP, with its involvement of teams only from the Australian National Office, was unable to facilitate this kind of collaboration. The
following two quotes illustrate how people from outside the Australian National Office were involved in the practice process:

The research we did on locally placed logisticians was applauded by International Headquarters. But it hasn’t been taken up by National Offices. This may be due to Human Resources – not wanting to spend money if you can’t make money. There is a newly formed National Office Disaster Reduction and Mitigation (DRM) Group that reports into the National Office Program Directors group (NOPD). The National Office DRM Group includes all the DRM managers. They’re starting to understand that working together as a collective is useful. I’ve been pushing the research findings through that. We are starting to get a bit of understanding. That National Office group is starting to think of basket funds to fund positions. But others think International Headquarters should be proving the funding for these positions. It’s hard to influence. Plan is an organisation that is very personality based.

DRR staff

From the gender RAP, we’re more aware and asking more tailored gender-aware questions. It helps that we have a gender action plan, that is prescribed by AusAID. We’re striving that all Country Offices do that during response activations. Whether it changes in practice across the organisation, I’m not sure.

DRR staff

Despite the lack of focus on practice in the design, some practitioners did things differently as a result of the RAP. The following is an example of how one of the participants applied the learning from the partnership RAP to renegotiate a key partnership. Usefully, the partnership renegotiation involved clarifying the objectives of each organisation. This clarification impacted on the joint agreement, the way
both partners envisaged their collaborative work and the way they monitored and evaluated their work. One RAP participant stated:

I sat down and had a conversation with them about – what does this partnership mean to you? Interestingly, none of us put money on the table ... All of the things that came out were about other things besides money: ‘reciprocal learning’, ‘new space’, ‘innovation’. That put us in a good place to think about an M&E framework. Instead of saying ‘this is what we spent on’ and ‘this is how much we’ve spent’ we’re asking ‘what are you learning?’, ‘what are Australian young people getting out of it?’

RAP Participant 2, 2013

This new way of thinking about monitoring and evaluation allowed the practitioner to revise the reporting requirements of the partner. The key evaluation questions changed – with a focus on the partnership process and outcomes for young people, instead of financial reporting and spending targets. This review of reporting focus had a positive effect on the partnership:

Even in terms of the way we’re asking [the subcontracted partner] to report to us, I’m pulling that in line with narrative reports for any partners. Gives them more confidence in the work they’re doing because they have a chance to reflect.

One participant questioned the structure of an external grouping as a result of learning through the RAP. This questioning was timely as it aligned with a review of the grouping. By taking a critical approach, one that directly addressed issues of power instead of only operational issues, the participant was able to ask different questions. The questions, and subsequent research, produced findings that improved the workings of the external grouping. As one RAP participant observed:
We talked to WaterAid who were leading the review. They were focused on the operations of the group. For me, being in the WASH reference group, there were dynamics that meant I didn’t feel comfortable participating and the power was totally with WaterAid. Through our research, we fed that back in. We asked questions like: Why is the core group just these people if our aspiration is to be a community of practice? … There were a few simple but useful recommendations. For example, being conscious to have small-group discussions … [and] WaterAid can lead proposals, but they shouldn’t only put their branding on it. Proposals need to be more recognised as a joint thing. Hopefully they’ve taken on those comments … They still hold the power, which is okay – they have the resources. But they need to be more conscious of areas of improvement.

WASH Staff, interview, 2013

However, practice changes were dependent on the inclination of individual RAP participants, rather than being a feature of the RAP design. These self-reports were the exception rather than the rule. Only three examples of practice change were provided across the 14 interviews.

**Level 4: Lack of impact on organisational results**

There is evidence that the RAP improved results related to PIA’s supporting goals of increased identity and income. However, there is no evidence of improved organisational results related to PIA’s high-level goals of impact or influence as a consequence of the RAP.

The RAP supported PIA’s supporting goals of increased identity and income by securing a partnership agreement with AusAID. PIA senior executives saw a clear link between the RAP, as demonstrating the organisation’s commitment to effective
development, and the longer term and higher level funding available through ANCP partnership, as illustrated in the following quote:

I’d worked on framework contracts – X and others weren’t familiar with them – my original contract was for 7/8 months – the primary task was to position Plan for an agency contract – ANCP. My view was you needed to demonstrate certain capabilities really quickly. Effectiveness was an important feature. The driving factor was getting the Board to resource that and resource that quickly.

PIA Senior Executive 2

PIA’s securing of the ANCP contract increased the income of the organisation. And it strengthened its identity, now noted for being one of the few Australia-based INGOs that had a partnership agreement with AusAID.

In contrast, there is no evidence of the RAP supporting achievement of PIA’s high-level goals of impact or influence. For example, there were no claims of improved organisational results in any of the annual effectiveness reviews. This section argues that the lack of improved organisational results is due to: a disconnection of the RAP from other PIA organisational systems and processes; and a lack of focus on organisational results in the RAP design.

The disconnection of the RAP from other systems and processes within PIA was a weakness of the RAP and inhibited organisational results. There was a disconnection between the RAP and systems and processes that would help achieve RAP aims. Stakeholders mentioned how the RAP did not connect closely with the HR system, with the Marketing Department nor with the M&E processes of the thematic teams:
This process need to involve more than just Program, as change needs to be universal within the organisation.

DRR evaluation of 2010 RAP

One stakeholder pointed to the lack of connection with HR as a weakness:

We could do a lot more if we had properly integrated the RAP as part of HR/Staff Development strategy. If it was integrated that could help us think through: What are the staff capacities we want to support? How do we assess these? What are the opportunities for wider integration?

RAP Designer

For some thematic teams, there was a high level of interaction with Marketing. The lack of connection between Marketing and Programs translates into pressures in the field. There is a question of whether the RAP, or sharing of RAP findings, could ease this tension. As one RAP participant stated:

I work quite a bit with Marketing. They are dealing with lots of supporters. The feedback comes back, ‘the supporters just want to fund hardware in WASH’. Then we put pressure on the field. But they push back, saying ‘You’ve told us that good practice is this and then you’re telling us this’. It is about getting the thinking on the same page, the broader thinking, if they were part of the RAP rather than thinking about KPIs. Whether it is part of the RAP or something else.

RAP participant 3, 2013

Strangely, the RAP was not connected to other forms of monitoring and evaluation despite being designed to draw on a range of evaluative material. From one participant’s perspective, there was a clear difference in prioritising compliance-based evaluation work over the RAP:

The evaluations are compliance based. The RAP is not compliance. We prioritise the compliance-based initiatives obviously.
RAP participant 1, 2013

Even if other evaluative work was prioritised, it would have been useful for RAP participants to draw this material into RAP enquiries. But thematic learning was not apparent in the RAP. From the perspective of one of the RAP designers, this lack of connection meant duplication in the organisation and a weakness for the RAP:

The RAP is not seen as the M&E approach. If it is not getting people to integrate their other work, we’ve got two parallel things happening. That goes back to the discussion about how individualised things are. People hold onto their thematic learning.

RAP Staff 2, 2013

7.5 Conclusion

The chapter has shown how the RAP was largely driven by PIA’s new partnership with AusAID, as with OAU’s Hubs. PIA drew from OAU’s Hubs in designing its organisational learning system and PIA’s system mirrored some of the same strengths and gaps as OAU’s system. The chapter has shown that most participants responded well to the learning system and that learning was both supported and inhibited by factors raised in the learning, adult learning and organisational learning literatures. The RAP was less successful at supporting behaviour change, largely due to the lack of emphasis on practice change in the RAP’s design, and therefore had no significant impact on organisational results. The commonalities and differences between the findings from each case study chapter are explored further in the next chapter.
Chapter 8: Cross-case comparison

8.1 Introduction

Looking across the cases provides additional insights into how MEL systems do and do not support organisational learning for improved development effectiveness. External factors – government aid policies for example – created opportunities but also imposed new expectations, as highlighted in the previous case study chapters. These isomorphic pressures forced recipients to alter internal governance processes and shift priorities. Chapters 6 and 7 examined each case study individually and presented findings in response to each of the three research questions: how the case study organisational learning system worked, the factors that supported and that inhibited learning in the organisational learning systems, and the effect, if any, of the organisational learning systems. This chapter provides findings from the examination across the two case studies, answering the second and third research questions from a cross-case perspective: the factors that supported and that inhibited learning across the two case study organisational learning systems and the effect, if any, of the organisational learning systems. The chapter identifies the range of factors that supported learning and the factors that inhibited effective practice change across the two cases, and the implications of these findings.

Learning was supported in the case study systems by approaches to learning that are well supported by the adult and organisational learning literatures. Staff managing these systems used these approaches intuitively without conscious understanding of their grounding in research. This chapter outlines the approaches that were common across both organisations (Section 8.2) as well as those that were
specific to one or other organisation (Section 8.3). Importantly, the chapter provides a connection between each approach and the adult or organisational learning literature to provide theoretical support to INGO staff in their explicit use of these approaches in the future.

Neither system supported practitioners well to apply their learning in the workplace (Level 3), as explained in Section 8.4. Practice change was not well supported, first, because of how learning was thought about. Learning was considered a cognitive, individual activity that occurred without regard to differences in power. The second reason that practice change, and by extension impact on organisational results, was not well supported in each system was the focus on upward accountability. Rather than focusing on practice change, the key output of each system was information which assessed and demonstrated effectiveness for managers, the board and external stakeholders, and the funding organisation in particular. This focus on symbolic and conceptual use of evaluations over instrumental use became an impediment to more systematic results from the learning systems.

8.2 Common factors that supported learning

Both cases supported learning (Level 2) using approaches that are established in the adult learning and organisational learning literatures. The common approaches were self-directed enquiry and bridging organisational divides. The following section discusses each of these approaches and the support for each approach in the adult and organisational learning literatures.
Self-directed enquiry

An approach that supported learning in both cases was when staff directed their own learning. Each organisational learning system had its own, and different, way of supporting staff self-directed enquiries. As shown in Chapter 6, OAU Hub members identified areas of enquiry for research or evaluation based on the priorities of their workgroups. Hub staff then commissioned external consultants to conduct these enquiries and Hub members interpreted the analysis and revised drafts of reports. As shown in Chapter 7, PIA RAP groups selected the focus of their enquiry that related to the focus area chosen by the organisation, developed their enquiry process, collected data, conducted analysis and sought assistance from identified experts when needed. In these different ways, both learning systems used a self-directed approach.

Adult learning theory, specifically the principles of andragogy and self-directed learning, stress the importance of adults directing their own learning. The match between the processes that the Hubs and RAP groups went through and the principles of andragogy is depicted in Table 17. In general, both learning systems supported self-directed enquiry according to these principles (Knowles, 1973). An important caveat to this match, however, is that participation in the RAP was mandatory, meaning that some staff did not necessarily agree that they needed to learn something, nor did they feel they were responsible for the decision to be involved. In this way, not all staff felt the RAP aligned with two of the adult learning principles: ‘learner’s need to know’ and ‘self-concept of the learner’ (see Section 3.1). The match between the Hub and RAP processes and the teaching tasks of self-directed learners is depicted in Table 18 (Tough, 1971). The table compares one
enquiry from each system with the teaching tasks of self-directed learners: the Hub Advocacy Unit Highway 1 Evaluation and the RAP WASH gender enquiry.

While self-directed enquiry was common across both cases, that does not mean to say that each group or staff member was equally self-directed. In fact, some RAP participants were clearly resistant to being involved in enquiries at all, let alone directing their own enquiries, particularly in the later years of the process. This resistance by some staff to participation can plausibly be related to the mismatch between the requirement to participate in the RAP and the two principles of andragogy outlined above. Alternatively, the literature also acknowledges that learners will differ in their readiness for and comfort with being self-directed, and thus the explanation might simply be that some staff were reluctant because they were unprepared to be self-directed on learning enquiry topics at the time (Merriam, 2001a).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of andragogy</th>
<th>Hubs</th>
<th>RAP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Orientation to learning</strong>: Adults want to learn to help them confront situations in their lives</td>
<td>Staff engaged in the Hubs because they wanted to engage with issues they faced in their work</td>
<td>Staff who engaged the most were those who saw the connection between learning in the RAP and issues they faced in their work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motivation to learn</strong>: Adults are motivated to learn based on internal, rather than external, pressures</td>
<td>Staff could choose whether to participate or not</td>
<td>Staff were required to participate. This meant some staff felt pressured and resisted learning, while others found their own internal motivation for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Readiness to learn</strong>: An adult becomes ready to learn to cope with real-life situations</td>
<td>Staff were motivated to learn by an issue that emerged at a particular time</td>
<td>Staff were motivated to learn by an issue that emerged at a particular time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Learner’s need to know</strong>: Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it</td>
<td>Hub members chose whether to participate and which enquiries they wanted to participate in</td>
<td>Enquiry topics were chosen by the organisation. Not all participants agreed that they needed to learn about that particular topic. Those who did not agree participated less</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-concept of the learner</strong>: Adults’ self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions and lives needs to be reinforced in any learning situation for adults to persist</td>
<td>The adult self-concept was reinforced by the design of the Hub, which participants could participate in or not</td>
<td>The design of the RAP did not reinforce the adult self-concept, as everyone was required to participate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Prior experience of the learner: Adults’ experience needs to be tapped into and managed – that is, learners must examine their own mental habits, biases and presuppositions.

| The Hubs acknowledged the experience of members by having them review any work undertaken by external consultants. Potential biases were challenged through the research unit’s annual development of a research review to inform the annual reflection. | Members’ experience was acknowledged through the RAP design of staff conducting enquiries. Potential biases were managed in a number of ways: guidance that enquiries should include information from a range of sources; encouragement to reflect critically; and inclusion of external ‘critical friends’.
Table 18: Mapping of Hub advocacy evaluation and RAP WASH gender enquiry against main teaching tasks of self-directed learners

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching task of self-directed learners</th>
<th>Process of Hub Advocacy Unit Highway 1 Evaluation</th>
<th>Process of RAP WASH gender enquiry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decide what knowledge and skill to learn based on a specific impetus</td>
<td>Decided to learn whether efforts of OAU in the Highway 1 project were successful</td>
<td>Decided to learn what their expectations for gender-responsive WASH were, given they were asking COs to be gender responsive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider which activities will be effective for learning the subject matter</td>
<td>Commissioned an evaluation that engaged community perspectives on success</td>
<td>Chose two of their own WASH projects to reflect on</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain materials and resources</td>
<td>Engaged in reflection and formalised discussion, and evaluation team used an independent analytic approach</td>
<td>Used their own gender framework and mapped their WASH programs against the framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Decide when to learn</td>
<td>Commissioned evaluation according to timeline and priorities of Advocacy unit</td>
<td>Undertook learning over the 2011 RAP process when it fitted with other responsibilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimate levels of knowledge and skill</td>
<td>Identified success of OAU in achieving outcomes set out in advance. Where communities identified gaps, considered those gaps and potential for OAU to address those gaps</td>
<td>Gauged own knowledge and skills by testing findings with external advisor and developing a paper on gender-responsive WASH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When unable to grasp some part of the knowledge and skill, spend more time dealing with these difficult parts and obtaining assistance from others</td>
<td>Engaged in internal discussion and discussion with evaluators and partners about whether and how to address community’s material needs without reducing pressure on government to respond</td>
<td>Sought assistance from external gender advisor to “ensure some validity” and to “challenge findings”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Bridging internal divides

Learning was supported in both organisations by bridging internal divides. Both organisations were complex and composed of separate and often competing units. Bridging these differences was a common approach that supported learning. In the OAU case, the key differences were between the International Programs Unit and the Public Policy and Advocacy Unit. These units had different ways of working and had developed different cultures over time. Having Hub meetings where representatives from each unit were present was an important part of building links and familiarity with different types of work. As outlined in the findings chapter, the Hubs were described as a ‘culture builder’ where links among programming, campaigns and advocacy could be explored. Hub designers and participants described the Hubs as an ‘open space for people to come together’. Hub members described how the Hubs allowed them to meet and talk with people whom they would not otherwise have interacted with.

In the PIA case, the differences were between the implementation teams (for example, Early Childhood Care and Education; Disaster Risk and Recovery; and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene) and the Program Effectiveness Team. The implementing teams saw themselves as field focused and pressured by competing demands between field and head office. They tended to see the Program Effectiveness Team, who managed the RAP, as not properly understanding their pressures and with the “luxury” to engage in abstract, evaluative activity. The RAP facilitated cross-departmental links, especially in the final two years of the RAP (2012–13), by establishing enquiry groups with members drawn from different
teams. Participants were able to build greater understanding of other members’ priorities and pressures by working together in the enquiry process.

The examples provided above indicate that both the Hubs and RAP supported the building of mutual trust, open communication and learning through cross-discipline teams. Organisational learning theorists identify the building of mutual trust and open communication as prerequisites to learning and knowledge creation (Argyis & Schon, 1974; Nonaka, 1994). Nonaka links the two ideas together – it is the building of a place, or “field”, which allows individual tacit knowledge to be articulated through interaction with others (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). It is the conversion of tacit to explicit knowledge and back to tacit again that Nonaka proposes as the basis of organisational learning. Both OAU and PIA were effective in bridging some internal differences between work units to build the foundation of trust necessary for future collaboration.

However, there were instances where it was not possible for the activities in the learning systems to address deeper issues of mistrust. Chapters 6 and 7 described the anxiety that staff felt due to the multiple restructures that went on in each organisation over the time of study and the issue of gender inequality in management practices in PIA. In this way, the two organisational learning systems were not separate from the wider culture of the organisations. These deeper issues of mistrust impacted negatively on each learning system. Organisational learning system staff were not at a high enough level of management to address these issues of mistrust directly. However, the power-conscious self-directed learning enquiry of one of the RAP groups surfaced the issue of gender inequality in management practice, discussed further in the next section.
Section 8.2 showed how organisational learning system staff from each case study organisation used two established approaches from the adult learning and organisational learning literatures that supported participant learning. They facilitated the self-directed enquiry of participants and worked to build a culture of trust. Participants were provided with time and resources for their enquiries and, as a consequence, participants were engaged in the process. Where there were caveats to self-direction, this limited learning in each system. For example, some RAP participants resisted learning in response to having their participation mandated.

Each system supported the building of a culture of trust and open communication by bringing participants from different teams together. This approach was a necessary, but not sufficient, part of creating a culture of learning. Organisation-wide issues, such as management restructures, impacted negatively on learning through staff perceptions and anxieties.

8.3 Specific factors that supported learning

Each case also supported learning using specific approaches in addition to the common approaches discussed above. The PIA case was successful in addressing rank and gender within groups, and scaffolding learning by external experts. The OAU case supported learning by staff making tacit knowledge explicit. The following section discusses each approach and the support for each approach in the adult learning and organisational learning literatures.

Addressing rank and gender within groups

Staff within organisational teams in both organisations faced internal divides that were based on differences in power. At PIA there were divides between different
ranks within the organisation – between operational and management staff – and divides related to gender – between male and female staff. In addition, the types of divides often intersected; for example, operational staff tended to be female and management staff tended to be male. Mixing groups to include members from different ranks and genders was not sufficient to build greater understanding and trust across these divides. Rather, it was the groups that were cognisant of differences related to these divides that were most successful in facilitating learning. Other groups were either blind to these differences or did not surface the differences as part of conducting their enquiries.

The processes that one successful RAP group used to surface and manage power imbalances were described in Section 7.4. The group used techniques to build a safe space and develop open communication in order for the group to learn. The techniques the group used were to develop agreements on session behaviour, having a staff rather than a management representative facilitate sessions and using an explicit framework for data analysis. Section 7.4 described how the safe space allowed this RAP group to address the issue of power differences in the organisation in their small group, facilitating useful learning. While the power-conscious approach was shown to be useful to this group, it was not widespread across the RAP, nor was it used in the OAU Hubs. This can be attributed to a power-blind approach to learning that was common to both organisations, discussed further in Chapter 9.

While the leaders of the RAP were not explicitly versed in power-conscious approaches to learning, the application of this approach by one RAP group is supported by the critical pedagogy stream of adult learning outlined in Section 3.1. Critical pedagogy’s ‘problem-posing’ is the starting point of enquiry and change.
Adult learners engage in the problems that impede their lives or work, and the learning process is driven by a desire to remove these impediments or problems. Learners in this critical mode often surface power differences based on gender, race and class which are recognised as the root of the problems they have posed (Friere, 2007). Without surfacing differences in power embedded in organisations through problem-posing, learners can remain passive subjects unaware of oppressive structures. Hence, the wider application of learning taking a critical approach is necessary to address issues in the workplace that are due to power differences.

The organisational learning literature does not address the issue of power well, as outlined in Chapter 3. Rather, some can be characterised as representing the perspectives of those with power (managers and educators) above employees, who are described in deficit terms (Fenwick, 1996). The case studies show a contrasting view to this perspective. The learning that was required in each system was generative learning – or exploration, to use March’s term (1991) – organisations were encountering new situations that required new knowledge. Employees were central to this knowledge creation, rather than simply being recipients of what was already known by managers and educators.

A power-conscious or critical approach was useful to the RAP group’s learning outlined above and in Chapter 7. However, in practice steps were taken carefully and in full consultation with participants. For example, the group from the PIA case study that took this approach convened separate sessions where female staff talked of their issues with gender inequality in the workplace. One of these discussions took place off site and included staff of the same rank and gender. This self-curated approach to designing settings was useful in that it enabled discussion
on inequality, its consequences and potential responses – a topic that was too
difficult to discuss in a plenary context. Participants themselves drove the
identification of key power issues that could be fully investigated through the
learning enquiry. The role of organisational managers and staff was to support and
facilitate these enquiries. However, the paucity of enquiries that took a power-
conscious approach illustrates the lack of attention to issues of power by both
participants and staff.

**Scaffolding learning by external experts**

Engaging with experts to scaffold learning was an approach used in the RAP that is
supported by sociocultural learning theory. As explained in Section 2.3,
socioculturalists developed the concept of scaffolding – where an expert in a
particular area provides the proportionate amount of instruction to the needs of the
learner (P. H. Miller, 2011). Like scaffolding used on building sites, scaffolding for
learners can be folded away when the learner is able to accomplish the task
themselves. The PIA chapter described how the WASH team gender-enquiry group in
2011 engaged with a gender expert who was able to extend their learning. As shown
in Chapter 7, the expert engaged with members as they encountered problems in
practice and group members accessed her expertise as felt necessary. This type of
accessibility and flexibility was valued, and contrasted favourably with other advisors
who were less accessible. The gender expert tailored her expertise to the group’s
needs at the time and reduced her inputs as the expertise of the group grew. In this
way, the expert enabled the team members to deal with work situations as they
arose. The relevance of the gender expert’s expertise to the enquiry group,
timeliness of her inputs and accessibility allowed her to successfully scaffold the group’s learning. This type of flexible and responsive expertise, available as requested by learners, was useful to the learning group and is supported by sociocultural learning theory.

**Making tacit knowledge explicit**

Making tacit knowledge explicit was another factor that helped staff learn and, for this to be achieved, open communication is essential. The OAU Hub system supported members and participants to bring knowledge into the open. For example, the OAU findings show how being involved in conversations in one Hub allowed a member to articulate his own approach and better understand the approach of others, facilitating mutual learning. The findings chapter described how the Gender Justice Hub developed a previously tacit approach, the transformational women’s leadership approach, through Hub discussions and research. Once articulated, this approach was then used as the basis for a shared agency-wide approach informing future plans and programming.

As discussed in Section 2.3, organisational learning theorists acknowledge the importance of explicating tacit knowledge. Nonaka sees individual tacit knowledge, accumulated through direct “hands-on” experience, as the prime mover in the process of organisational knowledge creation (1994). He describes the importance of creating a “field” – a place where individual tacit knowledge is articulated. Members in this field share their original experiences – the fundamental source of tacit knowledge – to convert them into explicit concepts that can be shared beyond the boundary of the team. These ideas, and the evidence of practice in some OAU Hubs,
underscore the importance of developing a workplace culture founded upon mutual intelligibility, or shared models of practice based upon shared understandings of mission and purpose.

**Conclusion**

Each of the approaches described above has sound foundations within the adult and organisational learning literature. However, those responsible for the Hubs at OAU or the RAP at PIA were not explicitly aware of the theoretical foundation to their work, nor did they use these approaches consciously. In contrast, new learning processes developed organically. The section above outlined those measures that facilitated learning, linking them to the established literature, as summarised in Table 19, to provide a rationale for use of these approaches in future organisational learning systems within INGOs.

**Table 19: Alignment between effective learning approaches used and learning theory**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective approach used in organisational learning system</th>
<th>Link to learning theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Self-directed learning</td>
<td>Adult learning (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam, 2001a; Tough, 1967, 1971)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Bridging organisational divides</td>
<td>Organisational learning (Argyis &amp; Schon, 1974; Argyris &amp; Schön, 1978; Nonaka, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Explicating implicit knowledge</td>
<td>Critical learning theory (Friere, 2007; Macedo, 2007; Shaull, 2007)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Addressing rank and gender within groups</td>
<td>Sociocultural learning (Blunden, 2010; P. H. Miller, 2011; Palincsar, 2005; Renshaw, 1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Scaffolding learning by external experts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
8.4 Common factors that inhibited practice change (the application of learning)

This section discusses the two reasons that OAU’s Hubs and PIA’s RAP had a limited effect on staff practice and thereby a limited effect on organisational results. First, the section argues that the implicit assumptions of learning evident in both organisational learning systems – cognitivist, individual and power blind – worked against the application of learning. Learning was considered as shifts in the conceptual understanding of individual staff which were assumed to lead to changes in behaviour. The prioritisation of each learning system on upwards-focused accountability and reporting to the donor, itself an manifestation of power differences, over staff application of learning is the second reason discussed.

Learning as cognitive, individual and power blind

Learning as cognition

Each of the organisational learning systems evidences an implicit cognitive conception of learning held by learning system designers, managers and participants which limited the application of learning. This conception considers learning a process that occurs entirely in the mind, does not focus on the application of knowledge and thereby lacks a focus on practice improvement. The disconnection between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’ had consequences for the goal of greater development effectiveness sought by both OAU and PIA. Let us examine how this cognitive conception of learning, that draws from rationalism, was reflected in the design, implementation and evaluation of each learning system.
Neither of the systems implemented by OAU and PIA focused on practice change in their design, as shown in Chapters 6 and 7. For example, the RAP guidance documents made almost no mention of practice. Where practice was mentioned, for example stating the 2011 RAP would have a “greater focus on continuous improvement”, there were no details about how the RAP would achieve this (PIA, 2011c, p. 3). In the case of the Hubs, design and management documents as well as interviews show the emphasis was primarily on improving internal program priority-setting and cross-agency collaboration and reporting, rather than supporting practice change. The reporting focus of the learning systems through the design shows that the primary intended users, to go back to the evaluation use literature, were actually managers as opposed to practitioners.

The lack of focus on practice change in the design of each learning system had consequences for their implementation. For example, OAU terms of reference for commissioned research and evaluation pieces had no reference to practice change. There was no requirement, for example, for developing practice briefs, running practice clinics or working with practitioners. PIA staff conducted their own research and evaluations, but the pattern for sharing information was similar to that of OAU – no attention was paid to how to embed improved knowledge in practice change by the staff themselves or others. Hub learning activities were also cognitivist in nature. For example, one ACAC Hub meeting focused on ‘What is the theory of change of ACAC?’, an abstract discussion aiming to develop a generic theory rather than a more pragmatist approach of eliciting the specific and particular theories of change from members’ work practice. RAP learning activities were also held largely in meetings discussing abstract, rather than specific, ideas. For example, during the
focus on partnerships in 2012–13, RAP meetings included presentations on how to enter into and revise partnerships, rather than specific discussion of particular partnerships and what could be learned from each example.

There is one counterpoint to the claims made above. One RAP sub-group conducted a number of meetings in 2013 where group participants brought detailed notes and reflections on their way of interacting with Country Office colleagues. These notes and reflections provided entry into grounded conversations on partnership with CO colleagues, ways that partnership might be improved and impediments to such improvements. The scenarios that practitioners described made it easier for others to understand and empathise with how the Australia-based person behaved and what stood in the way of them behaving differently. The grounded examples group members shared provided more insight into the partnership discussion than the development of generic partnership values or guidelines, and informed the PIA–CO enquiry and the development of Table 13 on responsibilities and accountabilities of NOs and COs discussed in Section 7.3. However, there was no implementation of these learnings given the lack of focus on practice through the design and implementation of the RAP. This limited counter-current gives insight into how INGOs (and NGOs more generally) might better engage practitioners’ existing, practical knowledge to facilitate practice improvement.

Evaluation forms for each learning system did ask participants to consider whether they applied their learning, in contrast to the lack of attention to practice change, through the design and implementation stages. For example, the RAP evaluation form asked participants to “Outline any practice changes or influence
activities (for example, circulation of RAP reports) undertaken or wish to undertake in the future as a result of the enquiry, analysis and reflection process” (PIA, 2011a). Similarly, the Hub evaluation survey asked practitioners whether they had observed changed practice as a result of Hub work at the individual, team, organisation, partner or beneficiary levels. The questions concerning whether participants had applied their learning in the evaluation stage, despite the lack of attention to practice during design or implementation, evidences the assumption that practice was expected to change as a result of improved knowledge and without any further support from learning facilitators. Unsurprisingly, given the lack of attention to the application of learning during design and implementation, participants reported few examples of behaviour change in evaluations.

**Learning as individual**

Another dimension to the tacit understanding of learning in each of the organisational learning systems was that learning occurred individually. However, this individual assumption of learning was not immediately apparent, as learning activities were conducted in groups, which conveyed a collective approach to learning. However, analysing the collective activities in more detail suggests that the focus in these sessions remained on the individual. For example, participants could largely choose the learning enquiry groups they joined (the exception was the thematic RAP groups in the first two years of the RAP system). In this way, the focus of learning was on the individual and their own individual learning objectives. At OAU, there was no requirement to attend with colleagues that participants worked with. Rather, individuals chose to participate in a Hub based on their own interest. At
PIA, again there was no specification for participants to conduct enquiries with others they worked with. Rather, participants conducted enquiries in thematic groups in the first two years and choose who they worked with in the last two years of the RAP (2012–13). The ability for participants to join any group that they chose highlights a focus on individual internalisation and action.

Another illustration of the individual assumptions of learning held by staff is how the Hubs outsourced research and evaluation activities. The Hubs commissioned consultants to analyse problems and produce reports, rather than involving people to work together in creating new or refining practice. These reports were shared with Hub participants, who largely read these reports individually. There were a number of sessions held on report findings, where consultants presented and Hub participants asked questions. However, there was no facilitation of group discussions involving people who worked together. Both these examples show the implicit assumption of learning as an individual activity, which limited the application of learning, as any changes to behaviour in the workplace context require communication and negotiation with colleagues who are involved in parts of work processes.

Learning as power blind

The implicit understanding of learning in each system was power blind, which also inhibited the application of learning. For example, while issues of rank, gender and race were important to how work was conducted, these issues were mostly ignored in learning enquiries. Where power was discussed, this was primarily as an issue that applied in the field. There was little discussion of power as an issue that applied
internally. For example, the learning systems assumed that each participant had equal rights to express themselves. There was no interrogation of the different positions that each person held and what each person’s positionality allowed them to say. While power was an issue that was brought up in the partnerships RAP in 2011, it was an issue that was applied to the external context. Only by the second year did it become a lens for internal analysis. The issue of power was not brought up within the Hub systems at all.

**Focus on donor accountability**

The prioritisation of upwards-focused donor accountability through reporting, itself an illustration of unequal power relations among AusAID and OAU and PIA, is the second reason that practice change was inhibited. The emphasis on donor reporting is illustrated in the design and implementation of each system. The design of each learning system prioritised ‘proving’ over ‘improving’. For example, RAP staff were responsible for collating assessments into a report, the Annual Effectiveness Review, rather than, for example, working with practitioners so that findings fed into new designs or ongoing projects. Similarly, the Hub goals prioritised articulation of the agency’s progress and achievements. This is shown by the fact that some Hub support team members spent the majority of their time on the annual reporting process (Sann, 2013). These examples show that the design of each system prioritised reporting over practice improvement, both in theory (through their stated goals) and in practice (through the prioritisation of staff time and emphasis).

The implementation of each learning system focused largely on producing reports, rather than facilitating learning. In both organisations, the key annual
product was the annual report. The organisational learning systems provided the content related to progress against organisational goals. These annual reports were resource intensive, requiring much staff time to produce. In the case of OAU, Hub members were responsible for developing case studies which were then reflected on by all staff working on that change goal in the organisation in 2009–10 (Sann, 2013). In 2011–12, PDU staff commissioned consultants to review and synthesise existing research and evaluation material (Sann, 2013). These consultants then presented the summary to Hub members for review. The refined documents were then used for the annual review and reflection for each change goal. These summary documents, in both cases, were then developed into the Annual Review reports. It is clear that the prioritisation of reporting over practice improvement continued from the design to the implementation stage of each learning system.

While the annual report was the key annual product of each learning system from an organisational perspective, this was not the key priority for many members or participants. In the case of PIA, many participants spoke of the need to separate out these functions and that the learning element of the RAP was subverted by the focus on reporting. Staff had the sense that developing the annual report from RAP findings diverted the purpose of the RAP. One participant described this diversion as a “managerial add-on” that got in the way of reflective practice. In this staff member’s view, the annual report provided a sanitised version of the work of the organisation. None of the hard or unanswered questions were included in these reports, as “If you want people to reflect and reflect honestly, you may not want to share with others” (RAP Participant 4, 2013). Despite the focus of staff on learning, the organisations continued to prioritise donor accountability. This can be seen in
the case of OAU, where most of the Hubs’ financial and staffing resources, especially in 2012 when budgets were cut, were put towards developing the annual report, rather than learning.

8.5 Conclusion

This chapter has identified the common strength of the learning systems at PIA and OAU, and discussed this strength in relation to the adult and organisational learning literatures. The two learning systems supported learning using two common strategies: self-directed learning and bridging organisational divides. Each also used specific strategies that supported learning: addressing differences in power and scaffolding learning by external experts in the RAP system, and explication of tacit knowledge in the Hub system. These factors are supported by the existing adult learning and organisational learning literatures and suggest the utility in applying these approaches more broadly.

The chapter has identified the two reasons that both systems did not support practice change well, resulting in the limited impact of the systems on staff behaviour and organisational results. The first reason is that staff held cognitivist and individual assumptions of learning that did not take note of differences in power. This view of learning meant there was no focus on supporting practical changes in the behaviour of groups of people who worked together, informed by the systematic analysis of organizational blockages due to existing relationships of power. The second reason is that upward accountability to donors was privileged over the learning needs of staff.
Chapter 9: Discussion

OAU and PIA set up the Hubs and RAP systems to contribute positively to their organisations and their beneficiaries. Chapters 6 and 7 described evidence of staff learning through the Hubs and RAP. Chapter 8 described a number of approaches to learning facilitation that worked well and can be replicated by INGOs more widely in their learning systems. However, the major finding across both cases was the lack of staff application of learning and therefore the lack of effect of the learning systems on each organisation. Chapter 8 proposed two reasons for the systems’ lack of focus on practice. This chapter proposes two solutions to this problem.

First, this chapter argues that organisational learning in INGOs is likely to be more effective when learning-focused evaluation and learning systems are separated from upward-focused accountability evaluations and learning systems. Second, the chapter sets out a model of organisational learning that incorporates the learning approaches and strategies that worked well in the cases, and draws from adult and organisational learning theory to address the gap of staff behaviour change identified in the cases. The chapter describes the proposed model, EPoC, which stands for an embodied, power-conscious and collective approach to learning. The model draws from theories of embodied, power-conscious and sociocultural learning to ensure learning is applied. The chapter explains that the learning theories in the EPoC model are situated at the other end of continua from cognitive learning, power-blind learning and individual learning, as illustrated in Figure 9. Each approach to learning can be useful in some instances. However, the chapter argues that
organisational learning for practice improvement requires organisations to move towards the right-hand side of the continua.

**Current approach to learning** — **Potential approach to learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cognitive</th>
<th>Embodied</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blind to power</td>
<td>Conscious of power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Collective</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 9: Continua between approaches to learning of relevance to supporting practice change*

### 9.1 Managing the tensions between learning and accountability

The tension between accountability and learning embedded in each learning system, and detailed in the final section of Chapter 8, is a common phenomenon in development evaluation findings. Here we examine evidence that illustrates how other development practitioners also find their learning can be distorted by accountability requirements (where accountability is defined as ‘upwards accountability’ focused on donor or management requirements) and examine three ideas from evaluation theory about how this tension can be managed: redefining accountability to be more learning oriented; merging learning and accountability processes; and considering learning and accountability as different and separating out the servicing of each requirement. The section argues that the final of these three approaches is required to support practice change from organisational learning initiatives.

The tensions between accountability and learning experienced by practitioners in OAU and PIA are documented more widely in the development
evaluation literature. For example, research into practices at evaluation units of the African Development Bank, the Danish International Development Agency, the UK Department for International Development, the European Union, the International Monetary Fund, KfW (a German Government-owned development bank), Oxfam, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency and the World Bank suggests that staff perceive tension and trade-offs between accountability and learning (Foresti, Archer, O’Neil, & Longhurst, 2007). Recent research from the World Bank also suggests that staff rarely valued or used knowledge from the accountability-focused self-evaluation system. Rather, staff chose to learn from evaluations which were optional, seen as technically credible and commissioned in response to specific learning interests (Heltberg, 2016). Equally, OECD research underlines the reality that results information is focused on accountability, for communicating progress, achievements and expenditures (OECD, 2014). Consequently, there is a lack of demand for results information for decision-making and learning in DAC member countries.

These examples draw attention to the fact that the tensions PIA and OAU experienced between accountability and learning requirements in their learning systems are an issue in the development sector more broadly. Staff from the other agencies listed above also perceived differences between information that is gathered for specific and self-identified learning needs and the accountability-focused information that is gathered for reporting purposes. The examples show that staff value the former over the latter and tend to use the information that has been gathered in response to their specific learning needs.
Evaluation theory provides three different perspectives on how the tensions between learning and accountability can be managed: redefining accountability to be more learning oriented; merging learning and accountability processes; and considering learning and accountability as different and separating out the servicing of each requirement. Theorists who take the first perspective have called for revising the understanding of accountability to be complementary with learning (Guijt, 2009; Perrin, Bemelmans-Videc, & Lonsdale, 2007; Rogers, 2004). For example, Perrin, Bemelmans-Videc and Lonsdale call for learning-oriented accountability approaches: accountability approaches, including both audit and evaluation, need to be consistent with and support a learning orientation. (Perrin et al., 2007) Rogers advocated ‘smart accountability’ which also involves a learning orientation:

Smart accountability includes demonstrating responsible, informed management ... and a commitment to identify and learn from both successes and mistakes. (Rogers, 2004)

Guijt has called for accountability that converges with learning and has defined this as “strategic accountability” or “respond-ability” (2009, p. 9). This type of accountability involves taking responsibility for oneself by understanding what was done, and being able to respond to questions about the basis of strategic decisions, the underlying theory of change and how money was spent (Guijt, 2009). These theorists have critiqued the prevailing definition of accountability as answerability, providing feedback on progress in relation to promises, or enforcement, even sanction if feedback is lacking (Guijt, 2009). Rather, they have advocated for a notion of accountability that demonstrates that the reporting agency has learned itself and responded and changed its actions in response to this learning. This perspective is useful in showing the limitations in the current definition of accountability.
However, this perspective does not take the organisational context of INGOs or power asymmetries between funding agencies and INGOs into account. The existing definition of accountability was built into the structure of the funding system through the head contract between the organisation and the INGO, the terms of reference of the learning system and the practices of learning facilitation staff. Each organisation and the learning staff members responded to the existing definition of accountability as answerability, with the threat of enforcement or sanction, rather than applying a more learning-oriented definition of accountability. Equally, while accountability exercises can be conducted in a fashion that is more conducive to learning the evidence from the section above illustrates that staff still distinguish between activities that respond directly to their own learning needs and accountability exercises.

The second perspective in the development evaluation literature for managing the tensions between accountability and learning is to merge the rhythms of accountability with the learning rhythm of the organisation and creatively merge accountability and learning needs (Guijt, 2009). For example, Gujit (2009) has called for scheduling learning processes to facilitate meeting of accountability requirements and gathering evidence to feed into annual participatory reviews that generate conclusions and insights and which are subsequently shared with funding agencies and constituents. However, while both organisations applied this perspective, without explicitly drawing from theory, it proved ultimately unsuccessful. Each organisation tried to merge the timelines of accountability (annual reporting cycles) with learning timelines. Equally, each system sought to merge the accountability and reporting needs of the donor with the learning needs.
of practitioners. However, trying to put accountability and learning needs together left both groups unsatisfied. Rather than helping resolve the tension, merging seemed to exacerbate it.

One of the issues is that the learning requirements of the donor differed from the learning needs of OAU and PIA staff. For example, the focus of (then) AusAID was on project results and reach. The ANCP Performance Report template demonstrates this focus, with the majority of the reporting template dedicated to quantitative reporting on project results and disaggregation of reach statistics (PIA, 2012a). There is minimal scope in the template for reporting on partnerships, with only three questions dedicated to partnerships (partnership type, number of partners, number of private sector partners).

In contrast, Plan Australia identified that staff needed to learn how to partner better. The RAP’s 2012–13 enquiry allowed staff and the organisation to learn about the different types of staff behaviours and management supports required to manage the range of new partnerships it was entering into. This example accentuates the mismatch between donor and INGO learning needs. While this learning enquiry was supported in the second phase of the RAP this type of learning was unsupported over the long term as donor and organisational funding was discontinued. And MEL at PIA has again returned to a focus on results since the cessation of the RAP.

The third perspective is to consider the differences between upward-focused accountability and learning, and potentially separate out the servicing of these requirements. This perspective has been developed based on studies of NGO–funder relations where resource dependence and accountability to donors are tightly
coupled (Ebrahim, 2005). While originally focused on small NGOs, the characterisation of this relationship applies equally to large INGOs that remain dependent on funding from one donor, the situation in each of the case studies. Ebrahim’s work (2005) suggests that differences in power can mean INGOs privilege upward-accountability to donors over accountability to mission or communities. While donor demands for accountability and reporting are legitimate, given the relationship of funding, these demands become problematic if they override INGOs’ capacity to engage in longer term learning about social and political change (Ebrahim, 2005). INGO understanding of social and political change is required in making progress towards their mission, and reflects accountability to communities (Ebrahim, 2005). Ebrahim (2005) calls for new research to explore the proposition that too much short-term accountability to funders can reduce learning and innovation. The case study findings support this proposition. Ebrahim argues for internal accountability to mission to guide information and reporting systems, ensuring evaluation is useful to staff and strengthens feedback loops, in contrast to the focus on donor requirements.

In conclusion, the literature points to the need to be cognisant of the tensions between donor-focused accountability and mission-focused learning. The section above outlined the three options that the development evaluation literature provides for dealing with this issue: redefining accountability to be more learning oriented; merging learning and accountability processes; and separating the servicing of accountability and learning. The findings chapters have shown that the learning systems applied the first two approaches for dealing with the tension between accountability and learning. The two INGOs already took what looked like a
learning-oriented approach to evaluation. For example, the INGOs articulated their program theories of change and the bases for strategic decisions (Guijt, 2009). Annual reports identified both successes and mistakes (Rogers, 2004). Additionally, the two INGOs worked to merge the rhythms and needs of learning and accountability (Guijt, 2009). For example, each learning system was linked to the annual reporting and financial reporting cycle. However, despite these approaches, the practice of each learning system demonstrated the understanding of accountability as answerability to the funding agency and the prioritisation of annual reporting over staff learning, meaning these two approaches were not sufficient to support learning in the two cases.

The implication of these findings is for INGOs to consider when to separate learning and accountability processes (Ebrahim, 2005). Focusing the organisational learning system on internal learning requirements is not to suggest that upward-focused accountability requirements are not important or should not be serviced. Rather, it is important to identify separate systems that service separate requirements. Systems other than organisational learning systems can be used to service upward-accountability to donors.

9.2 Approaches and strategies for improved MEL that better supports organisational learning and development effectiveness

How can the findings of this study contribute to improved monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) practice that better supports the development effectiveness of INGOs? Based on the findings, an important starting point is to identify the primary purpose of the MEL system or individual evaluation, whether upward-focused
accountability or learning. The difficult issue for INGOs, however, is that donors are largely more willing to fund upward-focused M&E and reporting than learning focused on practice improvement. The second issue is seen by donors as an internal priority for INGOs themselves. While it is clearly difficult for INGOs to allocate additional funds to practice improvement, especially in an environment of austerity, the alternative is that practitioners continue employing past practice and the organisation remains in its current position.

The EPoC model, described further below, supports staff to address the problem identified in the study of not implementing their learning, and can be used in MEL systems or evaluations developed in response to the learning needs of staff and aimed at improving staff behaviour and practice. EPoC is based on the findings from this research and ideas drawn from evaluation use, adult learning and organisational learning theories presented in previous sections. The acronym draws from the first letters of the key approaches: Embodied, Power-conscious and Collective approaches to learning, as depicted in Figure 10.
This section conceptualises the EPoC model, describes who EPoC is targeted at, and describes EPoC approaches and strategies. The section also provides an example of using EPoC approaches and strategies and outlines EPoC’s limitations.

**The EPoC model**

EPoC is a model developed to help INGOs ensure learning contributes to improved development effectiveness. It does so by drawing from Levinthal and March’s (1993) work on how organisations embed learning. This perspective helps to expand the existing definitions of evaluation use developed by Bourgeois, Cousins, Goh et al. (2013; 2014). That is, evidence of organisational learning requires that there are changes to systems and procedures that mean learning is internalised into the
organization so that staff need not relearn similar points again and again. In this way, EPoC aims to address the issue pointed out by Cassen et al. (1994) of organisational development agencies repeatedly committing the same errors and failing to learn from mistakes.

EPoC provides an approach and set of strategies to support the internalisation of individual learning into organisational systems described by Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) as central to the process of knowledge creation. In turn, EPoC contributes to the mechanisms of evaluation influence identified by Mark and Henry (2004). Chapters 6 and 7 described how the internalisation of new knowledge was problematic in both the Hubs and RAP. The lack of application of individual learning meant that there was no opportunity for systems to change. To better support the application of learning, EPoC shifts the tacit assumptions of learning embedded in evaluation use theory to being concerned with the work-based problems of adults situated in complex environments characterised by inequality.

INGO staff and evaluation practitioners who work with INGOs must take an EPoC approach to organisational learning and evaluative activity to ensure learning is applied.

**EPoC approaches and strategies to support learning**

EPoC comprises a set of learning approaches (embodied, collective and power conscious) that draw from the adult and organisational learning literatures, and strategies for implementing these approaches, as summarised in Table 20. EPoC builds on the learning approaches and strategies that worked well in the cases and draws from the literature to include strategies that support increased application of
learning. The rationales for including each approach and strategy are explained in the following sections.

**Table 20: EPoC approaches and strategies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Learning approach</th>
<th>Strategy used successfully in the case study learning systems and supported by literature</th>
<th>Strategy to trial derived from literature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Embodied</td>
<td>- Explicating tacit knowledge (Argyis &amp; Schon, 1974; Argyris &amp; Schôn, 1978; Nonaka, 1994)</td>
<td>- Supporting practice groups to come together to address current practice problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Supporting practice groups to start enquiries with ‘how’ rather than ‘why’ questions.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Power conscious</td>
<td>- Addressing rank and gender within groups (Friere, 2007; Macedo, 2007; Shaull, 2007)</td>
<td>- Problem posing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Problem posing</td>
<td>- Surfacing power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective</td>
<td>- Scaffolding learning by external experts (Blunden, 2010; P. H. Miller, 2011; Palincsar, 2005; Renshaw, 1992)</td>
<td>- Facilitate learning through collaborative practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Bridging organisational divides (Nonaka, 1994)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Self-directed learning (Knowles, 1973; Knowles et al., 2005; Merriam, 2001a; Tough, 1967, 1971)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s own work
Embodied learning approach

EPoC advocates an embodied approach to learning, in contrast to the cognitive approach implicit in the case study systems, to encourage a focus on practice change rather than the disembodied focus on reporting or ‘representational’ outputs of the Hubs and RAP. Using an embodied learning approach recognises the body as an agent which works and in so doing transforms itself and its world, rather than only the receptacle and subject of the mind (O’Loughlin, 2006). An anticipated critique to a more embodied approach to learning is that a focus on practice is devoid of deeper considerations. However, this need not be the case, as the Aristotelian concept of 

phronesis, practical wisdom, informs us. The emphasis on practice in this concept is not only instrumental or pragmatic. Rather, it involves the cultivation of virtue and reasoning capacity to make judgements that benefit society broadly (Ellett, 2012).

As can be seen, embodied learning theory and the idea of phronesis provide useful counterpoints to cognitive learning theory by showing how we come to know through the body in action (both physical and emotional). Focusing some of the attention within learning systems to participants learning through action and emotion, in addition to learning through the mind, can better support staff to learn what is needed to best respond to the complex environments and institutions in which they are placed. To put it another way, learning that can be applied immediately to a person’s work routine is likely to generate longer lasting impact, with benefits therefore on organisational effectiveness.

Embodied learning strategies

A slightly modified version of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s (1995) strategy for explicating and sharing tacit knowledge is proposed to support the articulation of tacit
knowledge – knowledge that is embodied but has not been made explicit. As
described previously, Nonaka and Takeuchi advocate supporting individuals to share
experiences and create shared mental models and technical skills (socialisation),
which leads to these individuals articulating their tacit knowledge into explicit
concepts (externalisation). These concepts can then be systematised into a
knowledge system (combination). Finally, this explicit knowledge needs to be
embodied back into tacit knowledge (internalisation). The organisational knowledge
creation process is depicted as a continuously developing spiral moving through the
four quadrants of socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation.
While this approach seems simple, the findings from the case studies show that this
is not so in real professional learning contexts.

The research findings point to the socialisation stage as problematic in both
OAU and PIA. Learning occurred most effectively, gauged by level of engagement
revealed by participants in qualitative interviews and focus groups, when team
members had a direct, rather than a generic, interest in learning outcomes. For this
reason, the findings suggest an elaboration of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s strategies in
order that socialisation will most likely lead to externalisation. One way of ensuring a
direct interest in learning enquiries is to support groups of people who work
together to address a current problem they are collectively faced with. Here we
need to draw a distinction between groups of people who work together in the same
team (say, the WASH team) and groups of people who work together in practice (a
WASH technical specialist in Melbourne, contract manager in Canberra, program
manager in Vietnam, external gender specialist). The practice group will necessarily
have a greater focus on practice and best serves as the starting point of the enquiry
process. Supporting cross-discipline practice groups to come together to share experiences and create shared mental models and technical skills in order to address current problems in practice is more likely to lead to the externalisation of tacit knowledge.

Another embodied strategy to organisational learning that Gonczi has advocated is to move away from a cognitive focus of “‘knowing why’: to an embodied focus of ‘knowing how’” (Gonczi, 2004). Applying this approach to a review of the PIA RAP enquiry questions, it can be argued that most questions were of the ‘why?’ or ‘what?’ variety rather than the ‘how?’ Contrast, for example, the more cognitive and abstracted questions of ‘What makes for a quality ANO approach to development and change among rights holders, duty bearers, civil society and Plan? or ‘What are our program theories of change?’ with the more embodied question of ‘How were increased gender equality and protection of women’s and girls’ rights realised in two projects?’ Focusing primarily on ‘how’ does not preclude a secondary focus on ‘why’ and ‘what’ questions. The difference is that the abstraction is related to the specificity. To continue the example, after finding out how increased gender equality and protection of women’s and girls’ rights were realised in two projects, staff can go on to ask why this approach was successful or what might be common or different in the gender-equality approach taken on other projects. The embodied learning strategy, then, is to start with the knowledge that is embodied in practice.

Power-conscious learning approach

EPOC advocates a power-conscious approach to learning, in contrast to the power-blind approach to learning taken in the two case study systems. EPOC draws from
critical pedagogy, a theory of education specifically concerned with power and how patterns of domination and oppression inform learning. Rather than being neutral, critical theorists see education either as functioning to bring about conformity to the status quo or as a practice of freedom, as described by Shaull (2007, p. 34) where “men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world”. Macedo (2007, p. 16) has described the dominant view of education at best as “informed by positivistic and management models”. Giroux (Giroux, 2011a, p. 3) describes this view of education at worst as following a neoliberal agenda that “embraces(s) an instrumental rationality in which matters of justice, values, ethics and power are erased from any notion of teaching and learning”. Taking a power-conscious approach to learning, in contrast, involves working with learners to name the world, through critique and problem posing, and change the world, through praxis.

A power-conscious approach to learning encourages critique as a mode of analysis for interrogating texts, institutions, social relations and ideologies (Giroux, 2011c). Through critique, citizens can come to see how domination manifests itself and impacts on society. Giroux (Giroux, 2011b, p. 134) has drawn from Bourdieu to further explain critique as a process of making power visible and thereby challenging the “ideological circuitry of hegemonic knowledge”. Critical theorists advocate that students engage in problem-posing education, where people develop their power to perceive the world and the way they exist in the world critically (Friere, 2007). The role for educators and students is to actively transform knowledge, rather than simply consuming it (Giroux, 2011a). Friere contrasts the problem-posing view of education with the ‘banking notion’. Problem-posing education sees students as
critical co-investigators, rather than passive subjects. Problem-posing education engages adults through a dialogic process that challenges students to become aware of the oppressive social structures in their world and to understand how those structures have influenced their own thought (Freire, 1973). Once the problem is posed or the world is named, Friere has seen the task of the human being to change the world. The work of bringing about this transformation is one of praxis, involving both action and reflection. Praxis combines activism with intellectualism (Friere, 2007).

Critical pedagogy makes a number of useful contributions to the discussion of the cases. Using the concepts developed by critical theorists, we can see that the majority of learning occurring in the systems followed a ‘banking notion’ of training focused on what Habermas (1985) would call “technical” knowledge, for instrumental purposes. Except for one specific example within PIA discussed in Chapter 8, the systems of power and domination within the workplace or the larger development sector were not surfaced. Rather, learning focused on technical issues, blind to issues of power or, where issues of power and transformative change were discussed, they were limited to the field site. That is, power and oppression existed ‘out there’ but not within the organisation itself. In contrast, a problem-posing learning system helps workers to surface issues of gender, race and class dimensions that are largely ignored in the learning organisation discourse (Fenwick, 1996).

Learning within the case study systems was largely dominated by the neoliberal discourse of effectiveness and efficiency, and the particular definition of ‘development effectiveness’ that does not attend to power. Transformational learning theory helps to see the limitations of this perspective and methods for
expanding the view. It helps us see that the learning is not a neutral activity, but connected implicitly to negotiations of power within and outside of the organisation. Adding a critical perspective can contribute to discussion of the cases in a number of ways. First, it helps to recognise the internal divisions and conflicts within PIA. Taking a critical perspective might mean surfacing the existing divisions within the organisation apparent from poor results in employee surveys and the Gender Equality Self-Assessment, as well as the lack of trust between some staff and management due to a restructure process. And it might mean that, where these issues were surfaced, they are couched in terms other than ‘you can either change your attitude or leave’ as shown in the previously cited quote from a manager at a RAP session:

We know we have low levels of trust. Researchers in Washington identified ‘four horses of the Apocalypse’ which identify if the relationship is doomed: criticism, contempt, defensiveness, stonewalling. I see a lot of those behaviours in our organisation and here. We have to call that. Otherwise we can’t develop a productive relationship.

Secondly, the critical lens is useful in discussing the cases. The structured approach to examining various positionalities (in relation to race, ethnicity and gender) and existing patterns of domination helps surface a number of questions: ‘Why were most of the tensions between female operational staff and male managers?’ ‘Why were most of the managers male and the operational staff female?’ ‘Why were there significant tensions between Australian female operational staff and male managers in National Offices?’ It is noteworthy that the group that was most successful in learning during the partnerships enquiry was the group that engaged in discussion of this kind. This perspective helps learning
facilitators surface and facilitate issues that are critical for staff and organisational learning.

**Power-conscious learning strategies**

Critical learning theory was discussed above as a counterpoint to the approach to learning taken by both case studies that was largely power blind. A key strategy for applying a critical approach in order to surface questions of power and domination both within and outside of the organisation is to draw upon Freire’s *problem-posing* method. In a professional setting, this would involve identifying existing problems that practice groups face and tracing the root of these to existing systems of power and domination, which exist largely unexposed and prevent staff from behaving in particular ways. For example, as noted previously the RAP enquiry group that raised critical questions of management processes was able to identify existing patterns of gender inequality in the workplace that inhibited effective practice. Other examples of applying the problem-posing strategy also emerged from the case studies. For example, enquiry groups identified differences of power between PIA and Australian partner organisations (when working in coalitions) and between staff in Australia and staff in Country Offices (including differences in gender and rank). However, the critical problem-posing approach was not widely applied despite the examples cited above. Taking a more conscious approach to problem posing and asking critical questions can help to ensure learning addresses important workplace issues underpinned by power asymmetries.

The power cube (Figure 11) is another method for surfacing power. Developed by Luke (1974) and Gaventa (2006), the cube calls attention to the range of spaces, levels, and forms of power. Spaces are the “opportunities, moments and
channels” to make differences to the lives of poor people. These spaces can either be closed, invited or claimed/created. Levels of power include local, national and global. Forms of power include visible, hidden and invisible. While the powercube can be useful tool there is a danger that the analysis is primarily conducted externally. For example, the powercube was used by PIA during its partnership RAP. But the cube was used to analyse differences in power between PIA and other organisations. In contrast, this thesis argues that the power dynamics internal to INGOs are important to surface and engage with. To do so, requires the interrogation of organisational dynamics in the so-called local level or the addition of another level related to the organisation.

Figure 11: Powercube
Source: Gaventa (2006, 25)

Problem posing carries risks and responsible application of a critical learning approach must acknowledge and manage these risks. On the one hand, the unveiling of power can expose power holders, who may deny the fact of holding power or lash
out in response. On the other hand, those without power in a given situation can be made more vulnerable by asking critical questions. What was learned from the RAP enquiry group that addressed the issues of gender inequality was that it was important for the group members to build trust in their small group, discuss and validate the issue by understanding that a number of female operational staff faced the same situations, and document their experiences. Evaluative data was instrumental to the surfacing of this discussion. These strategies helped to build the confidence of staff to discuss the issue more broadly and to reduce the risk through collective action. While not used in the case study groups, a common strategy to reduce risks is for those who hold less power in a given situation to develop alliances with power holders from other domains. For example, alliances could be developed with other levels of the organisation or different parts of the international organisation.

**Collective learning approach**

EPoC takes a collective learning approach that draws from sociocultural theory, which sees learning as a process that occurs through joint activity and is inescapably embedded in the social, cultural and historical context of the time (Renshaw, 1992). This view of learning as culturally and historically situated emphasises how participation in a broad range of joint activities helps learners acquire new strategies and knowledge of the world and culture (Wertsch, 1985). The implication is that a learner and their learning cannot be, and should not therefore artificially be, separated from their sociocultural context. Nor can learning necessarily apply outside of that context without appropriation by others from within the new context.
‘Practice’ is a central concept to the current application of sociocultural learning known as practice-based studies. Learners learn by engaging in activities that unite thought and action and, as discussed and demonstrated in one RAP group, embed knowledge (S. Gherardi, 2009). Importantly, practice is not an individual activity but, rather, involves others and the materials of work. For example, one can only be assessed as ‘learned’ by others engaged in the same activity. That is, people are considered to have knowledge when others in their community recognise their activity (S. Gherardi, 2009). This is not to say that practice is static; rather, there is the minimal agreement necessary to continue. Practice continues to be negotiated by practitioners and in this way continues to be refined progressively.

The artistry of the master practitioner is in responding to the complexity presented in the moment, rather than applying the general principles acquired in learning at universities or professional schools. As Schon (1983) helps us see, problems do not present themselves as well-defined tasks which can be solved by applying specialised knowledge. Rather, situations of complexity, instability and uncertainty require the practitioner to define the problem and what needs to be done in response. Increasing mastery of practices of the community involves individuals transforming their understanding of, and responsibility for, activities through their participation (S. Gherardi, Nicolini, & Odella, 1998) – a process known as participatory appropriation (Rogoff, 2006). The demonstration of whether someone has learned, or gained mastery, is their increasing ability to work with others within their practice community to carry out tasks that are recognised as significant.
As can be seen, taking a sociocultural perspective allows us to see learning as improved collaborative action, rather than internalisation of an externally valid truth. And the contemporary application of sociocultural theory, through practice-based studies, helps us see that learning should result in the improved ability of those engaged in a particular domain of knowledge to work together to carry out important tasks. Additionally, this theory helps us recognise how the culture of each institution and the broader society informs the learning system and the learning. In this way, it helps train the attention of organisations and staff on the particular problematic issues that need to be addressed at the time, rather than attempting to develop generic knowledge that can be applied to all times and places.

Strategies for applying a collective learning approach

The sociocultural and practice-based approaches provide us with two strategies to facilitate staff application of learning. The first strategy is to facilitate learning through collaborative enquiry. The second strategy is to support learning extension through the connection between group members and external experts.

Collaborative enquiry occurs through groups of people who work together carrying out a joint activity. Let us use a hypothetical partnerships enquiry example to understand how this might look in practice. In this example, staff from PIA ECCD and Plan Vietnam come together and decide their partnership needs improvement. They talk with each other about how their partnership is not working and decide to trial some initiatives to improve their partnership. They review their performance over a six-month period and decide that some initiatives had helped improve their partnership and others were not successful. They then agree to continue using those initiatives that had helped and stop using the unsuccessful approaches.
The way of learning in this example contrasts with what actually occurred in the 2012 PIA partnerships enquiry, which was carried out solely by Australia-based staff rather than being conducted jointly with Country Office, National Office or CSO partners. Australia-based participants collectively discussed how partnerships might look in the near present, near future and distant future (see Chapter Seven, pp 182-192). They examined key partnership elements and potential learning sites. Participants then identified what they wanted to learn from the RAP. Participants specified that they wanted to learn general principles and were then given a presentation from the Partnership section of (then) AusAID. This presentation provided a definition of partnership, a partnership framework of the different stages of partnership, key ‘principles’ of partnership, and a continuum between more ‘transactional’ and ‘partnership’ oriented partnerships. Participants then formed into enquiry groups after the preliminary three sessions and each group developed a hypothesis to be tested. For example, one hypothesis was that “National Office–Country Office relationships that are built on transparency, equity and mutual benefit lead to more effective development outcomes”. While partners were included in the enquiry it was only as data sources rather than as co-enquirers. The lack of substantive inclusion of Plan partners weakened the partnerships enquiry.

Theory and practice lead to the same conclusion: that including those directly involved in the learning issue can help improve the practice of those directly concerned. However, there are problems with applying this approach in large, complex organisations, and PIA and OAU are no exception. For example, each part of a complex organisation has its own cycles, priorities and key partners for particular issues. Equally, large groups can be difficult to manage in learning situations.
Negotiations of timing, priority and learning group size necessarily become key to developing any collective learning strategy.

The second collective learning strategy is to bring in external experts to extend the learning of participants. This strategy is based on a key sociocultural learning concept developed by Vygotsky, the ‘zone of proximal development’. This is the zone where a person can do more with assistance from more expert others (P. H. Miller, 2011). Vygotsky developed the concept specifically in relation to child development, but his theory can equally be applied to adult learners. Vygotsky described the types of interactions between an adult and child in this zone as progressing the child’s development. These interactions involve the gradual shift in responsibilities from adult to child by the adult behaving in ways that facilitate the child’s learning: relating the problem to the child’s previous experiences and adjusting the amount of help to the difficulty of the task (P. H. Miller, 2011, p. 216).

To finish with the same partnerships enquiry hypothetical, PIA ECCD and Plan Vietnam group members decide they would like an external facilitator and partnerships expert to facilitate their six-month review process. This facilitator raises new methods of partnership management for the partners to consider. The partners then develop a new six-month workplan based on the successful partnership management practices they identified in the first six months along with new methods suggested by the facilitator.

Learning facilitators are key to supporting collective enquiry groups to gain access to external expertise, by providing an external perspective on the current knowledge and practice level of the group, thereby helping those groups come to know that which they do not know and cannot perceive.
Potential areas for application of EPoC

EPoC provides a set of approaches and strategies for organisation and program managers to guide the way they develop and implement MEL systems, and commission and oversee individual evaluations to better lead to behaviour and practice change (instrumental use). Without behaviour change, the effects of evaluations remain dormant. This is not to say that conceptual shifts in understanding is not important. Rather it is to say that these conceptual shifts are necessary but not sufficient for organisational improvement. Staff behaviour change is required in order to progress towards improved organisational results. Therefore, EPoC’s focus on designing and implementing MEL systems and individual evaluations focused on practice change seeks to help managers ensure investment in MEL systems and individual evaluations is most effective.

EPoC provides approaches and strategies for evaluators to prioritise instrumental use of evaluation. While early evaluation theorists focused solely on instrumental use of evaluations, subsequent studies showed that evaluations were rarely used instrumentally and there were several factors beyond evaluators’ control in facilitating this type of use. Weiss’s expansion of the range of definitions of use was useful in describing the reality of how evaluations are used. However, the expansion in definition also led to a reduction of focus of evaluators on instrumental use. In contrast, the findings point to the need to identify instrumental use as important and necessary for internalisation and behaviour change in order to progress towards improved organisational outcomes. While conceptual use may be a precursor to instrumental use, it is not sufficient for achieving organisational results. Similarly, symbolic use of evaluations may be useful but not sufficient for achieving
organisational results. The findings point to the need to pair conceptual and
symbolic use with instrumental use in order to make a systemic difference. And the
use of evaluations only in a symbolic manner, which is a well-documented
phenomenon in the development sector where there is pressure to service donor
accountability requirements by using evaluations symbolically, is cautioned as a
potential form of evaluation misuse.

However, pairing conceptual or symbolic use with instrumental use may not
be as easy as it sounds. Many evaluation theorists have identified a range of factors
that get in the way of instrumental use, many of which are outside the control of
evaluators. For example, organisational timeframes for change may be much longer
than the timeframe of an individual evaluation, leadership may not be supportive of
evaluation recommendations or funding may not be available to implement findings.
While there may remain factors outside of evaluators’ control, EPoC approaches and
strategies are articulated to increase the likelihood of instrumental use of
evaluations. The approaches are articulated to improve practitioners’ facilitation of
evaluation use and learning. Practitioners can anticipate and plan to address the gap
between learning and practice by using the approaches and strategies when
designing and conducting evaluations, as well as when designing and conducting
larger MEL systems that draw from individual evaluations. In this way, the
approaches and strategies serve as a support to individual practitioners working at
different levels within MEL systems.
Application of EPoC

This section provides an example of using EPoC in practice. The EPoC model is shown in Figure 12. The first step in the process is the emergence of problems from practice, a continually occurring phenomenon. The task of evaluators and learning facilitators is to support staff in responding to these problems through learning. At the end of the EPoC learning enquiry, evaluators and facilitators can support staff in examining how the learning enquiry has helped to respond to the problem and supported the achievement of organisational results.

Figure 12: EPoC learning for organisational results model

Learning in the EPoC model must be undertaken by ‘practice groups’. The term ‘practice group’ is used consciously here, rather than enquiry group or team. As explained previously, a practice group is defined as a group of people from diverse
parts of the organisation who work together on a common task. Each practice group
shares and constructs knowledge to implement its common tasks. For practice to
change, the practice of each group member must change. The term ‘practice group’
is used over ‘enquiry group’ as it is their interconnected practice that they share in
common, rather than that they are conducting an enquiry together. Their enquiry
stems from the shared practice problem that they have identified. The term ‘practice
group’ is used over the term ‘team’ to emphasise that the group is not a team in the
sense of how this word is used in both of the case study INGOs – a group of people
working in the same thematic area. Equally, the term ‘group’ more aptly conveys the
sense of coming together, changing and disbanding in relation to tasks that need to
be done than the word ‘team’, which has a connotation of ongoing existence.

A hypothetical example of an EPoC enquiry starts with the problem a Water,
Sanitation and Hygiene gender-equality practice group encounters when trying to
implement new gender-equality principles without a clear understanding of how to
do this. Given the problem, the group of WASH technical specialists based in
Melbourne and Vietnam, program managers based in Melbourne and Vietnam, and
community organisers based in Vietnam might decide to engage in a learning
enquiry. For the organisation to achieve inclusive WASH programming, these
individuals need to learn collaboratively and change the way they work together.

Organisational learning facilitators can enable the practice group to share
their tacit, embodied knowledge in order to solve problems they have encountered
in practice. By talking and working together, members of the group can articulate
their knowledge about the problem, which has been tacit up until this stage. For
example, group members might identify that they are already developing WASH
programming that takes account of the different needs of men and women, and are collecting data on these differential needs. Group members begin to understand their knowledge gaps, in addition to their existing tacit knowledge. As part of the enquiry, the organisational learning specialist might work with the practice group to identify and fund the input of experts who can help to extend the learning of practice group members, for example a gender specialist based in Phnom Penh. As part of the learning enquiry, the group might raise the internal patterns of gender inequality and partnership practice that impact on the way the issues are understood and acted on.

Once the group has responded to its practice problem, members can externalise and share their knowledge with larger groups of people, who test the knowledge in relation to their own experience and expertise, and connect it with other explicit forms of knowledge. For example, some group members write a paper and use this in their work with other Country Offices. Other group members talk to the internal gender specialist about the need to address the gender inequalities found to impact on WASH practice more broadly across the organisation. Other group members take their findings and share them with an external WASH interest group. Once the combined version of knowledge is agreed on, it can again become internalised. This means that practice group members change their practice based on what they learned. And the organisation factors changes into its systems and policies. Only learning that has been verified through the testing process, during the ‘combination’ stage, is internalised. If the testing finds gaps in the knowledge, it loops back to the practice group for further refinement.
Potential critiques

There are two potential critiques in relation to EPoC. First, some might argue that the model is merely a rehashing of action research. It is correct that the proposed model is similar to action research in its focus on collective action and systematic enquiry. However, EPoC includes additional elements: a focus on identifying and connecting to embodied learning, as well as being conscious of the way that power dynamics affect organisational learning. Second, some might argue EPoC is a rehashing of Nonaka and Takeuchi’s organisational knowledge model. The proposed model uses the Nonaka and Takeuchi model as a base to highlight the weakness of the organisational learning systems which are the focus of enquiry here. The thesis argues that the problem faced by OAU and PIA – the difficulty staff and the organisations faced in internalising and applying new knowledge – may be a problem that applies more broadly than just these two cases. For that reason, the proposed model modifies Nonaka and Takeuchi’s model to highlight the key problematic area of internalisation with suggested response strategies.

9.3 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the two proposed ways to improve evaluative and organisational learning activity in INGOs to ensure staff implement their learning and thereby contribute to improved development outcomes. First, the chapter has examined the development evaluation literature which illustrates the competition between upward-focused accountability and learning in development evaluation. While there are some ways that upward-focused accountability and learning are related, it cannot be assumed that they can work together. Rather, the literature
helps us see the tensions between the two and consider when and how the two need to be separated. The chapter has argued that it is better to separate an upward-accountability focused exercise, like the annual reporting to the donor which drives both systems, from learning. Time and resources are better spent on specific learning activities if practice and organisational change are to be achieved.

The chapter has then presented the EPoC organisational learning model. This model takes an embodied, power-conscious and collective approach to learning. This approach centres on learning by practice groups through collective activity that problematises existing power relations in the areas of enquiry. The chapter drew from the learning and organisational learning literature to describe each learning approach and set of proposed strategies. The embodied approach provides a way to ground the cognitive approach and focus on the everyday concerns of the practitioner within the workplace. The power-conscious learning approach foregrounds the importance of identifying power imbalances that underlie practice problems and inhibit organisational change. The collective learning approach exemplifies the importance of learning collaboratively with others involved in implementing a practice, as well as showing how the particular social and historical context of the workplace and sector usefully contextualises otherwise abstract and individually focused learning.
Chapter 10: Conclusion

This research started from my practice-based enquiry as an evaluation practitioner working in development. I wanted to understand how evaluations are used and if their use contributes to development effectiveness. However, I needed to broaden the enquiry focus after engaging with the INGO case study organisations. OAU and PIA wanted to examine and improve the effectiveness of their work in particular thematic areas and across the whole organisation, rather than examining evaluations of single projects. As a consequence, both INGOS established organisational learning systems in response to their need. I broadened the focus of my study based on the needs and interests of OAU and PIA while maintaining a connection between the original and broadened questions, as evaluations provided the main input into the organisational learning systems. I found that similar questions applied to the broadened research area as to the first enquiry area: How did the organisational learning systems work and what, if any, effect did they have on improving the development effectiveness of each INGO?

Given my entry point into the enquiry, I started by examining the evaluation use literature in Chapter 2. While this literature was not specifically focused on organisational learning, I saw a connection between the use of individual evaluations by staff and the organisational use of broader learning systems based on evaluative enquiry. Chapter 2 described how evaluation theorists have been concerned about the underutilisation of evaluations since the inception of the profession. In response, they categorised different types of use based on research and developed strategies for increased use. Thanks to the work of Weiss (1977), theorists and practitioners
came to understand that evaluations can be used to improve understanding (conceptual and enlightenment use) and to persuade or legitimate (symbolic use), in addition to the original conception of evaluations being used to improve programs or policies (instrumental use). Patton’s (1998) work showed how involving staff in evaluative process increased the likelihood of use. Kirkhart (2000) as well as Mark and Henry (2004) have broadened the idea of evaluation use to one of evaluation influence which takes into account unintended uses as well as use over longer periods of time. These contributions of evaluation use theory are important to better understand the variety of ways evaluations are used and the importance of participation in evaluation for increased use.

However, the evaluation use theory is limited in its applicability to the research questions in two ways. Evaluation use theory is underpinned by theories of learning that assume the child as learner. In contrast, Chapter 3 drew from key ideas from adult learning theory. The largely self-directed and self-motivated way adults learn, in response to real-life problems, needs to be built on in any evaluative process or organizational learning system rather than using models of the trainer or evaluator as expert. Additionally, the individualised conception of evaluation use needs to shift to a more sophisticated understanding of collective use. Much like the idea of organisational learning when it was first developed, the current conceptualisation of organisational use is that staff within the organisation use evaluations instrumentally, conceptually or symbolically. In contrast, theorists such as Levinthal and March (1993), discussed in Chapter 3, define organisational learning as another type of learning over and above the learning that individuals within that organisation engage in. In their view, organisational learning becomes embedded
into organisational systems and procedures, meaning that staff do not need to re-
learn the same lesson again and again. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) helped to show
how individual learning converts into organisational learning. They describe the
important processes of externalising tacit knowledge and internalising new
knowledge at the systemic level.

Designing the research as a comparative case study embedded in two INGOs
in Melbourne over a two-year period with each case, allowed me to respond to the
research questions and compare the findings to the evaluation use, adult and
organisational learning literatures. The long-term nature of the study allowed me to
understand the range of factors that influenced the learning systems. Critical factors
were described at the beginning of each case study chapter (Chapters 6 and 7).
Chapters 6 and 7 showed how each system worked, the factors that supported and
inhibited learning, and the effects of learning at the individual and organisational
levels. Chapter 8 examined what was common and what was specific in supporting
learning across both case study organisations. The major finding was that neither
system supported practitioners to apply their learning and, as a consequence, both
systems had limited positive effect on each organisation’s development goals.

Chapter 9 proposed two solutions to the practice gap identified in Chapter 8.
It drew from the development evaluation literature to propose separating learning-
oriented evaluative activities from upward-focused accountability activities. While
staff may learn from accountability evaluative activities, the topic areas, questions
and resulting findings will differ from self-generated learning enquiries. As a
consequence, the chapter argues that better value will be derived from staff
identifying their own areas for learning which relate to organisational goals. The
chapter introduced the EPoC organisational learning model, which is aimed at supporting practice groups to solve the problems they encounter in trying to deliver effective development. The model engages practice groups in problem posing in order to identify those issues which impede their work, including issues of power and inequality that often remain undiscussable in modern organisations.

The learning systems studies in both organisations have been modified and changed since the time of study. Both organisations have become even more accountability focused, given the environment of decreased Australian government funding for NGOs and DFAT’s increased focus on performance management. Both organisations focus more on outcome reporting than on practitioner oriented learning systems. The changed environment makes the findings of the research even more relevant.
Appendix 1: Interview protocols
OVERVIEW FRAMEWORK FOR OXFAM AUSTRALIA HUB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Target group: Support Teams – DET/PQR (individual interviews):

- Hub Members, number and location
- Hub changes over time – people, effort, funding (budgeted vs. Actual), relationship to ANCP
- Hub operation – meetings, content, frequency, attendees
- Dissemination of Hub documents/learning/access – what, where, to who, access/hit rates
- What other learning mechanisms are in place across the organisation?
- Do you see a connection between the Hubs and those other mechanisms? If so, can you describe those connections?
- Looking back now, based on your experience of what it takes to coordinate/ manage/ lead technically the hubs, what additional skills or expertise would have been useful to you in conducting your role?
- Budgeting cycle
- Accountability parameters
- Salaries
- Key changes in timeline
- Utility

Impact of the Hubs on networking, learning, program improvement, changed practices

Target groups: Support Team members (individual interviews), Hub Leads (individual interviews) and Survey:

- Benefits of the hubs
- Challenges of the hubs (including blockers to access)
- One way of describing the Hubs is as a Community of Practice. How successful do you think the hubs have been at:
  - connecting practitioners to each other
  - sharing practitioners’ tacit knowledge
  - challenging practitioners’ pre-existing assumptions
- Examples of where learning has resulted in changed practice (individual, team, organisational, outside of organisation/technical discourse)
- Examples of where hub learning has benefitted community beneficiaries
- Examples of where the hub has contributed to discussion at senior levels within the organisation – about direction or strategy
- What would have changed /what would be different if there were no hubs?
- View on if the organisation/beneficiaries get more out of the hubs than if we/the organisation puts in.
- Rate each of the hubs on a scale 1-10 – in your view, what makes them great/not so great.
- What would you change/improve going forward?
Overall Hub Management and Link to Corporate Direction/F4F directions

- In your view what should the Fit For Future changes mean for the hubs? (increased focus on gender and active citizenship and thematic focus on EJ, reduced on Essential Services, continued org priority on efficient/effective learning)
- In your view how successful has the APPR process been at:
  - Identifying successes/challenges, learnings from the hubs, potential gaps in programming?
  - Influencing next year’s activities and priorities
- I note in the operational plan for this year only 1 of 7 of the priorities references changes to change goal hub outcomes. Much seems internally focused. How do you see the priority given to change goal priorities Vs internal (organisational change goals)? Is the balance right?
- When hub activities are proposed, is it ever explicitly stated who’s behaviour we are aiming to influence (short and long term?) ie what is the intended outcome/transformation? How does this relate to priorities?
RAP interviews: RAP designers

RAP developers and facilitators (past and present) regarding the RAP development process

Background/history: The following five questions are designed to help develop the story of the RAP evolution. I’m interested to know what is missing from the document analysis and your perspective on some of the RAP features.

1. To what extent does the Table of RAP evolution and list of external drivers reflect your understanding of the evolution of the RAP?
2. What is most of value in the RAP?
3. What are the gaps to the RAP approach?
4. What do you see as distinctive about reflective practice, that you chose this as the centre point of the PIA Programming Team’s organizational learning system?
5. How do you define the difference between ‘review’ and ‘reflection’ and how is this important to the RAP approach?

Measuring improvement: The RAP is designed to improve practice within PIA at individual, team and organizational levels. The following four questions ask about the larger practice improvement and measurement system within PIA and the levels and timing of expected change.

6. Can you describe how the RAP connects to the larger M&E system within PIA?
7. Can you describe what you expect to see improve as a result of the RAP?
8. Over what time frame might this improvement you describe be feasible?
9. Do you expect to see practice improvement at individual, thematic team and ANO levels at the same time?

Identifying PIA’s specific role in the aid delivery chain: The following questions are designed to explore how the RAP can better contribute to ANO’s understanding of its development effectiveness and practice improvement.

10. What is your opinion of the following proposition?

‘ANO has a particular role in the aid delivery chain. ANO staff is in direct control of specific development activities, for example: the conduct of relationships with partners, the quality and provision of technical assistance, and the procurement of funding. ANO staff activities contribute to development outcomes. But they do not directly determine development outcomes. Partners, particularly CO staff and CO partner agency staff, are key to the quality of development outcomes for beneficiaries.

For the RAP to better contribute to ANO’s understanding of its development effectiveness and help staff improve their practice RAP inquiries can more purposefully be focused on those activities ANO is in direct control of. For example, a RAP inquiry focused on the conduct of partnership relations (in the direct control of ANO staff) is more useful than focused on the outcomes of Plan Australia managed grants (in the direct control of CO staff or CO partner agency staff).’

11. How could the RAP approach be improved to assist ANO staff improve their practice and ANO determine its development effectiveness?

Are there any other comments you would like to make? Are there any questions that have been left out?
RAP interviews: IH and CO representatives

Connection to the international Plan system: The following questions are designed to understand the connection between the RAP and other processes within the Plan international system.

1. To start, can you describe your understanding of the ANO RAP?
2. How does ANO’s RAP effort align with IH plans to encourage practice improvement and measure effectiveness?
3. How do you see the connection (if any) between PIA’s RAP and the larger M&E system within Plan?
4. Can you tell me about other NO initiatives similar to the RAP? How important are NO annual reviews/ reflection processes in the context of Plan’s pursuit of more effective development practice?
5. Do you see a connection between the RAP and your CO annual review/ reflection process? If so, can you describe the connection? How important are CO annual reviews/ reflection processes in the context of Plan’s pursuit of more effective development practice?
6. Do you see a connection between NO annual review/ reflection initiatives and CO annual review/ reflection processes? If so, can you describe the connection?

Your involvement in the RAP: The following questions are designed to further develop the story of the RAP evolution.

7. Can you describe your involvement in the RAP? How would you describe the value of your involvement in the RAP?
8. Did you make use of the RAP experience in your own work context (ie did it have any influence your work)?
9. What do you see as the RAP’s strengths/ challenges/ and valuable dimensions?
10. How could this process have been more useful for you and others?

Identifying each Plan entity’s role in aid delivery: The following questions are designed to explore how the RAP can better contribute to ANO’s understanding of its development effectiveness and practice improvement.

11. What is your opinion of the following proposition?
‘ANO has a particular role in the aid delivery chain. ANO staff is in direct control of specific development activities, for example: the conduct of relationships with partners, the quality and provision of technical assistance, and the procurement of funding. ANO staff activities contribute to development outcomes. But they do not directly determine development outcomes. Partners, particularly CO staff and CO partner agency staff, are key to the quality of development outcomes for beneficiaries. For the RAP to better contribute to ANO’s understanding of its development effectiveness and help staff improve their practice RAP inquiries can more purposefully be focused on those activities ANO is in direct control of. For example, a RAP inquiry focused on the conduct of partnership relations (in the direct control of ANO staff) is more useful than focused on the outcomes of Plan Australia managed grants (in the direct control of CO staff or CO partner agency staff).’

12. In your opinion, is the reflection process influencing the way ANO practices in the field?
13. Do you have any thoughts on how the RAP approach be improved to assist ANO staff improve their practice and ANO determine its development effectiveness?
RAP interviews: Managers

Interviews with the CEO and key manager regarding the anticipated outcomes of the RAP for the organisation and how the RAP fits into the larger vision of Plan as a Learning Organisation

Background/history: The following questions are designed to further develop the story of the RAP evolution.

1. Can you tell me about your background with and perspective on the RAP?
2. What does the organization want to achieve from the RAP?
3. What were your expectations and concerns about the RAP?
4. Have your expectations been met? What, if any, are the implications of this?
5. What do you see as the strengths and challenges of the RAP approach?

Congruence: The following questions are designed to understand the connection between the RAP and other MEL processes within Plan Australia and within the Plan international system.

6. How does the RAP connect to other MEL processes within Plan Australia?
7. How does the RAP connect to other Plan International and/or CO M&E processes?
8. Do you think the RAP and these other processes are sufficient to ensure continuous improvement and more effective development practice within ANO?

Investment in the RAP: These questions are designed to develop an understanding of the value of the RAP to the organisation.

9. What is ANO’s investment in the RAP (including direct and indirect costs)?
10. Of the overall investment in the RAP, what proportion is from ANCP funding/from other sources?
11. How willing is PIA to fund the RAP/other reflective practice approaches if the ANCP wasn’t available? What, if anything, about the RAP would change if this were the case?

Improving the RAP: The following questions explore how the RAP can better contribute to understandings of development effectiveness and practice improvement.

12. What is your opinion of the following proposition?

‘ANO has a particular role in the aid delivery chain. ANO staff is in direct control of specific development activities, for example: the conduct of relationships with partners, the quality and provision of technical assistance, and the procurement of funding. ANO staff activities contribute to development outcomes. But they do not directly determine development outcomes. Partners, particularly CO staff and CO partner agency staff, are key to the quality of development outcomes for beneficiaries.

For the RAP to better contribute to ANO’s understanding of its development effectiveness and help staff improve their practice RAP inquiries can more purposefully be focused on those activities ANO is in direct control of. For example, a RAP inquiry focused on the conduct of partnership relations (in the direct control of ANO staff) is more useful than focused on the outcomes of Plan Australia managed grants (in the direct control of CO staff or CO partner agency staff).’

13. How could the RAP approach be improved to assist program staff improve their practice and ANO determine its development effectiveness?
**RAP interviews: participants**

**Background/history:** These questions are to help develop the RAP history.

1. Can you describe your understanding of the RAP and its purpose?
2. Can you describe the main changes to the RAP design and the reasons for these?
3. Can you describe your involvement with the RAP over time?
4. What were your initial expectations/concerns about the RAP? Have your expectations been met/concerns realised?
5. What do you see as the RAP’s strengths and challenges?

**How the RAP works:** The following questions are designed to understand how the RAP approach facilitates change in practice at individual/program and organisational levels.

6. Can you give me an example of when you’ve questioned your own practice within the RAP? Can you describe how this happened (for ex. new information, a different way of looking at something or a critique of your perspective)?
7. Which elements of the RAP are most useful for your practice improvement (for ex. capacity building, staged approach, individual reflection, team reflection, conscious articulation of your own practice, external perspectives etc.)?
8. How important is the reflection process in the inquiries you’ve undertaken?
9. Can you give me an example of improvement in your practice as a result of the RAP? And if there has been no change, can you tell me why?

**Practice improvement at Plan Australia:** The following questions are designed to situate the RAP within the larger ANO practice improvement context.

10. What other forums (for ex. training, other learning forums, or working groups), besides the RAP, do you engage in to improve your practice? What are the relative benefits or not of this participation? Does this complement the RAP?
11. Can you give me an example of how your thematic team used the RAP process during the year (either how your team learnt through the RAP or if you used reflective practice in other programming situations)? What other learning events did you hold/support in that example year?

**Improving the RAP:** The following questions explore how the RAP can better contribute to understanding development effectiveness and practice improvement.

12. What is your opinion of the following proposition?

> ‘ANO has a particular role in the aid delivery chain. ANO staff is in direct control of specific development activities, for example: the conduct of relationships with partners, the quality and provision of technical assistance, and the procurement of funding. ANO staff activities contribute to development outcomes. But they do not directly determine development outcomes. Partners, particularly CO staff and CO partner agency staff, are key to the quality of development outcomes for beneficiaries. For the RAP to better contribute to ANO’s understanding of its development effectiveness and help staff improve their practice RAP inquiries can more purposefully be focused on those activities ANO is in direct control of. For example, a RAP inquiry focused on the conduct of partnership relations (in the direct control of ANO staff) is more useful than focused on the outcomes of Plan Australia managed grants (in the direct control of CO staff or CO partner agency staff).’

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13. How could the RAP approach be improved to assist staff improve their practice and ANO determine its development effectiveness?
Appendix 2: Ethics approval
Dear Noor,

Re: Human Research Ethics Application – Register Number CHEAN B-2000419-10/10

The Design and Social Context College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN), at its meeting on 10 December 2010, assessed your ethics application entitled; ‘Negotiating the tensions between accounting or learning in development evaluation: to what ends’.

I write to advise that your application will receive approval at a Low Risk classification subject to the following minor amendments being sighted by the Committee Chair:

Section 3 – Project details
3.2 Please correct the data collection start date as we cannot give ethics approval retrospectively.
3.5 State the number of participants involved, how many interviews you will be conducting and the estimated time of commitment required from participants.

Section 5 – Participant details
5.3.3 Confirm if you are still working for Oxfam.

Plain Language Statement (PLS)
Please edit the statement to ensure it is concise.
Print on RMIT letterhead
Advise that the project has received clearance from the RMIT Human Research Ethics Committee.
Provide details of what the participants will be doing (e.g. involvement in interviews, completion of a questionnaire, audio/video taping), how many interviews will be conducted and the estimated time of commitment.
Please sign the PLS.

If you have any questions about this letter please contact the Chair of CHEAN, Assoc Prof Heather Fehring.

Please submit your amended application to the CHEAN Secretary and note that if the committee does not receive a response to this letter within 2 months from the date of the letter, it will be assumed that you are no longer seeking approval for your project and your application will be withdrawn.

Please quote the ethics registration number and the name of the Project in any future correspondence.

Yours sincerely,
Lisa Mann
Secretary
DSC College Human Ethics Advisory Network

cc: Prof Patricia Rogers, School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning
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