Building a learning NGO by design, not by accident. A study of change at The Fred Hollows Foundation

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Publication Date:
2018

DOI:
https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/20844

Building a learning NGO by design, not by accident.

A study of change at The Fred Hollows Foundation

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A thesis in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Public Health

School of Public Health and Community Medicine

Faculty of Medicine

University of New South Wales

Academic Supervisors: Dr Anne Bunde-Birouste, Dr Holly Seale & Dr Lois Meyer

October 2018

Thesis/Dissertation sheet

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
Thesis/Dissertation Sheet

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Abbreviation for degree as given in the University calendar: DrPH

School: Public Health and Community Medicine **Faculty**: Medicine

Title: Building a learning NGO by design, not by accident. A study of change at The Fred Hollows Foundation

Abstract

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Conducted from a practitioner-researcher perspective, a mixed-method approach was undertaken including a survey, semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions with staff members from the Foundation. Their purpose was to examine perceptions of The Foundation's performance as a learning organisation and implications for the future. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives from other INGOs and public health NGOs that had a reputation for performing well as learning organisations.

Empirical findings show that in a complex and rapidly changing operating environment, INGOs have a strong incentive to become learning organisations. Factors influencing OL include: allocation of resources; developing structures, systems and processes; inspired leadership that acts as a role model; and fostering a culture of learning, including by promoting relevant skillsets and behaviours. Eight categories identified in the literature to classify specific mechanisms were validated by this study and a new category emerged outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector. Based on these findings, an evidence-informed strategy tailored to the needs of The Foundation was developed.

There is a need for INGOs to proactively engage with the burgeoning OL field to achieve optimal programming outcomes and cost-effectiveness. It is recommended that they apply a similar methodology to the one described in this study, including a rigorous assessment process against the categories identified, and the development of a comprehensive, custom-made strategy.

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BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANISATION TOGETHER, A strategy for organisational learning & knowledge management at The Foundation
Authors : Camille Neyhouser, with contribution from Marie O’Brien
Internal Corporate Strategy document
Prepared 2017; unpublished to date</td></tr>
<tr><td>Status
Submitted to Organisational Management</td><td>Published</td><td></td><td>Accepted and In press</td><td></td><td>In progress (submitted)
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Acknowledgements

My role as an organisational learning and knowledge management specialist at The Fred Hollows Foundation provided me with the opportunity to undertake this research project over the last four years. I am very grateful to many colleagues for their help, guidance, time and input, both in terms of their contributions to this study and the continuous friendly support and interest they showed as regards my professional doctorate. I am particularly grateful to Mr. Thomas White (former Director of Programs at The Fred Hollows Foundation) for encouraging and strongly supporting my application with the Future Health Leaders Program at The University of New South Wales and the completion of this doctoral thesis. I also would like to thank my former colleague Ms Christina Roger for all her support and friendship during and after her time at The Foundation.

I would like to express my deep gratitude to my university supervisors Dr Anne Bunde-Birouste, Dr Holly Seale and Dr Lois Meyer for their invaluable guidance, support and encouragements throughout my candidature. I have thoroughly enjoyed working with and learning from each of them.

I also would like to acknowledge Ms Marie O'Brien, senior independent consultant specialised in organisational learning and knowledge management (OL & KM) who contributed to the development of the initial draft for The Foundation's OL & KM strategic document presented in Chapter Five and co-facilitated the stakeholder engagement workshops that led to the production of the draft strategy. Ms Christina Roger and Ms Corinna Philpott supported the survey analysis and Ms Kate Slatyer supported the interview analysis.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their continued support during my study. I would like to thank my parents for giving me an education that has been firmly grounded in values of social justice and equality and for always encouraging me to ask questions and learn the lessons from both challenges and successes. I would like to thank my ex-husband Justin for initially encouraging me to apply for the Future Health Leaders Program. I also would like to thank my friends Jude, Anatolia, Pete, Bobak, Maryam, Pablo, Lloyd and Felicity for their support and care at critical times during my candidature and many more friends in Australia, France, England, Germany etc. who have been a part of this four-year journey.

“Go to the people;
Live with them;
Learn from them;
Love them;
Start with what they know;
Build with what they have.
But with the best leaders,
When the work is done,
The task accomplished,
The people will say:
'We have done this ourselves'.”

Attributed to Lao Tzu

Abstract

There is some evidence in the literature that organisational learning (OL) is gaining momentum among international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), as a means to strengthen capacity to serve the most vulnerable populations in a context of increasing economic constraints. Following a major operational change undertaken in 2014-2015 at The Fred Hollows Foundation, a public health INGO focused on treating and preventing blindness and other vision problems in developing countries, the need to become a better learning organisation was identified. This thesis examines the processes of identifying suitable initiatives for OL at The Foundation, as well as the findings from and outcomes of those processes, which include the development of a strategy addressing its OL and knowledge management needs.

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Empirical findings show that in a complex and rapidly changing operating environment, INGOs have a strong incentive to become learning organisations. Factors influencing OL include: allocation of resources; developing structures, systems and processes; inspired leadership that acts as a role model; and fostering a culture of learning, including by promoting relevant skillsets and behaviours. Eight categories identified in the literature to classify specific mechanisms were validated by this study and a new category emerged outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector. Based on these findings, an evidence-informed strategy tailored to the needs of The Foundation was developed. There is a need for INGOs to proactively engage with the burgeoning OL field to achieve optimal programming outcomes and cost-effectiveness. It is recommended that they apply a similar methodology to the one described in this study, including a rigorous assessment process against the categories identified, and the development of a comprehensive, custom-made strategy.

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
ALPS	Accountability, Learning and Planning System
BRAC	Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CDRA	Community Development Resource Association
COGs	Cross-Organisational Groups
DANE	Epartamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística (Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics)
DE	Development Effectiveness
DFID	Department for International Development
DrPH	Doctorate in public health
EMG	Executive Management Group
FGD	Focus-group discussion
FHF	The Fred Hollows Foundation
G&C Team	Guiding and Coordination Team
HR	Human Resources
ICT	Information and communications technology
IAPB	International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness
INGOs	International non-governmental organisations
ISO	The International Organization for Standardization
KID	Knowledge and Innovation Division
KM-CAST	Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool
Lao PDR	Lao People's Democratic Republic
MEAL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning
MERL	Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning
MSC	Most Significant Change
NGDO	Non-governmental development organisation
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NFP	Not-for-profit
OL	Organisational learning
OL & KM	Organisational learning and knowledge management

Abbreviation	Definition
PC	Program coordinator
PDP	Performance development plan
PIP	Project implementation plan
PRISM	PRoject Information and Systems Management tool
RRF	Rapid Response Facility
TRIM	Total Records and Information Management
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNSW	The University of New South Wales
URL	Uniform Resource Locator
VUCA	Volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous

Note: In this thesis, I will use the terms not-for-profit, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international development sector and charity sector interchangeably.

Chapter 1: Preface

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter aims to establish the context in which the study presented in this thesis was carried out, as well as my professional and personal background, which has contributed to my interest in undertaking this work. It establishes the rationale for this research and briefly outlines the structure of the thesis.

1.1 The Fred Hollows Foundation, an eye health international non-governmental organisation (INGO)

The work presented in this thesis is situated within The Fred Hollows Foundation (‘The Foundation’, also abbreviated FHF), a non-profit aid organisation based in Australia, which was founded in 1992 by eye surgeon, Fred Hollows. A not-for-profit (NFP) can be defined as an organisation that does not operate for personal gain or profit and can be an association, a co-operative or a non-profit company (Rose, 2016). A charity is a type of not-for-profit organisation that must have a charitable end goal and has a statutory definition in Australian law (ibid). This excludes political parties, individuals and government entities (ibid). A non-governmental organisation (NGO) is a voluntary group of individuals set up to offer services or expertise to the community, without a government affiliation (ibid). International non-governmental organisations (INGOs) are NGOs that have an international focus and mission and often advocate for them with governments (ibid).

As an INGO, The Fred Hollows Foundation seeks to treat and prevent avoidable blindness and other vision problems. It now operates in more than 25 countries in Australia, The Pacific, South and South East Asia, and Africa. The Foundation’s vision is for a world where no one is needlessly blind, and Indigenous Australians enjoy the same health and life expectancy as other Australians. It works through strong partnerships and cross-sector collaborations at the local, national and global levels. Since its creation, The Foundation has restored sight to over two million people worldwide and trained thousands of community health workers, nurses and doctors (The Fred Hollows Foundation website, 2017). At the end of 2016, The Foundation was employing 338 paid staff members, including 197 based in 16 country offices (ibid).

The Fred Hollows Foundation is part of the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), an alliance of non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charitable eye hospitals, universities, research centres, training institutions, corporates, civil society organisations and clinical eye health institutions counting over 140 members to date (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, 2018a). Its mission is to “eliminate the main causes of blindness and visual impairment” (ibid) and to “achieve universal access to eye health through collaborating with our members to maximise eye health care coverage at global and country level" through advocacy, partnerships and knowledge sharing (ibid). Through IAPB, the eye health sector has many opportunities to collaborate such as a major two-yearly international conference (IAPB General Assembly) and other coordination mechanisms including working groups and global campaigns such as Vision 2020 – The Right to Sight (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, 2018b).

The eye health INGO sector is nested within the wider eye health sector and benefits from IAPB's collaboration mechanisms as well as its clear mandate. As a result, since 2013 I have been able to observe that the eye health INGO sector is a small, well organised sector. This is both thanks to the coordination provided by IAPB, as well as partnerships between major eye health INGOs such as The Fred Hollows Foundation, Helen Keller International, Sightsavers and Orbis International (The Fred Hollows Foundation, 2014; Orbis International, 2018; Sightsavers, 2018). This is quite a unique case in the INGO sector engaged in foreign aid. INGOs are notorious for their reluctance to collaborate stemming from competition for funds in a tough, saturated market of mostly restricted funding (Aldashev & Verdier, 2009; McVeigh, 2017; Nunnemkamp & Öhler, 2012).

Since 2009, The Foundation has undertaken a major transformation process, both in terms of structure and the way it delivers its programs. It evolved from a small, family-sized charity based in Australia to a medium-sized organisation with an ambition to become an international public health NGO delivering eye health programs globally. To achieve this, both the organisation's income and volume of programmatic activities increased, funding sources became more diversified and additional human resources were recruited, mostly in its headquarters based in Sydney. With the organisation growing rapidly however, it gradually became more difficult for staff members to maintain personal connections between headquarters and country offices, which was the main mechanism that had been used thus far to gather and disseminate knowledge and learning. The organisational structure therefore needed to evolve to better support the breadth of changes.

When I joined The Foundation as a program coordinator (PC) for Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic (Lao PDR) at the end of 2013, each of the 15 country offices had a dedicated program coordinator based in the Sydney office in charge of supporting, coordinating and developing their allocated country program. These positions provided a direct line of communication and information between country staff and senior management at headquarters level, including the Chief Executive Officer (CEO). This meant that the knowledge and learning arising from each country program was fed back in quite a straightforward manner to the head office by the PCs through direct face-to-face interactions, meetings, emails and written reports. However, it also led to duplication of effort, siloing of knowledge and vertical rather than horizontal learning, as each program coordinator was performing the exact same set of tasks for 'their' country office but did not have a joint forum to share reflections, challenges and solutions with each other.

A new five-year organisational strategy was launched in 2014 to work towards the goal of becoming an international public health NGO delivering eye health programs globally. To achieve this ambitious vision, a new structure was proposed to accompany this process and address related growth challenges. It was decided that the portfolio of activities previously performed by the individual PC for each country program would be changed to a lateral structure so that programmatic functions would henceforth be performed by technical teams: program development; program operations; resource mobilisation; and monitoring, evaluation and learning. These new technical teams were intended to service the needs of all country offices across the globe. In addition, four regional teams - Africa, South Asia & the Middle East, East Asia, were created to provide country offices with contextually relevant support and foster partnerships and advocacy at the regional level. Also, additional responsibilities (finance, administration, logistics) were devolved to country teams.

As a result of the complete restructure of the Foundation's operations and with the disappearance of the country PC function, it was recognised by senior managers within the organisation that the way knowledge was captured, disseminated, shared and managed had to change. The FHF Program Strategy 2014-2018 states that "*A management system that actively promotes, facilitates, and rewards organisational learning"* should be set up. As part of the new structure, in January 2014 the Development Effectiveness (DE) team was established and a Learning & Best Practice Coordinator position was subsequently created within the team. I successfully applied for this position and in that role was accountable for enhancing program effectiveness across the Foundation's programs by fostering a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous improvement. In this capacity I sought to actively create, capture, transfer and mobilise knowledge to ensure programs were being designed and delivered effectively and the impact of The Foundation's programs was to be maximised.

The portfolio of the Development Effectiveness team rapidly expanded to include a research function and in mid-2016 the Knowledge and Innovation Division (KID) was created. Its mandate was to support The Foundation continually building its capacity to achieve its strategic goals, by developing innovative solutions and generating new evidence; supporting effective use of available evidence; measuring and reporting the impact of The Foundation's programs; and fostering a culture of continuous learning, development and quality improvement. In line with the creation of KID, my role was subsequently re-titled 'Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management Specialist' to better reflect the changing needs of the organisation, and the evolving scope of my role. While researching the literature on organisational learning and knowledge management (OL & KM) in 2014-2015, I came to the realisation that learning should occur not only at the program/project level but also organisation-wide. This entailed that learning needed to freely circulate from one country office and one regional team to the next, as well as across divisions and support functions, such as information and communication technologies, internal communications, and learning and development. As an organisation, we therefore adopted a broader definition of learning referring to the learning organisation as the model we aimed for: a learning organisation is "an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself" as a result (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 1).

1.2 Personal and professional background

This research study has been undertaken as a work-based professional doctorate in public health (DrPH). The professional doctorate program "involves practitioner based learning that focuses on the workplace. It provides ... the opportunity to develop advanced professional skills by conducting research based on ... workplace projects and participating in structured workplace and academic supervision" (University of New South Wales, 2013a, p. 1). The program fosters practitioner-scholars and reflective practitioners (Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2000; Wasserman & Kram, 2009), and graduates have the opportunity to generate and use evidence in their workplace that is applied to real-world challenges and priorities (University of New South Wales, 2013a; University of New South Wales, 2013b; University of New South Wales, 2016).

My desire to undertake applied research that sought to strengthen the capacity of an INGO to become a better learning organisation stemmed from a range of reasons and factors. It was grounded in both my personal history and personality, my undergraduate and graduate studies, and observations and reflections made during my career in the not-for-profit sector. Since childhood, I have always had an inquiring mindset and a passion for finding answers to my many questions, especially with an aim of reducing inefficiencies and use mistakes as opportunities to learn and improve rather than consider them to be utter failures. From my parents, I also received an education that has been firmly grounded in values of social justice and equality. As part of my undergraduate studies in political science, I was taught to develop and propose my own solutions to national and international large-scale issues by examining them through the prism of various disciplines (history, economics, law, sociology, politics, international relations etc.). This made me aware of the fact that in an increasingly globalised and connected world, many solutions would need to be found beyond nation-states in order to be effective, and I chose to pursue a double master's degree in European affairs and international development.

I started working in the international development sector in 2008 and have since worked in the headquarters, country and field offices of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and United Nations (UN) organisations, both in emergency, recovery and development settings. I initially focused on project management, then on quality programming and monitoring, evaluation and learning of projects, and more recently specialised in organisational learning and knowledge management. This evolution has been closely related to observations and reflections based on my professional experiences over the last ten years. While working in both emergency, post-emergency and rehabilitation situations, I developed a conviction that as a sector we seem to rarely learn from our mistakes and as a result errors keep reoccurring, either in the same location or in a different country faced with similar challenges. In my opinion, this lack of accountability and learning mechanisms lead to significant inefficiencies. Based on my observations, the limited resources available to NGOs are not always used in the most efficient manner and as a result, we are not reaching as many vulnerable people as we could. I believe that the motto I had learnt during my graduate studies ‘Doing good, doing it right’ could become a reality if we better learn how to learn as a sector.

I repeatedly came to this conclusion during deployments with my previous organisation in a number of countries including Uganda, Niger, Haiti, Chad, Senegal, Thailand and Bangladesh. However, the example that had the most profound impact on me was during my time in Sierra Leone. I was deployed there in September 2012 during the largest cholera outbreak in its history as a Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) Manager. The United Kingdom’s (UK) Department for International Development (DFID) Rapid Response Facility (RRF) funding mechanism was activated for the first time on that occasion and it was crucial for the organisation to demonstrate its ability to deliver a state-of-the-art humanitarian response. The best emergency specialists in the organisation were flown from various parts of the world at short notice and rapidly started to collect data, organise logistics, and liaise with local and national authorities as well as partners. They soon began to deliver activities aimed at treating the drinking water, providing better water and sanitation infrastructure, and promoting hygiene among affected communities. It was a very large team comprising of more than 100 staff members working in a sizable office, and all managers and team leaders were non-nationals, including myself. The response was progressing well and soon the number of new cholera cases started to stabilise and drop. However, two days after arriving in Freetown, I realised that in a separate building on the same compound where the emergency program was located, the small team (about 10 people) that had been delivering the water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) development program for more than five years was also present. In the frenzy arising from a rapid-onset emergency, they had largely if not totally been left out of the situation analysis, design and planning phases that led to the implementation of the response. In doing so, the new emergency team had completely yet inadvertently overlooked the in-depth knowledge available at their fingertips from their WASH development colleagues. It was a major missed opportunity, as the development program team had accumulated significant information and lessons learnt over the years about the Sierra Leone context, the location and management of existing water and sanitation infrastructure, and had established long-lasting relationships with local and national authorities and other NGOs etc. Unfortunately, this knowledge was not shared, as some conflicts and frictions seemed to arise very quickly after the emergency experts started their work. This situation is not exceptional in the international aid sector. There is strong evidence in the literature of the lack of continuity between emergency relief, rehabilitation and development activities in programs delivered by international NGOs (Mosel & Levine, 2014; Pirotte, Husson & Grünewald, 1999). From my own experience based on my observations in the field, this can be partly explained by a lack of communication, reflection and learning mechanisms[1] or activities, which would allow for a smoother transition between various phases and mitigate the effects of new staff members continuously coming on board.

My strong interest in learning and reflection processes to streamline and strengthen capacity in the NGO sector emerged from these experiences and stayed with me when I started working at The Fred Hollows Foundation in September 2013.

1.3 Rationale for this research

The value of organisational learning and knowledge management approaches is gaining credibility and momentum among non-profit organisations, as they often operate within very tight economic constraints and typically serve the most vulnerable populations (Britton, 1998; Hovland, 2003; Whatley, 2013). In addition, in today's knowledge economy, the value of medium- to large-sized NGOs increasingly lies in their technical expertise and their ability to broker knowledge rather than in the delivery of services, as institutional donors increasingly provide local organisations or governments with direct funding (Bebbington & Riddell, 1995; Lewis & Sobhan, 1999; Mitlin, & Hickey & Bebbington, 2007). However, in order to become learning and knowledge sharing organisations, INGOs need to be able to manage knowledge and learn efficiently, not only at the level of individuals that make up the organisation but organisation-wide in order to become greater than the sum of their parts (Edmondson, 2014; Senge, 1990).

In looking to the role of organisational learning and knowledge management within the INGO sector, it is important to note that these concepts were born in the business field and as a result, the thinking and writing on these topics have been heavily influenced by the views of the corporate world (Pasteur, 2004; Ramalingam, 2008). Central to this research inquiry is an interest in what ways the concepts of organisational learning and knowledge management can be transferred and applied to the development sector

[1] In this thesis, we will use the term 'learning mechanism' to describe a formal or informal process allowing learning to arise.

(Roper & Pettit, 2002). Ramalingam (2008) has argued that aid organisations should focus on implementing, documenting and analysing "home-grown approaches to learning" (p. 6) based on experiences from development projects in the field rather than rely heavily on theories and concepts borrowed from other sectors.

Some international NGOs have already anecdotally applied organisational learning models and knowledge management principles to achieve optimal programming outcomes and improve cost-effectiveness, efficiency and impact (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Ramalingam, 2008). As set out in this thesis the research literature to date (Chapter Two) shows that organisational learning and knowledge management in NGOs remain under-researched. The existing research literature largely focuses on the rationale (the 'why') and principles (the 'what') of what should guide OL & KM in the not-for-profit sector but rarely documents successful strategies and mechanisms (the 'how') that can be implemented to apply those principles in practice. A notable exception is *The Learning NGO*, a foundational paper from 1998 by Bruce Britton that has significantly inspired other authors. It continues to inform the small body of research focusing on practical application of OL & KM in INGOs that has been undertaken more recently on this topic (see Hill & Aarnoudse, 2011; Makuwira, 2013; Ringa, 2012; Walton, 2005). However, a majority of additional published papers and grey literature specifically addressing OL & KM in NGOs were written in the late 1990s and early 2000s.

As mentioned above, when my role as Learning & Best Practice coordinator was created at The Foundation in 2014, I was faced with a dearth of academic literature documenting effective practice in my areas of interest. In addition, in order to successfully establish my portfolio of activities I set out to find answers to the following questions:

- How are the terms 'organisational learning' and 'knowledge management' defined and used in the international development sector, including in public health organisations within that sector?
- What is the pathway to becoming a learning organisation for INGOs?
- What does a learning INGO look like and what is a suitable framework to identify and build a learning INGO?

Pursuing these questions could integrate a scholarly approach while being embedded within the unfolding context of my organisation and they therefore guided my research enquiry. To do so, I enrolled in a work-based professional doctorate in public health (DrPH) in 2014 through the University of New South Wales. The professional doctorate program provided the opportunity to follow a structured, in-depth and rigorous scholarly process to investigate these issues within my own workplace and integrate emerging research processes and outcomes as the study progressed. It allowed me to address some of the existing knowledge gaps in the INGO sector through a comprehensive documentation of the pathway I was intending to use at The Foundation to strengthen its learning and information sharing mechanisms.

Importantly, in contrast to a traditional PhD I was able to compile, synthesise and present the outcomes of my applied research through the prisms of both rigour and practical use to and for The Foundation across the span of the study. This has included an evidence-informed strategy in organisational learning and knowledge management designed with a view to implement it at The Foundation.

This thesis aims to document, analyse and reflect on the process of successfully developing an organisational learning and knowledge management model, strategy and mechanisms in an international public health NGO. It presents a study of change at The Fred Hollows Foundation, an eye health organisation working in low-income settings on its journey to becoming a learning organisation. It examines the processes of identifying suitable initiatives for organisational learning at The Foundation, within a changing internal context and the broader domain of international non-government organisations.

In undertaking this research, it has been my hope from its inception that the findings and evidence-based outcomes of the study presented in this thesis can be disseminated and drawn upon as a manual or blueprint by other INGOs and public health organisations to practically and concretely guide them on their own path to becoming learning organisations.

1.4 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is presented as follows:

Chapter One: Preface

This chapter presents some background information as well as the rationale and structure of the thesis.

Chapter Two: Literature review on organisational learning and knowledge management in non-governmental organisations

This chapter presents the literature review I undertook to examine whether the issues and gaps in practice observed anecdotally in my previous organisation and at The Foundation were mirrored in other NGOs and reflected in academic papers and grey literature. I sought to understand how these gaps had been addressed by others as a way to document good practice in terms of strategies and mechanisms that could potentially be adapted and applied at The Foundation.

Further, I was interested in determining whether Britton's methodology (1998) known within the sector had been applied in a more contemporary setting. I also wanted to explore how it might be used and updated in the current context of INGOs, and more specifically the possible implications for The Foundation and my research focus.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter describes in detail the methodology I developed for this research by way of an audit trail (Ritchie, 2001) from study design and sampling to data collection and analysis. The design chosen was a mixed-methods study undertaken over two and a half years drawing on organisational ethnography and action research. It outlines the methodological reasoning for the approach taken and the scope of methods used to illuminate the needs for transforming The Foundation into a learning organisation. The methods chosen were a survey, semi-structured interviews, focus-group discussions (FGDs) and stakeholder engagement workshops with staff members. In addition, I carried out interviews with employees from other INGOs and public health NGOs that are considered to be performing well in the development sector in the organisational learning and knowledge management space.

Chapter Four: Findings

This section documents the outcomes of the comprehensive scoping exercise I undertook. It presents an in-depth assessment of The Fred Hollows Foundation's performance as a learning organisation. This allowed to establish whether and how the principles and mechanisms found in the literature are actually applied on the ground and to capture any additional mechanisms that learning organisations have successfully put in place but that are not yet documented.

Chapter Five: Strategy

This part of the thesis presents the evidence-informed strategy that was developed based on findings from the study and was tailored to the needs of The Fred Hollows Foundation. It also briefly describes the process used to design this strategy, which was highly participatory and innovative, still with a view to make this information available and usable by other organisational learning and knowledge management practitioners in the international development sector. It outlines the vision, strategic objectives, strategic framework and proposed operating model to implement this strategy. Finally, it proposes a set of indicators to track progress against the stated objectives and some initiatives to be established in the first year.

Chapter Six: Conclusions and recommendations

This chapter presents and draws together the implications of the findings for The Fred Hollows Foundation as well as the sector more broadly in keeping with the research questions posed for this study. It provides a set of recommendations to inform further development of the organisational learning and knowledge management domains by the INGO sector. It also captures a critical analysis of the current state of this field of study, as well as a reflective analysis of key aspects of my research. It concludes with reflective observations on the strengths and limitations of this work that can inform future research in applying the methodology presented in this thesis.

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Chapter 2: Literature review: organisational learning and knowledge management in non-governmental organisations

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter aims to introduce the topics of organisational learning (OL) and knowledge management (KM) in the not-for-profit sector and specifically in international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). It provides an overview of existing theories, evidence and debates in these fields. It informs the identification of gaps in the literature that support the rationale for this thesis (see Chapter One) and the development of a framework guiding the analysis of findings from this study (Chapter Four). This literature review focuses specifically on OL & KM concepts, strategies and mechanisms relevant to the international development context and offers possible pathways for application in INGOs. It is bounded largely by the literature available within this sector and does not attempt to provide a comprehensive overview across sectors or disciplinary areas.

2.1 Definitions and key concepts

The environment in which INGOs operate is characterised by complexity and uncertainty, as they frequently need to address 'wicked issues' related to poverty and injustice in fragile and unstable states (Varney, 2015). How change happens and how development occurs in the communities served by not-for-profit organisations is a poorly understood process that is non-linear and unpredictable (Pasteur, 2004). In dynamic and rapidly changing contexts, an organisation's ability to learn and share knowledge is a key success factor (ibid). However, given the vast array of definitions and perspectives on organisation learning, knowledge management, knowledge sharing, the learning organisation and the various concepts nested within these fields (ibid), this section provides an overview of their differences and practical application in the specific context of INGOs.

The learning organisation

The literature on the learning organisation (LO) is vast and principally draws from the private sector (Pasteur, 2004). However, this concept is particularly fitting for NGOs, as it is pragmatic, normative and inspirational in nature (Easterby-Smith, 1997; Roper & Pettit, 2002) and focuses on knowledge for action rather than knowledge as a theoretical concept (Argyris, 1993). It is also useful to NGO practitioners in that strong values underlie the learning organisation. These are for instance the need to value and recognise different types of knowledge and learning; an emphasis on establishing a learning environment in which all members can equally participate and grow; and the importance of aiming for double- and triple-loop learning rather than single-loop learning alone (Roper & Pettit, 2002).

The concept draws heavily on Peter Senge's work who proposed that "learning organizations [are] organizations where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together" (1990, p. 3). Senge himself built on Argyris and Schön's work (1978) and outlined five areas (Senge, 1990, pp. 10-12) that need to be in place for a learning organisation to arise and for "learning disabilities" (Senge, 1990, p. 17) to be overcome:

- Personal mastery refers to the process through which individuals continuously strive to achieve their goals;
- Mental models are deeply entrenched assumptions and beliefs that have an impact on how we see the world and how we act as a result. This requires an ability to reflect in action as a reflective practitioner;
- A shared vision needs to be built by leadership to provide a picture of the future the organisation seeks to create, which all employees can relate to and be inspired by in the long term;
- Team learning occurs through dialogue, which in turns gives organisation members the ability to act together;
- Systems thinking highlights the patterns and interrelationships that underlie complex structures or situations. It is the cornerstone of the learning organisation.

However, according to Ramalingam (2008), the reality of INGOs' operational work on the ground means that mastering these five disciplines largely remains a distant goal for international aid organisations. As explained by Ramalingam (2008), a review by the Active Learning Network for Accountability and Performance in Humanitarian Action (ALNAP) on learning among humanitarian aid agencies at the field level (ALNAP, 2004) demonstrated stark discrepancies between the ideal of Senge's model and NGOs' operational reality in the field and a lack of synergy between the five disciplines in that context. This is in part because staff members based in country offices rely heavily on tacit knowledge generated through social interactions, which are the most common way to disseminate knowledge in developing countries (Nonaka, Takeuchi & Umemoto, 1995; Pasteur, 2004; Ramalingam, 2008). However, the production of this tacit knowledge is often not matched by formal learning mechanisms (face-to-face training in a classroom environment, comprehensive use of information systems and strategies, utilisation of written guidelines), which means that the knowledge is not easily fed back at the headquarters level (Ramalingam, 2008).

In this thesis a broader definition than Senge's that is more prominent in the NGO literature is used (Roper & Pettit, 2002). Pedler et al. (1991, p. 1) defined a learning organisation as 'an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself' as a result. Pasteur (2004) noted that the NGO literature is both pragmatic, realistic and normative, as "a strong set of underlying values… inform practice within a learning organisation" (Roper & Pettit, 2002, p. 2). It is also aspirational, as it recognises that the learning organisation is an ideal model, in which learning is perfected and maximised, but which no organisation can ever fully achieve (ibid). What matters is going on the journey to becoming a learning organisation rather than the destination (Garavan, 1997). Consciously setting the goal to build a learning organisation puts learning high on the agenda, is conducive to establishing a roadmap for practical implementation, and supports change and action that will create a conducive environment for learning to flourish (Pasteur, 2004).

Organisational learning

Organisational learning is a broad concept and the literature on this topic covers a number of perspectives including management science, sociology, productivity and effectiveness, and psychological and behavioural aspects, as noted by a number of NGO practitioners (Easterby-Smith, 1997; Pasteur, 2004; Roper & Pettit, 2002). Therefore, "the creation of a comprehensive theory is an unrealistic aspiration" for this discipline (Easterby-Smith, 1997, p. 1085).

To date the organisational learning literature has been predominantly generated by the private sector, and to a lesser extent by the health and education sectors (Roper & Pettit, 2002). A useful application of organisational learning to the NGO sector is to consider it as a part of organisational development theory, in which it examines how an organisation learns and adapts based on that learning (Janus, 2016). In that regard, it is "a system of actions, actors, symbols, and processes that enable an organization to transform information into valued knowledge, which in turn increases its long-run adaptive capacity" (Schwandt, 1994, p. 58).

While the learning organisation can be understood as an ideal model NGOs can only aspire to (Pasteur, 2004), organisational learning describes the process by which an organisation can and should constantly change as a result of the learning happening within it (Britton, 1998; Cortina & Rojas, 2012). However, organisations themselves do not learn; rather, the individuals who are part of this organisation do and yet individual learning alone does not achieve organisational learning (Morgan, 1986; Wojtkowski, Wojtkowski, Wrycza, & Zupancic, 2012). In other words, individuals need to learn to achieve organisational learning but a collection of individuals who are learning does not necessarily produce organisational learning (Britton, 1998; Serrat, 2010). It can be said that organisational learning is therefore "the changing of organisational behavior" arising from a collective learning process (Swieringa & Wierdsma, 1992, p. 33). It requires reflective practitioners evolving in a conducive environment and who are able to reflect on their practice at the same time as they are acting, which allows them to act more effectively, constructively challenge their assumptions and those of their colleagues and produce new insights and ways of working (Schön, 1987; Smith, 2001).

The terms 'organisational learning' and 'learning organisation' are sometimes used interchangeably (Kontoghiorghes, Awbrey & Feurig, 2005; Ortenblad, 2001). Some authors have clarified, summarised and simplified the differences between these two concepts. Tsang (1997) for example argued that organisational learning can be viewed as a set of activities or process, while the learning organisation is a form or type of organisation. For Dodgson (1993), learning is considered to happen naturally in organisations (i.e. without them necessarily being aware of it), whereas it requires effort and investment to build a learning organisation. In a similar vein, Blacker (1995) argued that knowledge is seen as residing with individuals in organisational learning, while it is held in both individuals' and the organisational memory in learning organisations. While research documentation on organisational learning widely emerged from the academic world, the literature on the learning organisation stemmed primarily from practice (Easterby-Smith, 1997). Roper and Pettit (2002) acknowledged that in the NGO sector both terms are useful and used. 'Learning organisation' is both realistic, normative and aspirational, describing the ideal model these organisations can aspire to. On the other hand, 'organisational learning' highlights the need for learning beyond that which resides in individuals' heads so that organisations can become greater than the sum of their parts by learning more efficiently (ibid). From the perspective of INGOs, I would therefore suggest that there is a strong value in using and distinguishing these terms rather than using them interchangeably, as long as they are clearly yet simply defined at the outset.

This thesis thus adopts a pragmatic approach and uses the term 'organisational learning' to distinguish it from learning at the individual level, however imperfect and incomplete the learning at the organisational level might be. The term 'learning organisation' will be used to describe the particular type of institution that arises when an organisation makes a conscious choice to embark on a journey to learn more effectively.

Knowledge management

The concept of knowledge management has been a burgeoning area of interest in the NGO sector since the 1990s and has been embraced by institutional donors as part of a movement to optimise resources and modernise management tools and techniques by drawing inspiration from the private sector (Corfield, Paton & Little, 2013). KM has been widely promoted by major institutional donors in a context of increasing pressure to make better use of scarce public resources (ibid).

Some authors recognised that knowledge management is a broad term and proposed dividing it into three chronological steps (Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007):

- **Knowledge creation and capturing** is the process of harvesting knowledge or experience by 'extracting' it out of the mind of one or several individuals;
- **Knowledge organisation** involves consistent categorisation and storing of information so it can be accessed and retrieved easily;
- **Knowledge sharing & dissemination** covers the exchange of knowledge within and between organisations. It goes beyond communication, as knowledge can be difficult to articulate.

Some authors in the NGO literature have highlighted the links and complementarity between organisational learning and knowledge management. Edwards (1994) noted that KM is a precursor to OL. In order to achieve organisational learning, NGOs need to make strategic use of existing information (ibid). The raw information available to all needs to be transformed into knowledge, which in turn needs to be disseminated and used. To achieve this conversion process, knowledge management strategies need to be developed and implemented (ibid). Janus (2016) observed that the concept of KM overlaps with organisational learning in the sense that it is said to be an enabler of organisational learning. In a similar vein, Duhon (1998) described knowledge management as the enablers, systems and processes upon which a learning organisation is built. However, knowledge management places “greater focus on knowledge as a strategic asset and on encouraging the sharing of knowledge” (ibid, p. 4).

Building on this idea of knowledge as a strategic asset, Janus (ibid, p. 4) defined knowledge management as “an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, evaluating, retrieving, and sharing all of an enterprise’s knowledge assets”. These knowledge assets include databases, documents, policies, procedures, and individuals’ undocumented experience and expertise (Duhon, 1998).

Although knowledge management is increasingly recognised among INGOs as a strategic asset, transferring and applying knowledge can prove particularly challenging for these international organisations: it needs to be executed across a number of geographical areas, cultural backgrounds and thematic issues, while factoring in difficulties related to information and communications technologies, including internet access (Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007). The next subsection will examine different types of knowledge and how it is created, shared and applied.

The nature of knowledge

Edwards (1997) distinguished between information (simple, raw, fragmented material or data that enters the learning system and is made up of unprocessed facts, ideas and opinions), knowledge (which arises once information has been systematically organised, analysed, compared and tested) and wisdom (which involves combining knowledge with experience to guide action).

Wisdom is particularly crucial in the NGO sector, as knowledge that is not utilised in practice has little value (Edwards, 1994). Britton (1998) illustrated this idea through the example of an NGO developing its own participatory rural appraisal (PRA) mechanisms as a result of its experience working with local communities on the ground. Such an organisation creates wisdom for and through its staff members, as they combine their knowledge of PRA theory with their real-life experience in order to improve future delivery (ibid). To further qualify this important concept, Britton (1998) and Janus (2016) distinguished between different types of wisdom: tacit wisdom, which is not shared, arises from direct experience and exposure, is only available to the individual and not easy to convey to others; and explicit wisdom, which is made available to everyone in an organisation through precise and formal collection and articulation, and spreads organisational learning. The process of making personal, tacit wisdom available to others is what Nonaka (1991) called ‘articulation’, which is central to a learning organisation. However, Janus (2016) argued that the process of articulation somewhat creates an artificial distance between explicit wisdom and its original context of creation or use when it was at the stage of tacit knowledge, which can lead to oversimplification and loss of nuances.

Britton (1998) skilfully summarised and articulated these different concepts as follows:

> A learning organisation, therefore, supports its members to translate information into knowledge and then wisdom and then converts the tacit wisdom of its individual members into explicit wisdom, which can be accessed and used by others both within and outside the organisation. (p. 5)

Janus (2016) introduced the additional concept of implicit or experiential wisdom, which stands between wisdom that is difficult to share (tacit) and wisdom that can be collected and documented (explicit). Implicit or experiential wisdom is therefore at the stage where it resides in people’s heads but has the potential to be converted into explicit knowledge through a process of documentation and capturing. By their inquisitive nature and their ability to reflect in and on action, reflective practitioners are essential to this conversion process and the development of explicit wisdom in their organisation (Britton, 1998; Smith, 2001).

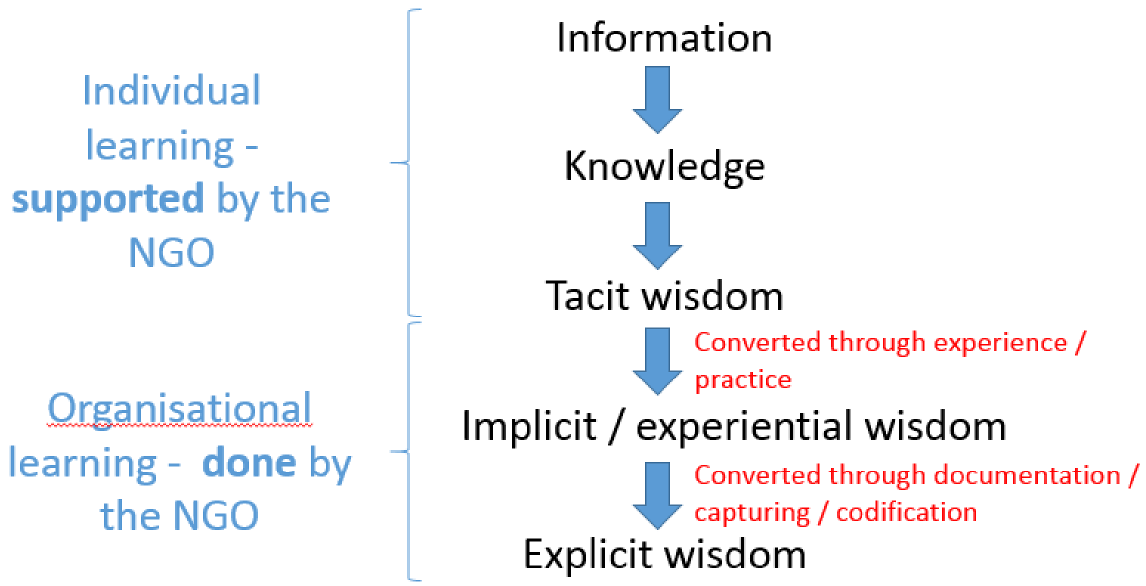

Figure 1 Articulating organisational learning and knowledge management concepts – information, knowledge and wisdom. Adapted from Britton (1998) and Janus (2016).

Types of learning

There seems to be a consensus in the NGO literature that learning is more than the mere absorption of information or knowledge (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Pasteur, 2004; Ramalingam, 2008). These authors tended to agree with Senge's view (1990) that

> Taking in information is only distantly related to real learning. It would be nonsensical to say, 'I just read a great book about bicycle riding – I've learned that. 'Through learning we become able to do something we were never able to do. Through learning we re-perceive the world and our relationship to it. (p. 13)

To be useful and used, knowledge needs to be transformed into insights that can be generalised to a broader range of contexts. Learning is therefore more concerned with converting knowledge into improved action based on experience, rather than simply capturing or storing that knowledge, and thus implies a process of socialisation and human interaction (Pasteur, 2004). Snowden (2003) described learning as a flow or an "ephemeral, active process of relating" (p. 3) and noted that the context in which learning happens is just as important as its content. In that sense, learning is experiential, which Prasad (2008) defined as "analysing and understanding the work we do, and regards learning as a social process of reflection and analysis" (p. 8).

Collectively learning from experience is what makes the experience transparent and learnable (Soal, 2008). To be experiential, learning needs to be cyclical and include "reviewing experience, concluding from the experience and planning future action, all of which are essential for effective learning" (Britton, 1998, p. 13).

Authors examining various types of learning relevant to NGOs further distinguished between informal learning, which is made up of small acts of informal knowledge sharing and daily reflection, and formal learning, which includes formal training, learning from other employees and on-the-job experience (Edwards, 1997; Ramalingam, 2008). Ramalingam (2008) further argued that even though organisations in the international development sector recognise informal learning as beneficial and necessary, this does not necessarily translate into the identification and implementation of organisational learning strategies that support informal learning. Edwards (1997) compared the learning process to an iceberg. Informal learning is the big underwater mass that includes learning happening in the field, while the formalisation of lessons learnt through good practice guidelines, training and policy statements is the small tip above water (ibid). Too much formalisation can lead to local learning being stifled and becoming too academic to be useful to practitioners on the ground. On the other end, insufficient formalisation carries the risk of mistakes not being identified and therefore repeated and learning might then remain localised and not be shared widely (ibid).

The last concept, which is very prevalent in the literature on organisational learning in NGOs and beyond, is that of learning loops, initially theorized by Argyris and Schön (1978). It implies that learning in organisations can be defined as a three-level evolutionary model comprising of single-, double- and triple-loop learning. **Single-loop learning** entails following the rules: transferring knowledge and skills, as well as correcting variances and deviations from explicit norms, practices, and policies, and immediate problem solving for first-order issues i.e. symptoms (Goold, 2006; Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002). For instance, if the midterm evaluation of a project notes that the implemented activities did not lead to the expected outcomes, the project design will subsequently be modified (Ramalingam, 2008). **Double-loop learning** involves changing the rules: reflection on the appropriateness of policies, practices and norms, especially with regards to espoused theory, regularly testing assumptions, identifying the root causes of issues, learning through practice and self-reflection, and rethinking strategy wherever necessary (Goold, 2006; Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002). An example of double-loop learning is that an organisation that defines itself as gender-sensitive would reflect on whether its internal practices are aligned with gender equity theory (Goold, 2006). **Triple-loop learning** involves learning how to learn or learning about learning: it questions the “raison d’être”, the entire rationale of an organisation, which can lead to significant changes in its internal structure, practice and ultimately its culture; it is the highest form of organisational learning (Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002). As an example, an NGO applying triple-loop learning might significantly modify its strategic direction, vision and mission after examining and reflecting on available evidence. However, Ramalingam (2008) stated that even though aid organisations display certain characteristics of triple-loop learning, as exemplified by the frequency with which new organisational strategies are introduced and new leaders are recruited, transformation often does not seem to occur as a result. The concept of triple-loop learning relies upon a capacity for radical change, which does not appear to be fully realised in the majority of NGOs (ibid):

> There is some indication of a degree of triple-loop learning in aid organisations ... . However, this does not appear to be particularly successful in achieving transformation. … the deeper commitments to change called for by the concept of triple-loop learning are unlikely to be present internally within the majority of aid agencies. (p. 5)

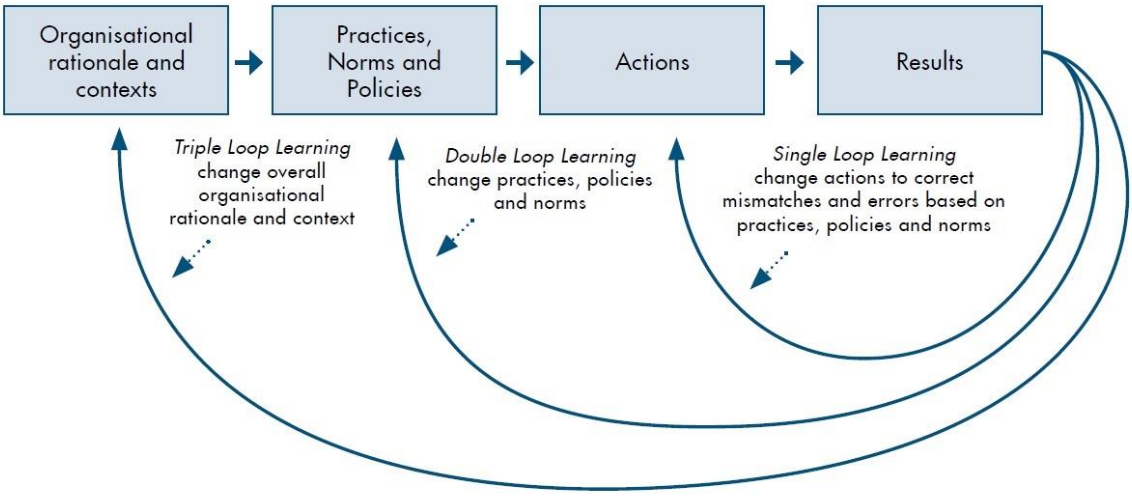

Figure 2: Single-, double- and triple-loop learning. From Ramalingam (2008), adapted from Argyris and Schön (1978).

Monitoring and evaluation systems

Learning is predominantly an invisible process, which makes it hard to track (Janus, 2016). To capture the effects of this process, an NGO needs to implement monitoring and evaluation systems that create awareness of what it does and the impact it is having (Britton, 1998).

Monitoring focuses predominantly on activities through the ongoing collection data and information, which informs program management (Janus, 2016). Evaluation examines the achievement of outcomes in the longer term and looks at the entirety of a program (ibid). Monitoring and evaluation systems have the ability to turn tacit knowledge (know-how stored in individuals' heads) into explicit knowledge, for which monitoring and evaluation systems are an ideal repository (Roper & Pettit, 2002). Examples of monitoring and evaluation systems include management information systems (Roper & Pettit, 2002), databases, evaluations, annual progress reports, research reports and donor reports (Britton, 1998) and will be further described in section 2.5 of this chapter.

2.2 Rationale identified in the literature for organisational learning and knowledge management in the NGO context

The historical tradition and importance of learning in the international development sector

The aid sector has learning at its core by its very nature and the importance of learning is historically rooted in the philosophy of international development (Roper & Pettit, 2002). It seeks to recognise and enhance untapped potential in all human beings through learning as a transformative process (ibid). Beyond merely developing capacities and skills, learning can provide the tools for critical analysis and reflection, which are essential to action and empowerment, as theorised by Paulo Freire in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed (1970). The early concept of learning as a catalyst for personal, collective and structural transformation in the international aid sector has led to participatory approaches to development such as participatory rural appraisals, participatory action research, action-learning sets and participatory monitoring and evaluation processes (Roper & Pettit, 2002).

The constant need to embrace change in a volatile and complex environment

Goold (2006) and Varney (2015) have argued that aid organisations operate in complex and ever-changing environments, which forces them to constantly embrace change. This requires an ability to learn, reflect and self-reflect as individuals and as organisations. That is why the international development sector relies heavily upon reflective practitioners (ibid). They are professionals who have the ability to learn, act on it and apply single-, double-loop and triple-loop learning in their everyday working practice (Oeij, Gaspersz, van Vuuren & Dhondt, 2017). This makes it possible for learning NGOs to remain relevant in the midst of the challenging external environment in which they operate: not only are they able to keep up with new learning and trends, but they also generate new, innovative ideas and ways of working (Edwards, 1997). Roper and Pettit (2002) stated that “Most people join the development field because they want to change the status quo” (p. 262) and for these development practitioners, change and learning is not only desirable but necessary (ibid).

However, Tsang (1997) challenged the links between learning and change that are sometimes depicted in the private sector literature as straightforward. He argued that learning and change are hard to measure empirically. It is therefore very difficult to prove there is a causal link and change might happen for completely different reasons than simply because learning has occurred (ibid). Other authors also noted that learning does not automatically lead to better organisational performance (Cook & Yanow, 1993; Huber, 1991). Conversely, more recently organisational theorists and practitioners have described the increasingly key role of learning in attaining and maintaining a competitive advantage (Armstrong & Foley, 2003; Baldwin, Danielson, & Wiggenhorn, 1997; Goh & Richards, 1997; Kontoghiorghes, Awbrey & Feurig, 2005; Kontoghiorghes, Porth, McCall, & Bausch, 1999; Liedtka, 1996).

Beyond the promise of efficiency borrowed from the private sector – a focus on values unique to NGOs

Ramalingam (2008) noted that while the concepts, approaches and models for organisational learning and knowledge management originated in the private sector, directly transferring and applying them to the aid sector might not be so relevant and even inadequate. This is because in the corporate sector, the rationale and purpose of organisational learning is to maximise profit and competitivity in the global market. However, this rationale does not apply to the not-for-profit sector, which lacks a clear, tight incentive to invest in and implement organisational learning. This explains why this sector is only partially able to apply the organisational learning principles and models borrowed from the for-profit sector to its context (Kelleher et al., 2002), as "although many businesses are modelling learning practices, neither the for-profit environment nor corporate structures fit well with the environmental and organisational forms needed for grassroots development" (Power, Maury & Maury, 2002, p. 273). In the absence of shareholders and profit in the NGO sector, strategic direction relies on values, principles and mission (Roper & Pettit, 2002). According to Bloch and Borges (2002), the international development sector therefore needs to adopt an approach to organisational learning that strongly focuses on values. Britton (2005) further advocated for

> An approach focusing more on the values, vision and culture of the organisation. This creates a rich 'ecosystem of possibilities' by encouraging a passion for

> learning and sharing knowledge among staff, developing staff learning competences, creating opportunities for sharing, and developing a culture of learning. (p. 36)

Similarly, Edwards (1997) noted that aid organisations have a system of values, beliefs and commitments that, in theory, enhance transparency, learning and communication, but that the fear of admitting failure can become an obstacle to aligning values, learning and the will or ability to act. Britton's paper *The Learning NGO* (1998) is fundamental in that respect, as it offers practical solutions to these challenges:

> This paper aims to provide NGO staff with a conceptual framework for the subject which is relevant to organisations which are value-driven, non-profit making and development-oriented. However, the purpose of the paper is not simply to describe the characteristics of learning organisations but to encourage NGOs to examine their organisations in the light of these characteristics. (p. 1)

The cost of not learning for NGOs and how knowledge sharing enhances efficiency

It has been previously suggested by some authors that a failure to learn could come at a high cost for NGOs. Insufficient focus on how projects can be implemented more effectively and goals achieved more efficiently has a significant human cost for so-called beneficiaries and can result in unnecessary hardship or even harm to them (Whatley, 2013). There is a strong argument for NGOs in favour of "learning to be efficient" (Britton, 1998, p. 8) and learning to efficiently use resources in order to achieve goals at a reasonable cost. As learning should constantly take place, the absence of a framework that promotes learning and knowledge sharing leads to a "negligent misuse of resources" (ibid, p. 9) and a lack of learning therefore means that organisations are prone to waste resources. Importantly, Janus (2016) noted that knowledge for NGOs is equivalent in value to creating products and productivity for the private sector.

According to Korten (1984), an essential currency for NGOs is knowing what works and what does not. He argued that learning is therefore not just an option but a necessary condition for their sustainable development comprising of three phases: first, learning to be effective (discovering the most effective ways of working with communities); then learning to be efficient (using resources efficiently to achieve objectives at a reasonable cost) and finally learning to expand (learning to scale up the work that has been successfully implemented so that as many people as possible can benefit from these solutions). Those NGOs that keep to business as usual and do not learn will be unable to adapt efficiently to their changing environment. At the very least, they will lose relevance as agents of social change and as a result will likely keep on ‘reinventing the wheel’, and at worst they will disappear altogether (Britton, 1998; Fowler, 1997; Milway & Saxton, 2011).

The value added of NGOs as knowledge brokers

The argument for needing to embed learning within NGOs has shifted from not only being able to survive but also to thrive in a rapidly changing environment. The competitive advantage of learning in NGOs lies in their ability to act as knowledge brokers (Bebbington & Riddell, 1995; Hulme, 1992; Lewis & Sobhan, 1999; Mitlin, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007; Norton, Howell & Reynolds, 2016):

> The strength of NGDOs [non-governmental development organisations] lies in their ability to act as bridges, facilitators, brokers, and translators, linking together the institutions, interventions, capacities, and levels of action that are required to lever broader structural changes from discrete or small-scale actions.” (Hulme, 1992, p. 9).

As proposed by Edwards (1994), beyond their original purpose to deliver services to vulnerable communities in a neutral way, Northern NGOs need to play a major role as information brokers and advocates between Southern populations and national or international policy-makers (Holma & Kontinen, 2012; Hovland, 2007; Narayanaswamy, 2015). In addition, NGOs are expected to provide civil society organisations in the South with capacity building processes to actively contribute to debates and decision-making on national and international development challenges (Keeble, 2002).

Edwards (1997) noted that “because NGOs are embedded simultaneously in the worlds of action and understanding, have a presence that crosses national boundaries, and possess a value system which (in theory) promotes learning and communication, they have a strong set of comparative advantages in learning terms” (p. 237). This allows them to service the needs of vulnerable populations with both expertise and compassion.

This unique position also provides them with a significant comparative advantage over traditional research institutions to act as knowledge generators, especially in terms of action research and participatory knowledge dissemination and learning (Hulme, 1994). However, to secure this comparative advantage and maximise their potential, NGOs need to bridge the existing gaps between research theory and practice, and therefore develop their skills in terms of ability to engage with the literature, rigorous research methodologies and robust data analysis (Edwards, 1997).

Organisational learning as an incentive to realign outdated structures and practices within NGOs

Finally, the fact that many NGOs remain very traditional in terms of their internal organisational structures and practices is another strong argument in favour of organisational learning and knowledge management (Roper & Pettit, 2002). This traditional approach to organisational development involves a strict hierarchy, a lack of participatory decision-making that is often very centralised, and a propensity to defensiveness and a culture of blame (Goold, 2006; Roper & Pettit, 2002). Learning organisation approaches on the other hand promote "flatter organisational structure, the nurturing of the leadership potential in all staff, closer connection with and greater accountability to clients, better internal communication, and the efficacy of teamwork" (Roper & Pettit, 2002, p. 7). This may therefore serve as a powerful incentive for NGOs to realign their structures and practices and to adopt more progressive approaches to governance, management and organisational development.

2.3 Factors influencing organisational learning & knowledge management

The literature on OL & KM in NGOs offers useful pointers that illuminate different factors to be considered in order to build a learning environment. They relate to the characteristics and skills of people (individuals) required in a learning NGO; the type of culture that should be fostered; the role of leadership and management; the systems, processes and structures that support organisational learning; and the technology and other types of resources required in seeking to foster a learning organisation.

People

Learning at the individual level

According to Senge (2006), "organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning. But without it no organisational learning occurs" (p. 139). An emphasis on individual learning is therefore a necessary pre-condition for the learning organisation. Edwards (1997, p. 238) added that "it is, perhaps, a truism that only people learn, not institutions. Organizational systems and structures can help or hinder, but the bottom line concerns individuals." This is what Britton (1998) called the "individual competencies approach" (p. 27), which focuses on developing the abilities of individuals in the organisation as learners. These specific competencies are linked to Senge's (1990) five disciplines as per Britton's model (1998). It implies that the competence of individual staff members as learners needs to be strengthened so they can better utilise and add to the organisation's body of wisdom. Janus (2016) further outlined a number of technical capabilities for effective knowledge sharing: "identifying and capturing the organization's operational experiences and lessons, packaging them into knowledge and learning products, sharing them within and outside the institution, and monitoring and evaluating these efforts" (p. 9).

Supporting and developing individuals' skillset for OL & KM

In the individual competencies model outlined by Britton (1998), developing the skillset of leaders to manage learning organisations is emphasised so they can act as "designers, teachers and stewards" (Senge, 1990, p. 315). Rather than focusing primarily on senior managers, Froggatt (2011) argued that learning and professional development opportunities need to be made available consistently and widely across the organisation. A common mistake made by NGOs is the provision of such opportunities predominantly to senior management, which is an elitist approach to learning (ibid). Also, if training and professional development are communicated as being compulsory endeavours, they will not be seen as opportunities for personal growth but as a way to control individuals: "learning and the pursuit of personal mastery needs to be an individual choice. Therefore, enforced take-up will not work" (ibid, p. 213). Similarly, Roper and Pettit (2002) noted that "a key aspect for successful organisational learning is to structure learning processes in such a way as to enhance individuals' agency and learning capabilities" (p. 16).

Individual learning as relational

On the other hand, Goold (2006) proposed viewing learning and change as a relational rather than solely an individual process: learning is heavily reliant on the quality of informal interactions and relationships as well as formal meetings that occur on a daily basis in an organisation. Therefore, strengthening the skills of individuals will have little effect unless the complex interactions between those individuals are simultaneously supported and improved, for example through coaching. Coaching and mentoring are said to be very efficient ways to enhance reflective practice in the workplace, as they help individuals identify blind spots, reflect on their habits and 'unlearn' what does not serve them, their team or their organisation (ibid).

Legitimising individual learning

Britton (1998) also offered concrete recommendations to "legitimize" (p. 31) learning by helping people make it a part of their day-to-day work: hiring individuals who are effective learners at heart by integrating learning objectives into work plans; including responsibilities related to learning into job descriptions; incorporating learning outputs and outcomes into project proposals; and ensuring that the organisational strategy has a goal related to organisational learning, which will be measured against key performance indicators. These suggestions are helpful in communicating to individuals the importance of a culture of learning in their organisation (ibid).

Culture

Culture is an essential component of organisational learning and knowledge management. A culture that promotes learning is driven by the belief that learning is an asset rather than a liability for the organisation and in this configuration, time is made available for learning (Bloch & Borges, 2002; Britton, 1998; Roper & Pettit, 2002; Soal, 2008; Wrigley, 2008).

Addressing behavioural patterns to enhance OL & KM

In line with Goold's position (2006) to learning as relational, Bloch and Borges (2002) suggested that the cultural factor behind organisational learning is related to behavioural and relational aspects. A shift in culture may therefore be blocked by the fact that the real underlying organisational barriers are difficult to pinpoint and address because they are sensitive: "effect of personal issues on group dynamics; [individuals'] ability to listen, discuss, and argue; the fulfilment of planned tasks; the expression of ideas and feelings; decision making etc" (ibid, p.467).

In their case study, Bloch and Borges (2002) further described an organisational learning process based on the theory of group action used in Curumim, a Brazilian feminist NGO. They described how the barriers to an organisational learning culture were progressively identified and extracted over time through a mapping process. It was facilitated by an external person focusing on internal communications strategies and practices as an important aspect of learning and knowledge sharing. It uncovered implicit assumptions, thus making them explicit. Through this mapping exercise, it became apparent that common assumptions around internal communications such as 'I don't have time' or 'This isn't my responsibility' "pointed to more general and deeper behavioural patterns that inhibited the group's effective action" (ibid, p. 468).

This case study showed that cultural change takes time and needs to be sustained. Significant evolution in a group's behaviour does not occur if the behavioural patterns that are hindering organisational learning are not made explicit of even pointed out only once and depends as much on individual and group decisions and actions as on the acquisition of new skills by individuals (ibid). A culture that promotes organisational learning needs to adopt the view that all the information required will never be available at the start of a project, and therefore any intervention will need to take on a participatory approach and adapt to the new information emerging during implementation (ibid).

A culture of openness

Soal (2008) stated that the learning NGO thrives when a culture of openness (including to constructive criticism), trust and mutual understanding is championed. Whatley (2013) described the constructive organisational culture as

> Rooted in a unique set of beliefs and values … that foster learning: … the valuing of the individual member, transparency and respect of dissenting opinion, open communication, shared responsibility and empowerment, personal growth and accountability to task, and transparency and moral integrity. (p. 967)

Similarly, Goold (2006) identified that a culture of openness relies on the ability to overcome the pattern of blaming others that is quite prevalent in NGOs and a willingness to admit to uncertainty and "the messiness of organisational life" (p. 4).

This leads to a greater aptitude for reasoned risk-taking and in turn a capacity to innovate (ibid).

Failing forward

The concept of 'failing forward' is quite prevalent in the literature on organisational learning within the NGO sector. Smillie (1995) demonstrated that the fact that NGOs acknowledge their mistakes is a positive trait and should be celebrated. Failure is only a bad thing if the same errors keep occurring (ibid). Owusu (2008) explained how ActionAid, an INGO tackling injustice and poverty worldwide gradually established a culture in which failures and mistakes could be honestly and constructively signalled and reported on by organising learning events in which dilemmas and tensions were openly discussed. Janus (2016) described a mechanism called 'premortem project review', which involves listing at the start of a new project all the reasons why it might fail and consequently putting mitigation measures in place. Similarly, for Edwards (1997) "development is *inherently* about failure as well as success" (p. 238). Once a mistake is identified and rectified, another will inevitably arise and therefore "learning means just not repeating the same mistake all the time" (Bloch & Borges, 2002, p. 471).

Establishing incentives and structures that support OL & KM

Changing the learning culture of an organisation is a difficult process but it can be done if the right incentives and structures are put in place (Britton, 1998; Edwards, 1997; Janus, 2016). Janus (2016) proposed identifying staff's efforts to inquire and experiment with new ways of doing things as needing to be an integral part of performance appraisal. They should be rewarded with educational opportunities (e.g. leadership training) and attendance to international conferences (ibid). Britton (1998) suggested incentives such as management explicitly recognising staff displaying a willingness to learn and share; allocating dedicated time during the work week for writing up lessons learnt, academic papers or good practice manuals, and/or to reflect; and "providing opportunities for 'learners' to speak about new developments at conferences" (p. 31).

Leadership & management

Leaders as role models for OL & KM

The essential role of leadership is a significant theme found in the literature on organisational learning in NGOs. According to Soal (2008), leaders who encourage and create buy-in from subordinates, value employee opinions and articulate an inspirational vision are more likely to foster learning. Senior managers need to act as role models for learning by displaying in their own work that they treat learning and knowledge sharing activities as everyday operations (Janus, 2016), clearly showing how they perform them in their own practices and behaviours (Kasper, 2007; Owusu, 2008). Owusu emphasised that championing learning at the top level is also essential because "responsibility for ensuring that learning happens cannot be delegated to people who do not have the authority to make it happen" (p. 7). This means that they need to be convinced for themselves of the potential and value of learning and knowledge management (ibid), underline that value with the rest of the organisation at all times, and ensure everyone else in the organisation uses a learning approach (Britton, 1998).

Learning leaders are transformational leaders who can navigate complexity

To do so, leaders need to clearly articulate their vision for the organisation to become a learning entity. Owusu (2008) described how ActionAid's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS) was enforced by senior management through clear principles and directives. However, in implementing that framework they also clearly displayed a willingness to listen to suggestions for improvement from the rest of the organisation, and to modify systems, structures, procedures and policies accordingly. This is a clear example of double-loop learning demonstrated by ActionAid's senior leadership.

Expanding on these ideas, a number of authors explore the concept of learning and transformational leaders in the learning NGO. Analysing nine case studies of "successful" (p. 190) South Asian NGOs, Hailey and James (2002) identified learning leaders as the single most important predictor of organisational learning. They described these learning leaders as being able to understand and adapt to a complex, changing environment, and to act as teachers, designers or stewards as per Senge's recommendations (1990). These transformational leaders have the ability to help organisations navigate the different stages of a change process, maintain a positive outlook and manage anxiety (Schein, 1992).

Malhotra (2001) and Stacey's (1995) approach to management and leadership for learning point towards the need for leaders to gently steer the ship in order to help their organisations safely navigate the ever-changing and complex waters of international development. In line with chaos and complexity theories, they depict "semi-confusing information systems" (Malhotra, 2001, p. 331) and nonlinear feedback networks

(Stacey, 1995). This implies that learning and transformational leaders need to allow their staff the space to "act on incomplete information, trust their own judgement, and feed input from informal fora into formal structures" (Hovland, 2003, p.4, summarising Malhotra, 2001, and Stacey, 1995).

Systems, processes & organisational structure

The 'software': communication and information systems as social systems

Learning can be seen as the lifeblood of the organisation while "both formal and informal [communication and information systems] are the circulatory system for learning" (Britton, 1998, p. 15), which continuously fuels and refreshes its various parts (ibid). Organisations require specific processes to ensure knowledge flows between people and systems are implemented in an effort to support learning (Janus, 2016).

However, Lewis and Madon (2004) noted that these systems are not necessarily related to the development or implementation of technology and may actually not involve any technological solutions. An information and communication system is "a system of formal and informal communication within an organization" (ibid, p. 118). The formal subsystem covers procedures and policies, while the informal aspect refers to norms, values and beliefs (ibid).

Many larger NGOs make the mistake of designing systems that are either too heavy (e.g. through an abundance of reporting requirements or formal training) or too light (e.g. relying on informal conversations) (Britton, 1998; Badala, Jaiswal & Sharma, 2008). Lewis and Madon (2004) stated that these systems are often poorly designed because NGOs are required to service a number of accountability lines, which necessitate different information flows to be channelled to various stakeholders (employees, institutional and private donors, partners and project beneficiaries). As per Heek's theory (2000, see Figure 3 on the next page), they urged NGOs to view these information systems as social systems including both formal and informal communications rather than merely technological solutions. NGOs therefore ought to consider the importance and impact of the local context and culture on information and communication systems (Lewis & Madon, 2004). This should inform the design of such systems in a way that is inclusive of various stakeholders' contextual needs and cultural sensitivities (ibid).

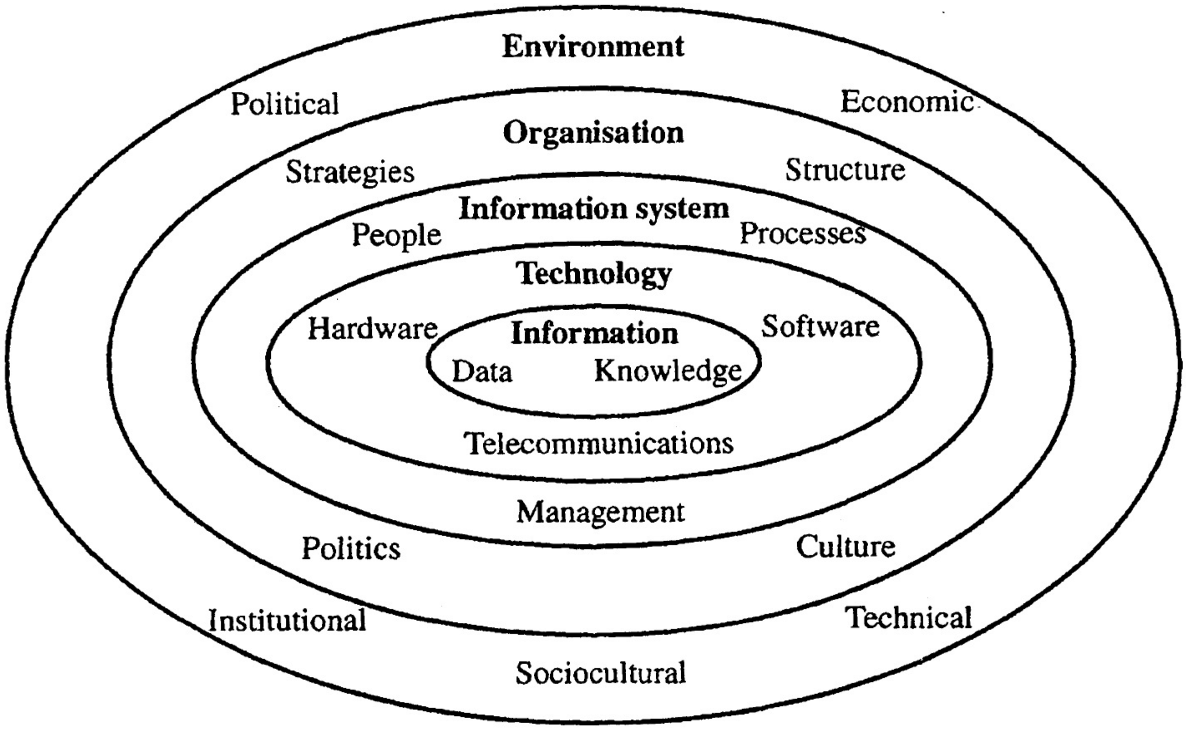

Figure 3: Information systems as social systems. From Heeks (2000), cited in Lewis and Madon (2004).

Kasper (2007) described information systems as “the organization of accumulated knowledge” (p. 4) and argued that they have traditionally “focused on codifying knowledge and storing it using technological systems and databases” (p. 4), which is achieved through content management systems. Other approaches are staff directories to facilitate knowledge sharing through person-to-person interactions, and tagging, which helps people find information that they did not know existed (ibid). To design a successful knowledge management system in an NGO, Kasper (2007) advised starting small (e.g. through a small pilot system); making knowledge management systems as easy and pain-free as possible for end users at the same time as helping them do their work better; taking the importance of personal relationships and informal interactions into account in the design of systems; and being inclusive by keeping external sources in mind, both in terms of where the information is drawn from and the various stakeholders who need to access it.

Organisational structure and decentralisation

The structure of an organisation has an impact on its ability to learn. A flatter organisational structure fosters organisational learning, improving internal communication and efficiency of teamwork (Roper & Pettit, 2002). Froggatt (2011) agreed that there are significant benefits to distributing the power to make decisions evenly to the different levels and locations of an organisation, including “to the outer limits” (p. 212) (i.e. in the field where the action happens). This creates the opportunity for field staff to use the information they collect to make decisions and act, especially in situations that are not envisaged in or covered by standard operating procedures (ibid). As part of its organisational learning efforts, ActionAid recognised the desired changes in its learning culture needed to be supported by new systems as per the ALPS, and that its structures needed to evolve in line with these changes. This translated into a movement towards “decentralisation, regionalisation and devolution of authority, as well as [towards] greater coordination among key functions” (Owusu, 2008, p. 7).

In addition, Kelleher et al. (2002) advocated for greater alignment between the aid sector’s values and structures in the form of organisations that are “sufficiently democratic that those ideas with merit can flourish from all levels of the organisation and evolve into practice”, and that “[possess] teams capable of functioning democratically and effectively” (p. 78).

A broader geographical range and delegation of authority can prove to be a significant advantage for international NGOs, as they are able to gather knowledge and wisdom from all levels at the same time - local, national and international (Edwards, 1994). However, Goold (2006) noted that decentralisation can also present challenges for organisational learning, especially in terms of double-loop learning, if the communication channels and relationships between the centre and the rest of the organisation are difficult or weak. Goold (2006) further advised that communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) can be a useful mechanism to counter the challenges of decentralisation.

Resources & technology for learning

Allocating adequate resources into the budget

Janus (2016) and Britton (1998) strongly advocated for resources dedicated to learning to be specifically earmarked within an organisation’s budget. According to Janus (2016)

> A dedicated budget for knowledge and learning is an important indication that

> an organization takes knowledge sharing seriously. It signals that senior management is ready to invest in the knowledge and learning capabilities of its staff and the organization at large. Not allocating funds for knowledge and learning also sends a message to staff — that knowledge sharing may not be worth an investment. But without basic funding, good ideas and practices may quickly lose traction. (p. 39)

Britton (1998) and Owusu (2008) further argued for the need to see learning as essential to the development process and therefore accordingly allocate an adequate proportion of the organisation's budget that will cover research, documentation, publications, attendance to conferences, training, learning visits and other learning mechanisms. This requires educating donors and supporters on the importance of organisational learning, which should translate into a budget line for learning and knowledge management in funding applications (Britton, 1998).

The 'hardware': information and communication technologies

According to Janus (2016), technology can facilitate knowledge sharing and learning. Organisations use a number of information and communications technology (ICT) platforms such as intranets, wikis, e-discussion systems, online brainstorming and project management systems to provide guidance, enhance collaboration and improve know-how (ibid). However, a common mistake is to view knowledge management as primarily driven by technology, which can facilitate learning but will not drive it (ibid). A simple way to assess whether ICT platforms are fit for purpose is to ask employees which ones they are actually using, for what purpose, how they could be improved and what is missing (ibid).

Bhatt (2000) argued that organisations tend to focus chiefly on implementing technological solutions technological solutions for knowledge sharing, as is far easier than driving behaviour change or even processes that support that change to foster a culture of learning. Similarly, Volkow (1998) noted that it is not sufficient to have IT systems if the organisational culture, structures or processes are not conducive to knowledge sharing and learning. Lewis and Madon (2004) illustrated this point through the case study of an NGO in Bangladesh: junior research staff were provided with very limited access to the internet by senior managers, as the only internet-access computer was owned by the head of the research department and kept in a separate office. In this example, the culture of defensiveness trumped the potential benefits of ICT systems. In addition, Kasper (2007) noted that while new technologies are making it easier to capture knowledge (e.g. through audio, video, and informal publishing mechanisms such as blogposts and wikis), the new challenge is “not so much about how to capture knowledge, but about what knowledge to capture” (p. 2).

Dedicated time and space for learning

Further, learning and knowledge sharing require resources in the form of time, space and skills (Britton, 1998; Goold, 2006; Roper & Pettit, 2002; Soal, 2008; Wrigley, 2008). Goold (2006) and Wrigley (2008) emphasised the need for a dedicated, supported and neutral space. “Learning only happens with dedicated space. It is a distinct activity in its own right” (Soal, 2008, p. 10). In that respect, reflection and learning cannot happen during regular meetings, as they require longer sessions that allow for in-depth discussions of issues (Alidou, 2008). Skills and patience are also required to help people reflect and to draw knowledge out of them in a way that makes them feel empowered (Roper & Pettit, 2002).

2.4 Barriers to organisational learning & knowledge management

NGOs’ aspirations are not always aligned with their practices as regards becoming learning organisations and sharing knowledge (Britton, 1998). This is because a number of barriers arise that make it difficult to turn aspirations into reality (Goold, 2006). The literature on OL & KM in NGOs distinguishes between internal barriers, which NGOs have some control over, and external barriers that are to a large extent outside their sphere of influence (Britton, 1998; Ringa, 2012; Vushe, 2018).

External barriers

The funding environment and the pressure to demonstrate impact

The funding environment, which leads to NGOs being accountable to a number of stakeholders and audiences, can be a major external barrier (Goold, 2006). Funding tied to specific projects or programs limits the possibility for organisation-wide learning. Due to donor requirements, NGOs tend to focus their monitoring, evaluation and reporting efforts on the operational level, which means they get ‘stuck’ in first-loop learning. Even though this is a growing challenge, the literature on learning organisations and organisational learning does not readily address the issue of accountability to multiple stakeholders and how to solve it (Roper & Pettit, 2002). Roche (1998) pointed out that because an NGO's ultimate beneficiaries are a different group of people from its donors, various knowledge demands arise in relation to different groups. However, as donors control the purse strings, an NGO's agenda is often more shaped by its donor requirements than by insight from its 'clients' or beneficiaries in the local context (ibid). This obviously has consequences regarding the way learning processes are structured (Lewis & Madon, 2004; Power et al., 2002; Whatley, 2013).

Citing ActionAid as an example, Owusu (2008) noted that NGOs increasingly feel under pressure to provide evidence for change and to demonstrate impact to donors in a linear manner, through reporting processes that focus mainly on inputs and outputs. This can be in direct contradiction with a learning agenda that needs to take into account complex systems, environments and the need for adaptability (ibid). This approach also fails to recognise that knowledge is an intangible asset (Ahmed & Zairi, 2000). As a result, unlike the corporate sector, NGOs often struggle to describe what good performance looks like and therefore to clearly define the direction their learning processes should take (Greijn, 2008). Owusu (2008) added that prioritising the delivery of often unrealistic targets can also constrain learning and deplored "the unrelenting pressure to demonstrate impacts, even though in some contexts learning would have been more appropriate as a yardstick for judging success" (p. 7).

The pressure to maintain low overheads

The pressure for NGOs to maintain and demonstrate low overheads might be another barrier to investing in the resources required for organisational learning and knowledge management such as time, systems and skill development (Britton, 1998). Also, the fact that NGOs increasingly need to compete with each other for funding gives them a strong incentive to show only their achievements in the form of "uncomplicated success stories" (ibid, p. 21) to satisfy their institutional donors and supporters. Edwards (1997) noted that "this detracts from the depth of self-criticism and analysis required if NGOs are to be serious about learning; rising competition for public funds leads NGOs to prioritise public relations over genuine learning (i.e. highlighting the good and burying the bad)" (pp. 240-241). Also, this competition for funding between NGOs limits the potential for sharing and learning across organisations, much in the way the private sector operates (Britton, 1998).

The complexity of the development process

Another barrier to learning is the complexity of the development process. Ramalingam (2008) stated that there is a tendency among NGOs to underestimate how complex aid work can be. As a result, they set unrealistic objectives and expectations as regards what learning can be achieved or try to oversimplify the learning captured (ibid). Ellerman (2005) pointed out that international NGOs are trying to tackle some of the world's most complex challenges in a variety of very different contexts with various stakeholders, factors and interacting issues. Although it is tempting to focus on single-loop learning at the operational level in an attempt to simplify the messages, the diversity and complexity of international development calls for efforts to "[build] people's capacity to learn and make the connections [, as it is] more important than accumulating information" (Edwards, 1997, p. 237).

Cultural barriers related to diverse learning traditions

Edwards (1997) further noted that "differences in learning styles and languages are also a feature of a large, dispersed, multi-cultural staff" (p. 238). Different learning traditions within one same organisation can act as cultural barriers and hinder knowledge sharing and learning if they are not appropriately identified and addressed. For example, in some societies such as Benin it is not common to share knowledge and wisdom because they are seen as precious, finite resources that people prefer to keep to themselves (Alidou, 2008).

In other contexts such as Bangladesh, it is culturally appropriate for senior staff to deliberately maintain a distant attitude towards junior staff and mentoring, coaching or supporting younger colleagues is frowned upon (Lewis & Madon, 2004). Similarly, providing feedback is not appropriate in some cultures. In Niger and Mali, there is an assumption that receiving positive feedback could 'spoil' employees by making them arrogant (Alidou, 2008). Hovland (2003) pointed out that "the best [knowledge management], learning and evaluation strategies in the UK are not necessarily the best [knowledge management], learning and evaluation strategies in Uganda. Different groups and organisations (whether they are different due to political circumstances, economic resources, culture, social background or religion etc.) may have different associations to concepts such as ‘leadership’, ‘cooperation’, ‘information’, ‘sharing’ and ‘monitoring’” (p. 8).

Internal barriers

Many NGOs have built-in barriers to learning that are the direct product of the organisation’s behaviours and characteristics (Britton, 1998). Edwards (1996) analysed some of the most commonly recognised internal barriers to achieving organisational learning in the NGO sector.

The activist culture

The activist culture, often present in international aid organisations equates learning to a luxury taking up time and resources that could otherwise be used for ‘real’ work, that is fieldwork (Britton, 1998; Edwards, 1996; Lewis & Madon, 2004; Whatley, 2013). Goold (2006) developed this point by describing the bias for action in NGOs, which “[gives] more value to action and results than to reflection and inquiry” (p. 3). This bias sees learning as “time spent in inconclusive deliberations” (p. 3), which is in direct contradiction with the “urgency of tasks” and leads to an “avoidance of reflective observation” (p. 3).

Fear, defensiveness and a culture of blame

These traits can be exacerbated by a fear of admitting failure, including to donors and supporters, which translates into a tendency to report only success stories, both internally and externally (Edwards, 1997). This can lead to a culture of defensiveness, risk aversion and even blame among employees when errors are finally discovered and exposed (Froggatt, 2011; Goold, 2006; Greijn, 2008; Lewis & Madon, 2004; Whatley, 2013). NGOs also find it difficult to deal with any ‘discordant’ or critical information that goes against the official organisational discourse or the views of institutional donors, which might lead to resistance from leadership to take into account and apply dissenting lessons learnt (Edwards, 1996). This can create discrepancies between what is learnt and what learning is applied to affect changes of behaviour or practice (Roper & Pettit, 2002) and might explain why triple-loop learning is so difficult to achieve.

A highly hierarchical, strictly controlled and centralised structure

The organisational structure of many NGOs largely remains hierarchical, strictly controlled from the top and highly centralised, which are all characteristics that can inhibit learning (Edwards,1997; Owusu, 2008). Knowledge sharing, experimentation and innovation can be hindered by the "tunnel vision of the project system" (Smillie, 1995, cited in Britton, 1998, p. 21), an obligation to abide by the logical framework approach, and a pressure to disburse donor funds within a set timeframe with little room for adaptation (Owusu, 2008). Roper and Pettit (2002) also described how leaders will often initiate organisational learning and change processes "with real commitment to transform the organisation, until they realise how genuine transformation will challenge their own authority and prerogatives" (p. 17). Therefore, a learning organisation can only arise if it fully commits to replacing its traditional hierarchical structures with a flatter configuration (Newman, King & Youngs, 2000).

However, decentralisation and geographical distance can also be a challenge for organisational learning if communication mechanisms or relationships between headquarters and regional and/or country and/or field offices are strained or weak, creating information gaps and bottlenecks (Goold, 2006; Suzuki, 1998). A rapid expansion in the size of an organisation can have a similar effect: as employees are less able to rely on who they know to access all the information they need, the organisational structure becomes more complex and internal knowledge flows decrease significantly as a result (Serenko, Bontis & Hardie, 2007).

OL & KM are not seen as 'everyone's business'

Organisational learning and knowledge sharing are often seen by leadership and employees as the responsibility of one particular team or individual (Goold, 2006; Janus, 2016). Edwards (1997) pointed out that "experience shows that people are unlikely to use or value learning if they see learning as someone else's responsibility (as is traditional in organizations that divide those who `think' from those who `do')" (p. 243). Learning and knowledge sharing should in fact be described as everyone's responsibility: "Knowledge and learning needs to be located in the areas of the organization where it is being generated — that is, everywhere" (Janus, 2016, p. 29).

The trap of overreliance on information and communication technologies

Knowledge might not be transferred efficiently because knowledge management systems are inefficient, under-resourced or under-developed in terms of capture, storage, transfer, dissemination or access (Edwards, 1996; Thomas & Mohan, 2007). When a vast amount of information exists but systems are inadequate to process it, or the structure is insufficient to allow the conversion of information into knowledge and wisdom, information overload can arise. This means that the right people are not able to access the right information at the right time (Edwards, 1996; Thomas & Mohan, 2007). Ramalingam (2008) argued that these issues arise when information systems and documents are seen as the ‘end products’ of organisational learning and organisations fail to recognise the social and human dimensions of learning that shape these systems and structures.

Insufficient investment in people and resources for OL & KM

Lastly, a lack of investment in people and resources (budget, systems, technology, space, time) for learning is an obvious obstacle (Britton, 1998; Kasper, 2007; Owusu, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002). This can be explained by the fact that

> Many NGO managers and board members are still reluctant to be seen to be using resources for what appear to be ‘non-productive’ purposes. Learning, if it appears in a budget explicitly, is often viewed as a drain on organisational resources rather than a means of creating its most precious asset: wisdom. (Britton, 1998, p. 31)

Roper and Pettit (2002) pointed out the importance of creating a “space for learning” (p. 14). Owusu (2008) argued that the lack of time often put forward by employees for not engaging in learning activities is in fact a direct consequence of the lack of individual incentives or rewards for learning. They will only engage in learning if they are reassured that this is considered to be a critical and integral part of their role in equal measures with other activities (ibid). “Management should make it clear that staff are expected to learn and to reflect on their performance. It is essential that this is supported by appropriate incentives, and that time is made available for writing” (ibid, p. 7).

Individuals are unlikely to provide additional efforts that will benefit the whole organisation on top of their extra workload if it is not clear how it would provide a personal return (Britton, 1998; Kasper, 2007). Incentives should therefore be provided for knowledge sharing and learning activities such as reflection, reading or listening to what others have learnt, as well as “systematising and sharing experiences so others can critique our work” (Roper & Pettit, p. 14). High staff turnover is a significant barrier to organisational learning in INGOs (Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002; Whatley, 2013), as it is a major contributor to the loss of institutional memory (Britton, 1998). An increase in turnover at the senior management level has been observed in recent years and greatly contributes to exacerbating the issue, as much critical information remains 'stored' only in the heads of executives (Whatley, 2013).

2.5 Organisational learning & knowledge management strategies and mechanisms in NGOs

As outlined in the preface of this thesis, while the literature is abundant with examples of the concrete application of organisational learning in the business sector, few well documented and evidence-based examples of successful mechanisms and strategies are found in the aid sector literature (Froggatt, 2011). This can be explained by the fact that unlike the private sector, NGOs are not subject to market share and profitability (Walsh & Lenihan, 2006), and therefore these mechanisms will be different or they will be applied differently in the NGO sector compared to the corporate sector. Britton (1998) proposed a comprehensive model for the learning organisation based on eight key functions.

Britton's (1998) model on eight key functions of the learning organisation and related mechanisms

In his paper *The Learning NGO* (1998), Britton provided a framework for how NGOs may learn, both internally and from outside the organisation. This model is central to Britton's paper (1998) and proposes that there are eight key dimensions an organisation must master in order to learn effectively as follows: creating a supportive culture; gathering internal experience; accessing external learning; communication systems; mechanisms for drawing conclusions; developing and maintaining an organisational memory; integrating learning into policy and practice; and applying the learning. These features are summarised in the corresponding subsections below.

In his paper (1998), the author provided a detailed explanation for each function, outlined the necessary preconditions that need to be in place for their effective implementation and flagged common barriers to the model being successfully embedded into day-to-day practice. He provided detailed examples of specific mechanisms that fall within each of the eight criteria and may be considered to ensure every aspect is covered. He highlighted the fact that these functions are interdependent and the mechanisms should therefore be designed and implemented in synergy rather than considered in isolation as a ‘tick-box’ exercise. At the end of the paper, a 40-item questionnaire allows organisations to assess their strengths and weaknesses against each of the eight key features of the learning NGO. The author suggested that this diagnostic tool may be useful for senior management to precisely establish the areas that need to be prioritised for their organisation to become a successful learning entity.

Britton’s model continues to be the seminal work that informs the small body of research focusing on practical application of OL & KM in NGOs that has been undertaken to date (Hill & Aarnoudse, 2011; Makuwira, 2013; Ringa, 2012; Walton, 2005). I therefore use Britton’s (1998) classification on the eight key functions of a learning organisation to present the mechanisms and strategies highlighted in the not-for-profit literature as outlined below. The reasons for choosing to use Britton’s taxonomy are that when researching and comparing other frameworks, I have found this model to be unique in the literature on OL & KM in NGOs, as it is very comprehensive, as well highly practical and applicable to the NGO context due to Britton’s deep cognisance of these organisations. Also, it meticulously presents a set of OL & KM mechanisms for each of the key functions. Since its publication, it has been significantly cited and analysed at length by other authors on OL & KM in NGOs, including in more recent years (Hill & Aarnoudse, 2011; Vathis, 2016; Vushe, 2018). In addition, based on my knowledge of the INGO sector, this model is the most comprehensive, realistic and practically applicable in the literature on OL & KM in INGOs that I have been able to source.

Creating a supportive culture

For learning to become integral to an INGO’s functioning, it has to become part of the organisational culture (Britton, 1998) It is important to identify “where the energy is” and build on what is already working in the organisation (Goold, 2006, p. 8). Portilla and Aguilera (2008) used appreciative enquiry, a form of collective reflection to identify activities and moments of success in the past and capitalise on what factors created that success. Coaching and mentoring can significantly enhance reflective practice (Goold, 2006), which fosters a culture of knowledge sharing. Other forms of regular, facilitated collective space and time for learning include annual participatory learning reviews (Owusu, 2008) and homeweeks (Soal, 2008). Homeweeks are held for a week each month at the Community Development Resource Association (CDRA), a South African NGO. They are a space for practitioners to share and learn from each other's practice and focus on accomplishing all "organisational strategising, maintenance and integrating activities" in a dedicated space (ibid, p. 10).

Gathering internal experience

Gathering internal experience comprises of sharing and exchanges information, knowledge and wisdom. Strategies and mechanisms for gathering internal experience are the most documented in the literature on organisational learning for the not-for-profit sector compared to all the other mechanisms identified in Britton's framework. They range from informal sharing of lessons from the field through to formal KM systems to capture and codify tacit knowledge for use. Examples of content management systems and codification-based knowledge systems are SharePoint (an online document management and storage system), intranets (web-based information sharing networks within a single organisation) and online project management systems, which are a database of all existing and past programs and projects (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007). They are most efficient when they display features such as tagging. Tagging enables the creation of taxonomies and typologies for organising content, which allows users to find content over time in a precise way and to access an organised and structured body of knowledge (Kasper, 2007).

Lunchtime presentations (also referred to across institutions as 'paperbag lunch' or 'brownbag lunch' presentations) are a popular type of knowledge-sharing event during which an internal or external speaker is invited to share information from recent experiences or findings that is relevant to other staff members (Janus, 2016). Held at lunchtime, these sessions include time for questions and answers and are recorded for later access.

Immersions in a field environment have a profound impact on individual learning and can also significantly influence organisational learning if they are coupled with a subsequent collective reflection process on the implications of lessons learnt for the organisation (van Klinken, 2012). Knowledge harvesting uses regular interviews to extract tacit wisdom out of the heads of experts, top performers and other key staff members, and to articulate lessons learnt 'on the spot' as they arise (Kasper, 2007). The production of knowledge and learning products and assets is a popular strategy among NGOs and comprises of factsheets, how-to guides and simplified reporting templates (Janus, 2016; Owusu, 2008). They can be written in locally appropriate language and allow staff more time to interact with the communities they work with instead of 'reinventing the wheel' through their own templates (Janus, 2016; Owusu, 2008). Similarly, case studies and storytelling are widely used in the aid sector, as they offer a way to approach learning that is more in line with oral traditions and parables used in the South to convey knowledge (Goold, 2006; van Klinken, 2012). Case studies "offer a method for sharing contextual knowledge that can help replicate lessons learnt. They are based on actual events and offer an opportunity for analysis of a problem or scenario" (Janus, 2016, p. 69).

Accessing external learning

Organisations cannot learn only from internal experience and need to access external sources for comprehensive learning to arise (Britton, 1998). Partnerships with other organisations can facilitate learning and this has been demonstrated in the public health sector (Ng et al., 2013). This is particularly pertinent to the not-for-profit sector, as many NGOs are implementing similar programs in the same geographical areas but are not direct competitors with each other for business, unlike in the private sector. Partnerships between aid organisations and academic institutions can be mutually beneficial: they provide NGOs with expertise and knowledge on research methodologies and how to implement robust studies, while academic institutions get direct access to the field to test their theories and carry out research (Janus, 2016). Additionally, they allow for practice validation and innovation testing through evidence, and enhance boundary spanning, knowledge exchange and cross-fertilisation across sectors (Green, 2013; Olivier, Hunt & Ridde, 2016; Roche, 2013; Yan, Lin & Clarke, 2018).

Benchmarking allows an organisation to compare its performance with a wide range of other organisations in the corporate, public, multilateral/bilateral agency and aid sectors. NGOs can learn a lot from this process, as it helps them identify best practice and common standards against which they can assess themselves (Britton, 1998). It has been introduced in various NGOs in the UK through government-sponsored accreditation programs focusing on quality such as ‘Investors in People’, The International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 9000 registration accreditation and Total Quality Management (Paton & Payne, 1997).

Communities of practice or learning are networks of people who work in the same field or share a common interest, created in order to facilitate knowledge sharing based on the willingness of members to learn together (Denning, 2000; Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007). They can be established within the same company across different departments, or between various organisations, in formal or informal settings (Kasper, 2007).

Communication systems

Communication systems aim to allow information to flow freely throughout the different layers of an organisation (Britton, 1998). Blogs (short for “web logs”) are a form of online journal or diary that is frequently updated with personal thoughts, reflections and stories, often on a particular theme or themes (Britton, 1998). One form of blogging that can be particularly useful for knowledge sharing in NGOs is internal group blogging, as they “allow practitioners to codify knowledge and ideas for internal use in a less polished form than might be found in more formal publications. They provide online, searchable forums for information exchange and sharing” (Kasper, 2007, p. 4). In that sense, they can capture the content of discussions held via email into a format that can be accessed by a wider internal audience (ibid).

Online staff skills directories, also called expertise locators or capabilities catalogues, allow staff members to identify colleagues in their organisation who have expertise in a specific area of work they are interested in or seek for a particular task (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007). They have been successful implemented in a number of NGOs such as Nature Conservancy (Kasper, 2007) and WaterAid (Britton, 1998).

Webinars are online presentations taking place in real time. Following the presentation, participants can ask questions, obtain answers instantly and engage in interactive discussions. They are a cost-effective way to convey learning to a large audience and presentations can usually be recorded for later viewing (Janus, 2016).

Mechanisms for drawing conclusions

The process of drawing conclusions is what differentiates organisational learning from mere exchange of information, as it transforms information to knowledge and ultimately useable wisdom (Britton, 1998). After-action reviews are a popular mechanism for drawing conclusions among NGOs inspired from the US Army (Ramalingam, 2008). It is a facilitated, structured review and reflection process allowing a project team to gather information during or after the end of a project and identify successes, failures and lessons learnt through questions posed to the group: what was supposed to happen; what actually happened (including the unplanned); why was there a difference; what can we learn from it (Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007).

When used strategically, evaluation and monitoring can also be pivotal as genuine "learning moments" (Roper & Pettit, 2002, p. 16). Bloch and Borges (2002) described at length how Curumim, in an effort to apply double-loop learning, "[creates] an environment that favours reflection on their behaviour in the monitoring process" (p. 467) in order to assess whether the indicators used are appropriate, and therefore challenge the relevance of the monitoring process when necessary. As another example of double-loop learning, Britton (1998) explained how the British Red Cross evaluated its response to the Rwanda crisis in the late 1990 through analysis of its decision-making processes, identification of areas of best practice and formulation of recommendations that were documented and disseminated widely across the organisation.

The Most Significant Change (MSC) process is a deductive, participatory strategy used to measure change through stories collected from stakeholders and retrospectively describing NGO activities (Davies & Dart, 2005). It is a form of monitoring and evaluation that focuses on the systematic collection and selection of success stories by both staff members and beneficiaries, followed by in-depth discussions on the value of the changes narrated by stakeholders (Janus, 2016; Wrigley, 2008). By its very nature, it informs project management through continuous knowledge sharing at every stage of the project cycle (Janus, 2016). MSC is one well-documented example of a successful knowledge sharing and learning mechanism that has emerged from within the development sector and is story-based, making it an ideal tool that should be widely adopted by NGOs (Ramalingam, 2008; Wrigley, 2008).

Developing and maintaining an organisational memory

Remembering is essential to organisational learning and specific mechanisms need to be implemented to counter NGOs' tendency to lose or forget information and knowledge. Like any other organisations, NGOs have to mitigate the loss of institutional memory upon staff leaving their jobs and they do so mainly through exit interviews and handover notes (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007). While exit interviews traditionally focus on the reasons why employees leave their roles and how the organisation might be improved, they have recently been expanded to include 'wisdom capturing' from departing staff in terms of both their technical knowledge and their expertise or know-how based on experience (Janus, 2016, p. 59).

> The interviews aim to capture both explicit knowledge (to ensure the smooth transfer of files, emails, and other documents) and tacit knowledge (to document harder-to-capture practical information, know-how, and lessons learned). The less an organization documents knowledge on a regular basis, the more important it is to capture it when a person exits. (Kasper, 2007, p. 3)

The Ford Foundation has been implementing these knowledge-based exit interviews for a few years and found them so valuable that they now conduct them annually with non-departing staff members to ensure knowledge is regularly captured (ibid). Similarly, as a way to make the exit interview and handover process more dynamic, Colombia's National Administrative Department of Statistics (Epartamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística, DANE) has established a knowledge transfer mechanism by which departing staff members make an in-depth handover of their expertise and know-how to the new colleagues replacing them. In turn, these new staff members organise knowledge-sharing events for a wide audience within their organisation and present important aspects of their new roles and the critical points they learnt from their departing colleagues (Janus, 2016).

Integrating learning into strategy and policy

Weaving lessons learnt into the fabric of an organisation can be achieved by designing policies and procedures that reflect what the structure has learnt and ground decision-making into experience, especially if this is conducted as a participatory process (Britton, 1998). The literature on organisational learning and knowledge management is scarce as regards mechanisms allowing learning to be integrated into strategy and policy. Britton (1998) mentioned that policy development should be seen as a "participative learning process in itself" (p. 18). As an example, Owusu (2008) described how ActionAid's financial systems were integrated with review cycles and program planning, which meant that the review process directly impacted planning and budgeting. This enabled more transparent and responsive budgets and ensured that "learning would be fed back into planning, which in turn would lead to greater transparency in financial reporting at all levels" (ibid, p. 7).

Janus (2016) strongly advocated for the development of a dedicated knowledge-sharing strategy driven by senior management but designed through a co-creation process with many stakeholders and learning champions actively involved. This participatory approach provides the organisation with a clear and shared vision towards organisational learning and knowledge management. The strategy should outline key principles and proposed mechanisms, inform all staff members about the value of knowledge sharing for the organisation (internal advocacy), and is an essential tool to facilitate and communicate the dissemination of the strategic framework for learning to all stakeholders (Janus, 2016).

Applying the learning

A continuous learning cycle can only arise when what has been learnt is routinely applied in the work setting (Britton, 1998). Action Learning Sets and action research allow staff members to meet regularly, reflect on their practice and apply the lessons through a double-loop learning process (Goold, 2006). Action Learning Sets are a structured process whereby small groups of peers meet and work together on a regular basis to address complex issues through collective learning, reflection and solution generation (Whatley, 2013). Action research seeks to achieve both action and research outcomes carried out at the same time during an intervention. It encompasses studies undertaken during a project and using robust evidence to improve the approach and methods used in the intervention (Whatley, 2013). According to Prasad (2008), Action Learning Sets and action research allow organisations "to develop their capacity for learning, and to transform the patterns of interaction with other actors in the system" (p.

8). For instance, the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee (BRAC), the most famous Bangladeshi NGO operating in 14 countries worldwide is deeply committed to learning from the context they operate in and uses action research and experimentation at length to do so (Whatley, 2013).

Helpdesks, an asynchronous networking mechanism, are an example of how learning can be generated across the world in real time and directly applied to a specific context and location (Kasper, 2007). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has a network of regionally-located resource facilities that act as information and knowledge helpdesks to support local field staff with pressing issues (ibid). They can ask questions via email, phone or fax and responses are generated from a broad area of stakeholders such as UNDP staff, other UN agencies, professional networks and knowledge databases (ibid). All these experiences and answers sent from other locations are synthesised as a consolidated response within a few days and sent to the author of the question on the ground (ibid).

Peer-assisted learning sessions or ‘peer assists’ typically involve a meeting or workshop that brings knowledge into a new project by sharing insights and experience at its outset. This enables the generation of lessons learnt and their application at the very start of a project (Britton, 2002; Janus, 2016). Premortem project reviews are a particular type of peer assists that involve listing all the reasons why the new project might fail and consequently putting mitigation measures in place (Janus, 2016). Participants are requested to individually write down every reason they can foresee for the project breakdown and are subsequently tasked with collectively imagining solutions to these issues. Because the failure scenario is completely hypothetical, this mechanism is able to remove barriers related to defensiveness and fear of failure (ibid).

Finally, regular staff visits, exchanges and job secondments are time-bound mechanisms that allow employees to observe and/or work in a different location or setting within their organisation, and apply the lessons learnt upon returning to their own context (Britton, 2002; Janus, 2016). A job secondment is a temporary, specific work assignment performed by an employee in a different area of expertise than their usual area of work. To maximise the learnings from these initiatives and the application of lessons learnt, they need to be rigorously and thoroughly ‘debriefed’ through a structured conversation between the ‘guest’ employee and their hosting team (Britton, 2002). These mechanisms can be set up within one same organisation or between agencies in order to "open up the boundaries of organisations to learn from one another" (ibid, p. 20), thus optimising access to external learning.

2.6 Concluding summary on the literature review

There is evidence in the literature on OL & KM in INGOs that these disciplinary approaches are gaining momentum among international aid organisations. In a complex, competitive and rapidly changing operating environment, failing to learn comes at a high cost and INGOs therefore have a strong incentive to become learning organisations. The research literature suggests that the factors influencing organisational learning include: supporting and promoting individual learning in the organisation; an adequate allocation of resources; developing appropriate structures, systems and processes; inspired leadership that acts as a role model; promoting individual learning; and fostering a culture of learning, including by promoting relevant skillsets and behaviours.

INGOs are faced with both external and internal barriers to organisational learning. External barriers include: a funding environment that does not foster learning and reflection; the pressure to demonstrate impact; and cultural barriers to learning related to the international context within which INGOs operate. Some of the internal barriers are: a bias for action; defensiveness and a culture of blame; highly hierarchical structures; an overreliance on technology to achieve learning at the organisational level; and an insufficient investment in resources for learning.

Through this research study, the different elements arising from the literature will be used to investigate the extent to which The Fred Hollows Foundation and other NGOs are able to articulate their rationale for becoming learning organisations. I will also examine whether they take the factors and barriers identified in the literature into account to consciously build a learning environment in which knowledge is shared and used. Similarly, the eight categories outlined in Britton's framework (1998) will be used to analyse in detail the study findings presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter presents the methodological approach informing this research inquiry and details the reasoning and features of the mixed-methods design employed to address the research questions. It also presents the data collection process and analysis conducted within and across the methods to inform the findings.

This study was designed to gain an in-depth understanding of the experience and processes involved in developing a strategy for organisational learning (OL) and knowledge management (KM)[2] for The Fred Hollows Foundation, an international public health non-governmental organisation. It also aimed to identify suitable initiatives to build a better learning organisation at The Foundation based on clearly identified needs and stakeholder aspirations. Throughout this project, I was an insider studying my workplace as an applied researcher. The overall methodological approach I undertook to conduct this study drew upon organisational ethnography. In addition, the design was informed by action research drawing upon aspects of collaborative organisational inquiry. I found it important to ensure that the research findings would be analysed collaboratively with colleagues, as they would directly inform the development of the strategy.

3.1 Methodological approaches

Ethnography and organisational ethnography

Through my research, I wanted to examine which organisational learning and knowledge management strategies have been applied at The Fred Hollows Foundation, which ones where used and why. I also sought to understand my colleagues' acceptance of these mechanisms, and their perceptions towards usefulness. I wanted to investigate their current involvement in these mechanisms. I was interested in discovering their aspirations and expectations for organisational learning and knowledge management in their organisation, as well as how they hoped to contribute to building a learning organisation. Ethnography is concerned with discovering what people actually do as opposed to what they say they do

[2] This will be abbreviated 'OL & KM' throughout this chapter.

and providing a rich understanding from the perspective of participants (Willis, 2007). According to Spradley (1980), “the essential core of ethnography is the concern with the meaning of actions and events to the people we seek to understand” (p. 5). It can be applied to communities, institutions, organisations and other settings (Schensul & LeCompte, 1999), involving the researcher to be fully engaged in the daily lives of participants through observation and inquiry (Walsh, 1998).

Learning and knowledge sharing are routine activities in the workplace, but it is difficult for people to explain how they capture, store and share what they learn. A lot of knowledge is tacit, that is residing in people’s heads and hard to express or make explicit (Janus, 2016). My research therefore aimed to shed light on these learning and knowledge management/sharing mechanisms by making the voices and opinions of my colleagues on these issues heard. I wanted to make them visible and explicit to others including senior managers at The Fred Hollows Foundation and the wider INGO sector, and assess how they were perceived and used by individuals and the organisation as a whole. I sought to uncover the meaning and value staff members put behind these strategies and mechanisms in order to draw the attention of decision-makers and prompt action. Costley, Elliott and Gibbs (2010) highlighted the suitability of ethnography in a work context, noting that “ethnography is potentially a useful approach to research … for example, within an organization or community of practice” (p. 89). As such, organisational ethnography seemed to be an appropriate approach, as it aims to reveal the complexities and intricacies of everyday activities in an organisational setting (Koot, 1995). According to Ybema, Yanow, Wels and Kamsteeg (2009):

> For organizational ethnographers much of the intriguing ‘mystery’ of organizational life is hidden in the ordinary exchanges of ordinary people on an ordinary sort of day. From this perspective, the intricacies of everyday organizational life can be better grasped not through questionnaires developed and analysed while sitting in an office, but by going out into the organizational ‘field’. (p.1)

Grounding my study in organisational ethnography allowed me to apply a realist-objectivist lens, which focuses on discovering “how things are really done … in a particular organizational situation” (Yanow, Ybema & van Hulst, 2011, p. 3). Finally, organisational ethnography has the potential to influence and inform organisational change in the complex environment that is the workplace (Down, 2012; Hodson, 2004).

Being an insider-researcher

"Ethnography is … a useful approach to research in a situation where the researcher already plays an active part" (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010, p. 89). In particular, as organisational ethnography involves prolonged engagement in the workplace, the role, perspective and influence of the researcher is crucial. However, it also needs to be identified as such and made explicit in order to ensure the researcher's judgment does not 'taint' the voices of participants (Clifford, 1986; Sanjek, 1990).

An insider-researcher can be defined as conducting research with a population he or she is also a member of, and having a shared experience, identity and language with the studied group (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha, 2000). Being already a part of the group being researched and relating to the study subjects as equals provides the insider-researcher with increased legitimacy, more complete and quicker acceptance by participants and greater openness in what they share (Adler & Adler, 1987; Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). This is referred to in the literature as complete membership status (ibid) and potentially allows for greater depth in the data collected (Corbin Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). The terms 'insider-researcher', 'practitioner researcher' and 'worker researcher' are often used interchangeably in the organisational literature (Costley, Elliott and Gibbs, 2010; Nakata, 2015; Workman, 2007).

As an insider-researcher, I sought to perform organisational ethnography on an everyday basis in my workplace (Watson, 2012) while making the most of my privileged position as an employee of The Fred Hollows Foundation (Walsh, 2011). Being embedded in the organisation as an Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management Specialist meant that I would be less likely to grapple with major difficulties traditionally encountered by outsider organisational ethnographers such as: obtaining access to research sites; establishing relationships with participants in the studied field; or gaining a deep and nuanced understanding the context, organisational culture and its workings (Yanow, Ybema & van Hulst, 2011; Walsh, 2010). According to Reed and Procter (1995), additional criteria for practitioner research undertaken in healthcare settings are as follows: a social process carried out in close collaboration with colleagues and that gives all participants a say; an educative experience for all those who take part in the project; and a focus on aspects of practice that the insider-research can directly influence and modify. These principles are applicable to other domains beyond healthcare (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010). I was particularly attached to the educational dimension of this research project for my colleagues, especially with regard to the introduction of new concepts such as organisational learning and knowledge management.

Action research

In addition to the organisational ethnographic lens, my role as a practitioner researcher undertaking a professional doctorate study in my workplace to inform and affect change prompted me to apply an action research approach. According to Coghlan and Shani (2013), action research is “a set of interventions that aims at producing knowledge that is robust for scholars and actionable for practitioners” (p. 443). It seeks to link practice with ideas and occurs primarily “as people try to work together to address key problems in their communities or organizations” (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1). Coghlan and Shani (2013) noted that action research is “focused on developing a deeper level of understanding of an important issue for both the system studied and the scientific community, in order to identify, modify, and transform the studied system [through] … the inquiry process and scientific rigor” (p. 445).

As a methodology, action research also enables the results from a study to be used by the practitioner researcher to affect changes in practice in a straightforward manner (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010). Changes or improvements in a given context are made through a cycle or series of cycles including investigation and planning followed by action and reflection (Campbell, Wunungmurra, & Nyomba, 2005). This approach influenced the design of my research, which was intended to be a cyclical, iterative process of collecting data, analysing it, presenting my colleagues with the findings, and using the results including my colleagues’ inputs to produce a strategy and action plan for my organisation. Through a refining process, each cycle of data collection and feedback was to inform decisions regarding priorities for the OL & KM strategy and to help to determine which systems, processes and products might be appropriate for The Foundation.

Collaborative organisational inquiry within action research in a not-for-profit setting

In line with the action research tradition, which involves participants as active contributors rather than passive research subjects (Reason & Bradbury, 2008), I was particularly attached to the idea of collaborative inquiry in this project, especially in light of the fact that my research setting is a not-for-profit organisation. This sector typically places a strong emphasis on participation and collaborative decision-making (Laloux, 2014). Collaborative organisational research uncovers “how management methods, or organizational arrangements affect outcomes in the system or systems under study” (Pasmore, Stymne, Shani, Mohrman & Adler, 2008, p. 20). The Fred Hollows Foundation aims to empower vulnerable populations in developing countries by restoring their sight (Wikipedia, 2018). Our approach to community empowerment applies to the workplace and its employees as well as to the communities with whom we work. Focusing on the empowerment of employees to keep them motivated via stakeholder engagement, participatory decision-making and staff-led co-creation of meaning and solutions (Hartley, 2017) are common characteristics of green organisations such as charities like The Fred Hollows Foundation (Laloux, 2014).

The collaborative research method I used is influenced by Paulo Freire’s approach to social change based on empowerment and conscientisation achieved through a process of collective and reflexive inquiry (Brinton Lykes & Mallona, 2008; Torre, Cahill & Fox, 2015). As per Freire’s vision (1970), it is defined by a bottom-up approach in which the views and priorities of the ‘end users’ grounded in their local contexts are placed at the centre of the research design, and the researcher and the ‘researched’ share power as equally as possible (Baum, 1998). In line with the tradition of collaborative research, staff-led co-creation, analysis and use of research is gaining momentum, particularly in the not-for-profit sector (Hartley, 2017; Merrilees, Miller & Yakimova, 2017).

Drawing from this research tradition, I wanted to introduce collaborative aspects in my research process wherever possible in order to ensure that my colleagues would feel a sense of ownership of the outcomes, especially the production of a strategy for OL & KM. This would in turn enhance its successful implementation. It was therefore intended that this collaborative methodological approach would guide the data collection and analysis process. In addition, because I was acutely aware of the fact that I was leading both the research and strategy development process, I wanted to mitigate the risks of my views as both a technical expert and a researcher taking precedence over what the majority of my colleagues believed was necessary to make FHF a better-learning organisation. Therefore, the design of the strategy was to be extensively guided by the outcomes of highly interactive discussions and co-created outputs with a broad range of colleagues (see section 3.4 - Reflexivity subsection).

'Bricolage'

Steinberg (2006) noted that bricolage is an approach to research that "involves taking research strategies from a variety of scholarly disciplines and traditions as they are needed in the unfolding context of the research situation" (p. 119). It lends itself well to combining "multiple perspectives and methodologies in order to gain a better understanding of real-world situations" (Costley, Elliott & Gibbs, 2010, p. 90). The aim is to address the complexities of real-life research contexts and the challenges of those working in and studying them (ibid) by making the full range of research methods available as a "toolbox" (Walsh, 2011). Bricolage provides practitioner researchers with the flexibility to select and combine the most relevant ones as deemed necessary for their research project and to modify this combination as the research unfolds and evolves, as per emergent design (ibid).

As described above, as an insider-researcher I was able to act as a 'bricoleur' in my organisation. My research project was designed as a combination of organisational strategy and action research drawing on aspects collaborative organisational inquiry, which provided the rigour expected from a researcher while allowing for the adaptability required from a practitioner. As an insider-researcher, I was also aiming to use my in-depth knowledge of the organisation and my position as an Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management Specialist to amend the design of my study relatively easily and quickly as per the evolving needs, while maintaining the necessary distance with my subject.

3.2 Study design (overview of methods) and sampling

Mixed methods

In terms of study design, I chose a mixed-methods approach for my research project (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill 2012). Mixed-methods research involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of both qualitative and quantitative data "in a single study or in a series of studies that investigate the same underlying phenomenon" (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008, p. 267). It is understood that combining these methods will lead to a more accurate and in-depth exploration and understanding of the research problem than either approach on its own (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007; Hesse-Biber, 2010). Integration arises through purposeful interdependence of various methods and produces understanding and insights that cannot be achieved otherwise (Bazeley, 2018). It can therefore address research questions that other methodologies cannot answer (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Bazeley, 2018). It also allows a greater diversity of views, including divergent ones, to be represented (ibid). The aim of mixed-method research is not to replace quantitative or quantitative research but to build on and combine the strengths, as well as mitigate the weaknesses of each type of method within one same study (Andrew & Halcomb, 2009).

As I was interested in exploring employees' experiences of organisational learning and views on learning strategies used in international NGOs, including health and eye health INGOs, a qualitative component was particularly suited. Qualitative data gathering methods comprise of semi-structured interviews; focus-group discussions; observation; and reflections captured in research notes. In public health, qualitative research methods are most appropriate to capture the experiences, views and meanings (Pope & Mays, 1995) that individuals give to their "life world" (Faltermaier, 1997, p. 357), allowing subjective reporting (ibid).

Quantitative methods usually draw results based on larger, more representative sample sizes than qualitative methods, often provide data in the form of numbers and statistics, arranged in tables, charts, figures, or other non-textual forms (Singh, 2007) and are therefore seen as depicting a more objective reality than qualitative methods (Sale, Lohfeld & Brazil, 2002). The numerical data thus collected can be used to generalise concepts more widely than with qualitative data (McNabb, 2008).The quantitative component of my study consisted of a survey questionnaire distributed to The Foundation's employees, designed to gain a more objective understanding of my colleagues' views on the current level of achievement by FHF in the areas of organisational learning and knowledge management. This quantitative diagnosis also aimed to highlight thematic areas requiring prioritisation according to staff members.

Emergent design

The concept of emergent design goes hand-in-hand with the notion of 'bricolage', as they both exist "out of respect for the complexity of the lived world" (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2005, p 137). According to Wibberley (2012), "bricolage can be used as an emergent research design" (p. 1).

Given (2008) noted that

> An emergent design involves data collection and analysis procedures that can evolve over the course of a research project in response to what is learned in the earlier parts of the study. In particular, if the research questions and goals change in response to new information and insights, then the research design may need to change accordingly. (p. 245)

This introduces a level of flexibility as regards the data collection and analysis processes. It also enables an ongoing evolution of the research design to reflect what has been learnt in a timely manner as well as address the new and/or additional goals of the research project (ibid).

In line with the approach to emergent research design conducted in the workplace described by Walsh (2010), as an insider-researcher employed by The Foundation I was in a privileged position to get buy-in, logistical support and resources from my organisation, and consequently modify my study design during the course of my research. For example, I added to my method design a series of focus-group discussions that I facilitated using a benchmarking and self-assessment tool called 'Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool' or KM-CAST and designed specifically for INGOs (Mansfield, 2015). The aim was to complement the information collected during semi-structured interviews that I considered insufficient to establish a clear baseline for The Foundation's performance in terms of organisational learning and knowledge management. Similarly, after an initial in-depth analysis of the research data collected through the survey, interviews and focus-group discussions, I identified the need to involve a broad selection of staff members across divisions at The Foundation who could bring their practitioner lens in further examining the findings. In line with action research drawing on aspects of collaborative inquiry, I realised after analysing the results myself and prior to drafting the strategy that it was essential for the success of the project to give my colleagues the opportunity to use their practitioner experience to guide the shaping of the strategy. This resulted in organising a series of stakeholder engagement workshops described in detail in the 'Data analysis and rigour' section below (section 3.4).

These modifications allowed my study design to form a coherent whole in which each step was following a logical progression from the previous one to build a momentum of participation from limited interaction with a big group of survey respondents to targeted exchanges with a select sample of key stakeholders in the workshops:

1) The survey depicted a snapshot in time and a broad picture of The Foundation's level of achievement in terms of organisational learning and knowledge management. It also provided a high-level, 'big sweep' by scoping participants' aspirations and expectations regarding the organisation's future developments in these areas. It provided some general directions to be further explored in interviews. The concept of the learning organisation was very briefly introduced by providing the definition by Pedler et al. (1991)[3] commonly used in the NGO sector to establish the context and illuminate survey participants' understanding of the LO in a simple manner. The level of engagement and interaction was limited, as the survey involved a wide range of respondents simply filling out an electronic form.

2) a. The internal semi-structured interviews were conducted either face-to-face or in one-on-one conversations over the phone between the interviewee and the researcher. They explored enablers and barriers by narrowing down the scope to a

[3] "A learning organisation an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself" as a result" (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 1).

smaller number of issues and barriers to be explored in more detail and addressed. Existing strategies and solutions deemed efficient by individual interviewees were also identified for further exploration as a way to start imagining more concretely what the future of The Foundation as a learning organisation could look like.

2) b. The external interviews served to prompt inspiration and thinking ‘outside the box’ of The Foundation and explore solutions that were already successfully implemented by others and could be replicated in our organisation.

3) The focus-group discussions aimed at establishing a dialogue within small groups of participants to capture their co-constructed views on organisational learning and knowledge management at The Fred Hollows Foundation as a result of “sharing, contesting and acquiring knowledge” on these very concepts (Lehoux, Poland & Daudelin, 2006, p. 2). It also provided a clear, comprehensive and well-informed baseline on key elements that needed to be prioritised in the OL and KM strategy in the next few years.

4) The stakeholder engagement workshops involved a select group of key actors who examined a synthesis of all the data collected in a participatory manner. This was achieved through an interactive, action-focused dialogue producing a vision and strategic objectives directly feeding into the strategy document. Beyond the co-creation of knowledge explored in the focus-group discussions, the workshops enabled a co-design of the strategy’s building blocks.

This process is summarised in the diagram below. As outlined, each research method was designed to build onto the next and to leave an imprint in my organisation. This was both in terms of familiarisation with the findings and improved understanding of the concepts by participants, as well as increased levels of participation and collaboration:

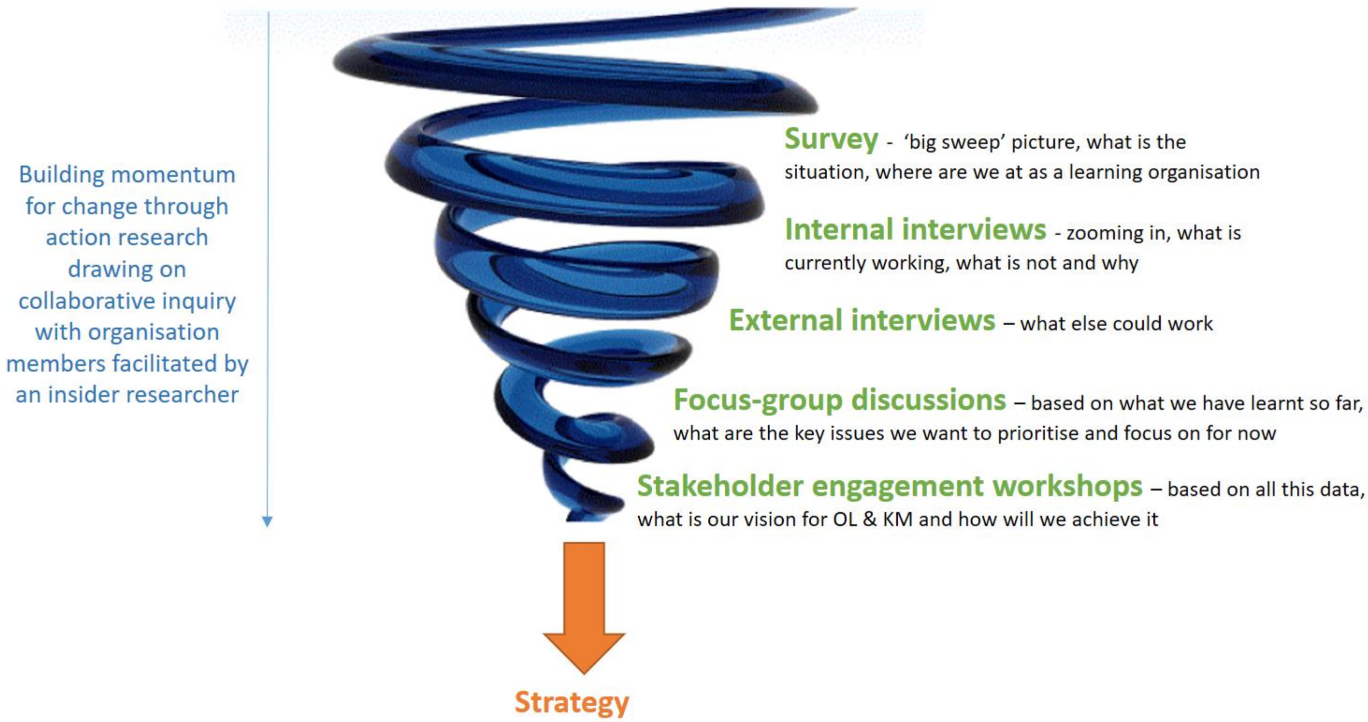

Figure 4: Spiral of action research: building a momentum of participation to reach a shared understanding and vision for change. *Study design for data collection and analysis based on an action research methodology drawing on collaborative organisational inquiry.*

3.3 Data collection methods

The purpose of using a suite of data collection methods in mixed-method research is to triangulate the data collected by concomitantly applying multiple methods and attributing them an equal value to confirm the validity of a finding through the cross-referencing of several datasets (Mortellaro, 2015). The approach I used combined not only a survey questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions with key informants, but also observation, indirect and direct participation, and introspection, all captured in my research notes. This blended approach to data collection methods was labelled omnibus field strategy by Denzin (1978) and allows a wide range of rich data to be captured and analysed, which is particularly important for self-reflective inquiry (Marshall & Mead, 2005) in the context of organisational ethnography and action research drawing on elements of collaborative inquiry.

Survey

Purpose and key features: The survey was anonymous and explored at a high level the perceptions of FHF Programs staff in country offices and in Sydney/Melbourne/London headquarters in relation to the current level of achievement by The Foundation in the areas of organisational learning and knowledge management. It also broadly captured their preferences, aspirations and expectations as regards the future development of The Foundation as a learning organisation, the areas that should be considered in priority and which systems, processes and products were deemed appropriate for the organisation. Survey questions were adapted from two tools that are publicly available on the internet: The Learning Organization Survey that was presented in a peer-reviewed Harvard Business Review article (Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008); and Britton's Learning NGO Questionnaire (1998), which has been tested and refined several times by its author to suit the needs of a wide range of NGOs that tested this tool. In order to avoid confusion as regards what was meant by the 'learning organisation' in the context of the survey, participants were provided with a definition as per Pedler et al. (1991) in the introduction section. A learning organisation is "an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself" as a result (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 1).

Questions 9 to 16 covered Britton's (1998) eight major thematic areas in relation to organisational learning including: creating a supportive culture; gathering internal experience; accessing external learning; communication systems; mechanisms for drawing conclusions; developing an organisational memory; integrating learning into programming strategy and policy; and applying the learning. One question explored perceptions of responsibility for organisational learning among in-country staff. Two items assessed participants' experiences of challenges to documenting and applying learning as well as their aspirations regarding the resources they would need to do this better. Two items captured respondents' aspirations in terms of future areas of organisational learning that would need to be prioritised at The Foundation and means of communications with the Organisational Learning and Knowledge Management team. Finally, one open-ended question gave participants the opportunity to provide additional comments and suggestions.

The questions were a mix of closed- and open-ended questions. Closed-ended questions aimed at collecting broad demographic data on participants, as well as their views on FHF's performance regarding each of the eight areas of organisational learning listed above through the use of a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, neither agree nor disagree, disagree, strongly disagree). Closed-ended questions are useful to collect and analyse large amounts of data in a short, quick and simple manner, both for respondents and researchers, and generally yield higher percentages of answers than open-ended questions (Reja, Lozar, Hlebec, & Vehovar, 2003). In particular, rating scale questions, commonly known as Likert-scale questions, are part of a subset of closed-ended questions called matrix questions that allow for more nuanced answers, as they capture degrees of opinions rather than a binary yes/no answer (McLeod, 2008). Collecting this information was deemed important in order to identify the specific gaps in FHF's current practice and which areas should be prioritised. Open-ended questions aimed at getting additional information on respondents' specific challenges, opportunities and resources as regards organisational learning in their day-to-day work through the use of free text fields. Open-ended questions are considered to be adding significant richness to the data provided by closed-ended questions and it is therefore good practice to include both types in a survey questionnaire in order to ensure complementarity (Schuman, 1972).

*Participants***:** All staff members in country offices (n=13 offices) as well as Sydney Programs Division, the Global Policy, Partnerships and Advocacy Division based in Melbourne, and the London (UK) Resource Mobilisation team (211 staff members in total) were invited to participate in an online electronic survey. 138 of them (65.4%) took part in this survey and among those, 119 (56.4%) fully completed it. The survey was initially piloted with a small number of voluntary participants (n=15) from the Sydney Programs Division and country teams. They were subsequently invited to provide detailed, question-by-question feedback on the survey tool via email. The tool was then refined based on the comments received; some questions were amended, two questions were added and four questions were removed. In order to avoid the possibility of coercion, the abovementioned personnel were contacted by a third party (Programs Division Executive Assistant) via email. The cover email included information about the project and staff members were requested to access the survey via the Uniform Resource Locator (URL) provided. Participation was to be voluntary and consent was explicitly sought through the inclusion of a message at the beginning of the survey. In order to ensure a high participation rate, automated reminders were sent to participants who had not yet responded if the survey had not been completed after five days and after eight days.

Data collection: The survey was open for 12 days in February 2016 and was administered via a licensed online surveying software (SurveyMonkey). Initially, it was agreed with my line manager and academic research supervisors that a period of 10 days would be appropriate. This was to ensure that respondents would have sufficient time to complete it, while keeping the momentum by availing the survey for a relatively short window of time and sending automated reminders. However, we decided to leave the survey open for two additional days at the end to accommodate for public holidays in South-East Asian countries.

Interviews

Internal semi-structured interviews

Purpose and key features: Internal interviews were conducted to understand existing effective strategies for organisational learning, their scalability and the potential barriers to their implementation. The interview guide was developed on the basis on key concepts outlined in the literature, in particular the eight thematic areas from *The Learning NGO* paper (Britton, 1998). It also explored the main challenges, enablers and key stakeholders for organisational learning and knowledge management at The Foundation. In order to avoid confusion as regards what was meant by the 'learning organisation' in the context of the interview, participants were provided with a definition as per Pedler et al. (1991) during the introduction. A learning organisation is "an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself" as a result (Pedler et al., 1991, p. 1).

Target group: Nine FHF staff members (six women, three men) including two in selected country offices (Pakistan, Rwanda) and seven in Australia headquarters (Sydney and Melbourne) were recruited via stratified purposeful sampling based on the relevance of their role to the research topic, length of employment in the organisation, level of seniority and geographical location. The aim was to establish a diverse sample to allow for a broader range of views to be captured. The stakeholder group included senior managers, Monitoring & Evaluation officers and project officers in selected country offices, staff from the headquarters Programs team based in Sydney, as well as members from the Research and Medical teams based in Melbourne.

Data collection: I developed the initial interview guide based on the themes that had emerged from the literature review I had conducted, with a specific focus on the eight key functions of the learning organisation outlined by Britton (1998). The interview guide was then piloted with two participants who provided feedback after each interview. It was subsequently refined based on these discussions and my own observations.

External semi-structured interviews

Purpose and key features: Interviews with participants from external organisations were conducted to understand which organisational learning strategies or mechanisms are deemed effective in their structures and whether some of them would be transferable to The Fred Hollows Foundation. The interview guide was the same as with the internal interviews, the only exception being that a few questions specific to FHF were not asked of external interviewees.

Participants: Eight interviews (three women, five men) were undertaken with staff members representing external organisations. Among the eight interviewees, five were from international NGOs (INGOs) among which two interviewees were working for INGOs with a specific focus on public health; and three interviewees were from public health organisations outside the INGO sector (Australian Defence Force, health service delivery, public health research institution). Initially, all the external interviews were intended to be undertaken with Organisational Learning or Knowledge Management specialists in INGOs with a particular focus on public health. It soon became apparent that such positions do not exist in the vast majority of INGOs, including public health INGOs. The decision was therefore made to take a broader perspective of public health and look more widely at the public health field to capture the perceptions and experiences of other sectors within public health. The majority of participants (five out of eight) were Organisational Learning, Knowledge Management or Monitoring & Evaluation specialists in their respective organisations and were therefore selected through purposeful sampling, as I was confident that they would have rich insights and relevant views (Kuzel, 1999) on organisational learning in their workplace due to the nature of their role. The three remaining respondents were members of public health organisations (academia, army, ambulance services) selected through convenience sampling (Kuzel, 1999).

Data collection: The questions were piloted with one external participant to ensure the approach used was suitable before being rolled out with other external interviewees. The interviewee was requested to verbally provide detailed feedback at the end of the pilot interview, which was used to slightly clarify and amend some of the questions. No questions were added or removed as a result of the pilot interview feedback.

Focus-group discussions (FGDs)

Purpose and key features: During internal interviews with FHF staff, it became apparent that some team members had little understanding or knowledge of OL & KM and some interviews therefore lacked depth and relevance. Some of the questions in the individual interview guide that was initially developed for this research project appeared too complex and interviewees tended to get confused between individual learning (e.g. training) and organisational learning.

To mitigate this issue, I considered introducing focus-group discussions into my research design. According to Lehoux, Poland and Daudelin (2009), "focus groups are social spaces in which participants co-construct the 'patient's [or other] view' by sharing, contesting and acquiring knowledge" (p. 2). Focus-group discussions therefore appeared particularly suited, as I was interested in capturing participants' co-constructed views on OL & KM at The Fred Hollows Foundation and observing how interacting with each other would enhance their understanding and comprehension of the various concepts. I was also curious to observe how they would apply (or not) this freshly acquired insight on OL & KM to their assessment of our organisation.

In the meantime, I had come across an 'organisational learning and knowledge management capacity assessment tool' (KM-CAST) that was developed specifically to facilitate group discussions on organisational learning and that was designed to be appropriate regardless of the level of knowledge of the audience (Mansfield, 2015). This tool was developed specifically for INGOs and is unpatented (free to access and to use). Participants are invited to rank their organisation against nine knowledge management areas as per the criteria described according to five levels (Novice to Expert). Based on what I learnt from conducting internal individual interviews, it became clear that focus-group discussions would provide additional and richer information by stimulating conversations between team members.

Participants: Ten internal focus-group discussions were conducted with Fred Hollows Foundation staff members who had not yet been part of individual interviews (n=48, 29 women, 19 men). The number of participants in each discussion was between four and six. Participants were recruited via a mix of purposeful stratified sampling and convenience sampling. All the staff members from relevant teams with a focus or interest in organisational learning and knowledge management were invited to join the discussion and those who were available and interested in participating attended.

Data collection: The focus-group discussions were conducted using the abovementioned KM-CAST tool as a discussion guide. This approach was tested in a pilot focus-group discussion with members of the Development Effectiveness team. The tool was deemed appropriate for use and applied as such in the remaining focus-group discussions. It was distributed to all participants in electronic form prior to the session and in print form during the session. All FGDs were conducted face-to-face and facilitated by me. The fact that the tool had a scoring system with clear criteria greatly mitigated disagreements regarding the organisation's performance against each category. Where slight discrepancies arose in the scoring for a particular criterion, participants were individually asked to provide their scoring and an average of all individual scores was recorded as the final rating.

Research journal

Observation is an essential component of the ethnographic research framework (Patton, 2002) and self-inquiry is a key feature of reflexivity in ethnographic research (Denshire, 2010, 2011a, 2011b). Therefore, I kept a detailed research journal through each step of my research project to track and monitor my experiences as both a researcher and an active participant in my organisation. Detailed notes were taken during the literature review research and write-up phase of the thesis to note elements from the literature that triggered reflection on whether the concepts found in the literature applied to The Fred Hollows Foundation, and when they did not; and early thoughts on how this could inform the development of a strategy for The Foundation. I also recorded my thoughts immediately after conducting interviews and took extensive notes during the analysis of interview transcripts and focus-group discussion minutes. This process allowed me to reflect on interesting ideas and statements and identify whether they contradicted or aligned with the literature and the data already analysed. Referring back to my journal proved essential in developing and constantly refining the thematic framework. The interview analysis process also triggered many reflections on my own assumptions as regards where FHF is situated on the learning organisation continuum. Compiling and revisiting these research notes supported reflexivity, an important practice in organisational ethnography (Yanow, Ybema & van Hulst, 2011), as described further in the Reflexivity subsection below (section 3.4).

Ethics

This study was approved by the University of New South Wales Medical and Community Human Research Advisory panel (HREA 2014-7-59). For the survey, consent was explicitly sought through the inclusion of a message at the beginning of the online survey questionnaire explaining that consent would be implied when staff members chose to proceed to the next page by clicking on the ‘Next’ button. For interview and focus-group discussions, informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to taking part in the study, either in written form (consent form) or verbally when the consent form could not be obtained in advance. No personal identification information about participants was to be collected during the survey. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured through anonymous interviews, focus-group discussions and participation in the survey, and de-identification of all data during transcription.

3.4 Data analysis and rigour

Survey analysis

Raw data was extracted from the online licensed software used for data collection in the form of Excel spreadsheets. Due to the small sample size (n=119), it was deemed appropriate to undertake the descriptive analysis in the Microsoft Excel software. Results were tabulated for each question using various demographic characteristics such as the location, level of seniority and length of service of respondents at The Foundation. During analysis, response categories for the closed-ended questions were collapsed from a five-point to a three-point Likert scale (agree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree). Answers to the open-ended questions collected through free text fields were consolidated, analysed manually and summarised into short narratives.

Answers to most closed-ended questions were displayed in tabular form using percentages for ease of analysis and comparison. However, some questions were presented as bar charts in the Findings chapter (Chapter Four) to facilitate their understanding and analysis by an audience of practitioners.

Interview analysis

Participants were assigned a unique identifier number at the time of recruitment to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. A digital tape recorder was used so that the entirety of the interviews could be transcribed verbatim for analysis. Prior to the interview commencing, each of them was asked whether they agreed to the interview being digitally recorded and they were also notified when the recording commenced and concluded. The interviews were then professionally transcribed in full and all identifying information removed from the transcripts prior to analysis.

The four-step process outlined by Bryman (2012) on coding transcripts for qualitative analysis and Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step model on conducting a thematic analysis present simple and clear guidelines to identify, analyse and report on qualitative data. While they provide useful insight into coding methodology and a good starting point to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis, I did not strictly follow each step to analyse my interview transcripts. Braun and Clarke (2006) advocated for a flexible approach to analysing qualitative research findings to ensure data analysis models and methods can be adapted and remain useful. I therefore used the elements from each model that I deemed useful to guide my analysis. An inductive approach was initially used to analyse the data, as a gap had been identified both from my own observations as a practitioner (see Chapter One) and following a rapid scan of the literature (Chapter Two), and also in order to avoid being limited by the academic and grey documentation I had already reviewed (Birleson & Brann, 2006; Rowley, 2006). I was particularly interested in identifying data that could add to the body of knowledge on organisational learning in international NGOs and Ritchie (2001) has argued that an inductive approach to analysing qualitative data can inform theory development. I used the Nvivo qualitative data analysis computer software to organise, sort through and categorise the dataset in order to prepare the analysis of interviews. A research assistant (employed by The Foundation at the time) and I independently coded five transcripts from the same interviews, which amounted to about a quarter of the total number of interview transcripts. We separately developed 'coding nodes' (codes) that were then organised into concept maps using the Mind Map feature in Nvivo. Developing concept maps allowed us to establish a hierarchy between the codes, identify emerging themes and highlight connections between some of these themes and codes. They also provided an easy way to compare the node structures we had independently created. This formed the basis for the development of a thematic framework that was produced and refined as per discussions comparing similarities and differences.

After this initial phase of interview analysis, I carried out a more in-depth review of the literature (see Chapter Two) using the NVivo software to code the main themes emerging from published and grey documentation. Once the literature review was complete, I continued coding the remaining transcripts (12) inductively using the coding framework developed during the initial phase of interview analysis. It quickly became apparent that there were many areas of overlap between the codes identified in the literature and those emerging from my interviews. As an example, the eight categories outlined in Britton's framework (1998) were directly applicable to classify specific mechanisms that arose from interviews, although a new category emerged outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector. Findings from the interview analysis are presented in detail in Chapter Four. The coding framework (themes and codes) was therefore refined and expanded using a selection of the concepts identified in the literature, which is typical of a deductive approach in qualitative data analysis (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). This updated coding framework was subsequently applied to the entirety of the interview transcripts (17) during the final re-coding phase.

According to Gale et al. (2013), a combined approach is appropriate in qualitative research when the analysis aims to explore specific issues but also "leave space to discover other unexpected aspects of the participants' experience" (p. 3) and perceptions (ibid). As a result of this combination of inductive and deductive analysis, I produced a final thematic framework that was applied to provide an 'at-a-glance' assessment of all The Foundation's current and potential mechanisms identified in the survey, internal interviews and focus-group discussions (see Appendix 5). This evidence-informed Knowledge Management Diagnostic Tool proved particularly useful to communicate the need to focus on potential areas for improvement to my colleagues as an audience of practitioners and is well aligned with the principles driving collaboration in action research inquiry (Acosta, Goltz, & Goodson, 2015).

Informal member checking (Ritchie, 2001) was carried out with interview participants by requesting informant feedback on the summarised information collected from participants at the end of each interview. In addition, some interviewees were contacted during the analysis of interview transcripts to address errors and verify unclear statements in the transcribed information. During these follow-up discussions, they were also invited to provide additional information that had not been covered during interviews and reflections when deemed relevant. As described above, peer involvement (Ritchie, 2001) was ensured through independent coding by myself and the research assistant.

Focus-group discussions (FGDs)

Participants were assigned a unique identifier number at the time of recruitment to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Prior to the focus-group discussion commencing, each of them was asked whether they agreed to the discussion being digitally recorded and they were also notified when the recording commenced and concluded. Detailed handwritten and/or typed notes were taken to record both the ratings given by participants as a collective for each criterion of the KM-CAST knowledge management self-assessment tool (Mansfield, 2015) and the explanations provided during discussions to justify scorings for each category. In addition, a digital tape recorder was used to record the entirety of the discussions as a backup in case the detailed notes were accidentally destroyed.

During discussions, participants were invited to rank FHF's performance against nine knowledge management areas as per the criteria described according to five levels (Novice to Expert) and to reach consensus on an average score for each area. The ratings for each FGD were then tabulated into an Excel spreadsheet and an average score across all FGDs was calculated for each criterion between zero (level 1 – novice) and 4 (level 5 – expert). These averages were used to produce a spider chart (see Chapter Four, section 4.2, Figure 7) providing at a glance a benchmarking and baseline self-assessment of The Foundation's performance regarding organisational learning and knowledge management. This spider chart can easily be understood by an audience of practitioners. It can also be compared with other organisations' charts as part of a benchmarking exercise and applied during a later self-assessment exercise to track progress overtime against the criteria.

The detailed narrative notes were utilised for comparison and triangulation to corroborate or contrast the data collected from the interview transcripts and answers to the survey's open-ended questions. They were consolidated into one document, analysed in-depth to uncover the main ideas that emerged and served to refine codes and themes in the thematic framework.

Member checking (Ritchie, 2001) was undertaken by distributing summarised notes from the discussions to all FGD participants and requesting comments, corrections of potential errors or misinterpretation of statements and additional information.

Participatory data analysis and engagement workshops

After this stage of in-depth academic analysis of the data collected through the survey, interviews and focus-group discussions conducted in my workplace as an insider, practitioner researcher, there was a need to involve The Foundation's key stakeholders in further exploring the findings. In line with the methodological approach to action research drawing on collaborative inquiry, this stage of the analysis was designed to allow The Foundation's employees at various levels, departments and geographical locations of the organisation to analyse the findings in a participatory manner during stakeholder engagement workshops. It was deemed essential to the success of the project to give them the opportunity to examine the consolidated study results using their practitioner lens and experience to produce outcomes that would be directly applicable and useful to the organisation and its staff members (Hartley, 2017; Reason & Bradbury, 2008).

This additional step of analysis also aimed to build engagement and ownership of the findings and solutions generated through a participatory examination of the data and co-creation of the output. This is in line with the principles outlined in collaboration in action research, which is based on the assumption that research findings will be used to develop a plan to implement proposed changes, which will then be assessed in subsequent cycles (Acosta, Goltz, & Goodson, 2015).

A stakeholder mapping exercise was first conducted by the Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management team with support from a senior independent consultant specialised in OL & KM to identify the most adequate workshop participants. The selection criteria included whether and how their roles involved aspects of OL & KM, as well as their level of influence and seniority in the organisation. The final list of participants was developed to ensure varied representation across Divisions and hierarchical levels and was validated by each Division director.

Three face-to-face Engagement and Input workshops were held with various team representatives who had a stake or an interest in building a learning organisation as per the stakeholder mapping (n=32 participants in total). The purpose of these research dissemination and translation workshops was to allow participants to familiarise themselves in an interactive and structured manner with the detailed findings from the research to date. This led to discussions on visualising and shaping the desired future of The Foundation as a high performing learning organisation through interactive exercises that included drawing and storytelling. A series of teleconferences were subsequently conducted by the OL & KM team and the independent consultant with staff members who were interested in participating in this process but could not physically attend the workshops, all of them International Programs colleagues located in regional/country offices and the London office (n=14). These phone conversations followed the same pattern as the workshops so the information captured could be directly incorporated into the workshop output.

The output from the three Engagement and Input workshops and teleconferences was collated, structured and combined with the mixed-method study results in preparation for the final Consolidation and Finalisation workshop. This workshop comprised of volunteers who had already attended the Engagement and Input workshops (n=14) and were presented with the consolidated output described above. The proposed draft vision for the desired future of The Fred Hollows Foundation as a learning organisation was utilised to develop and refine a vision statement and three strategic objectives. An implementation plan including a draft operating model, roles and responsibilities and next steps was also established. This formed the basis for the OL & KM Strategy presented in Chapter Five. In addition, during the strategy development process, regular check-ins and collection of feedback on the successive draft strategy documents were undertaken.

Reflexivity

In this research project, I was both a researcher and practitioner with responsibility as the Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management Specialist. I was therefore cognisant of the fact that I was affecting my environment and actively contributing to and driving the changes happening in my organisation. Conventional ethnography refers to the in-depth observation and study of the 'other' and critics note this can lead to the traditional ethnographer being invisible or hidden yet omniscient in ethnographic accounts (Anderson, 2006). It was useful to be aware of these features and to be guided by the methodological literature to know where to position myself and how to approach this research.

As a practitioner researcher studying my own organisation, I was cognisant of the fact that I was effectively becoming a 'research tool' in my organisation's journey. This also meant that my work would be deeply affected by the 'me' as both a researcher and practitioner. As a consequence, I wanted to be able to include my own experiences, learnings and reflections into the research process. At every step of my study, I thus kept a detailed research journal to track and monitor my experiences as both a researcher and an active participant in my organisation throughout the project. This included my reflections on the research process. I later revisited those notes on a regular basis to add reflexive comments to guide the refinement of my thesis, in particular the literature review (Chapter Two) and recommendations (Chapter Six). I also kept detailed notes of regular informal brainstorming with colleagues that also supported me in the writing process.

These practices are well aligned with the principles of "sensitivity to the hidden dimensions of organizational life", "highly reflexive research" and "highly relational research" (Yanow, Ybema & van Hulst, 2011, p. 8). These concepts underpin organisational ethnography intersecting with action research undertaken by an insider researcher. Being aware of these features allowed me to document, analyse and explore the experience of conceptualising and developing an evidence-informed strategy for organisational learning and knowledge management in my organisation while making my voice in this process not only visible, but a valuable research output in itself. By capturing my own experiences, analysis, observations and reflections as part of my research, I was able to position myself as a reflective practitioner (Denshire, 2010, 2011a, 2011b), a key feature of the learning organisation (Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013).

Chapter 4: Findings

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter aims to present and analyse the findings from the studies undertaken at The Fred Hollows Foundation in such a way that will be useful for practitioners reviewing these results while at the same time maintaining academic rigour. Visual representations of results such as bar charts and spider charts were produced with that purpose in mind.

The findings were used to develop an evidence-informed strategy presented in the next chapter. A short discussion at the end of the chapter presents implications and suggested future directions for The Fred Hollows Foundation and the wider INGO sector. Specific recommendations are presented in Chapter Six.

4.1 Findings from the survey

Summary of participants

All staff members in country offices (n=13 offices) as well as the Sydney Programs Division, the Global Policy, Partnerships and Advocacy Division based in Melbourne, and the London (UK) Resource Mobilisation team (211 staff members in total) were invited to participate in an online electronic survey. 138 staff members (65.4%) took part, of which 119 (56.4%) fully completed the survey. In summary, participants were mostly based in country offices (74.8%, 89/119), while the remaining respondents were based in Sydney, Melbourne and London (25.2%, 30/119). The majority were female (55.5%, 66/119) and were aged 25-34 years (37.0%, 44/119). Almost a third (31.9%, 38/119) had been employed by The Fred Hollows Foundation for two to five years at the time of the survey. Most respondents in the country offices (53.9%, 48/89) were program/project officers. The survey data is presented descriptively as no significant differences in the responses was found by the demographic variables recorded (sex, age group, length of service, area of specialisation and type of position). The demographic characteristics of participants are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of survey participants

Characteristic	% (no. of participants) n = 119
Sex	
Female	55.5% (66)
Male	44.5% (53)
Age group (years)	
18-24	0.8% (1)
25-34	37.0% (44)
35-44	34.5% (41)
45-54	21.0% (25)
55-64	5.0% (6)
≥ 65	0% (0)
Not specified	1.7% (2)
Length of service at The Fred Hollows Foundation (months / years)	
0-3 months	7.6% (9)
3-6 months	6.0% (7)
6-12 months	12.6% (15)
1-2 years	16.8% (20)
2-5 years	31.9% (38)
5-10 years	20.2% (24)
≥ 10 years	5.0% (6)
Location	
Africa	31.1% (37)
East Asia	26.1% (31)
South Asia / Middle East	10.9% (13)
Indigenous Australia Program	6.7% (8)
Sydney/Melbourne/London (UK)	25.2% (30)
Area of specialisation (n=89)[4]	
Program/project management	82.0% (73)
Monitoring & evaluation	10.1% (9)
Communications	5.6% (5)
Advocacy	2.3% (2)
Type of position (n=89)[4]	
Country manager	10.1% (9)
Senior manager	33.7% (30)
Officer	53.9% (48)
Community mobiliser	2.3% (2)

[4] These characteristics only applied to respondents based in country offices (n=89).

Survey results analysis

Responsibility for organisational learning and knowledge management in country offices

As shown in Table 2, participants who were based in country offices (n=89) were asked to nominate who they thought should be responsible for organisational learning and knowledge management. The senior managers such as country managers (64.0%, 57/89) and program/project managers (52.8%, n=47) were nominated as being the staff members responsible. Interestingly, even though the monitoring and evaluation function typically covers the capturing and/or sharing of knowledge and learning (Roper & Pettit, 2002), only 24.7% of participants (22/89) identified that this position oversaw OL & KM in their respective locations. There were no significant differences in responses by sex, age group, length of service, area of specialisation, geographical area and type of position.

Table 2: Survey participants' perceptions on who should be responsible for organisational learning and knowledge management in their location

Response (several choices possible)	% (no. of participants) n = 89 [5]
Country manager	64.0% (57)
Program / project manager	52.8% (47)
Monitoring & evaluation specialist	24.7% (22)
Program / project officer	20.2% (18)
Communications officer	10.1% (9)
Advocacy officer	6.7% (6)
Human resource specialist	6.7% (6)
Operations manager	2.3% (2)
Finance manager	1.1% (1)
Not applicable to location / not sure	14.6% (13)

[5] This question was only posed to respondents based in country offices (n=89).

Perceptions of FHF as a learning organisation

As per Table 3, almost two-thirds of respondents agreed that FHF can be defined as a learning organisation (63.0%, 75/119) while 25.5% disagreed (28/119). However, the results varied greatly per location: while most of the in-country staff (69.7%, 62/89) agreed that FHF is a learning organisation, only 36.7% (11/30) of the staff based in the Sydney/Melbourne/London offices agreed and almost half of them (46.7%, 14/30) disagreed.

Table 3: Participants' perceptions of The Fred Hollows Foundation as a learning organisation

Statement: Overall, FHF is a learning organisation	**Response % (no. of participants) n = 119**		
	Strongly agree /agree	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Strongly disagree/disagree**
Africa (n=37)	73.0% (27)	8.1% (3)	18.9% (7)
East Asia (n=31)	77.4% (24)	12.9% (4)	9.7% (3)
South Asia / Middle East (n=13)	53.8% (7)	23.1% (3)	23.1% (3)
Indigenous Australia Program (n=8)	75.0% (4)	12.5% (2)	12.5% (2)
Total in-country respondents (n=89)	69.7% (62)	13.4% (12)	16.9% (15)
Sydney / Melbourne / London (n=30)	36.7% (11)	16.7% (5)	46.6% (14)
Grand total (n=119)	63.0% (75)	13.5% (16)	25.5% (28)

Perceptions of The Fred Hollows Foundation's performance on specific aspects of organisational learning and knowledge management

Survey respondents were asked to provide their perceptions of FHF's level of achievement in relation to eight key functions of the learning organisation: creating a supportive culture; gathering internal experience; accessing external learning; communication systems; mechanisms for drawing conclusions; developing an organisational memory; integrating learning into programming strategy and policy; and applying the learning. The results are described below and displayed in Tables 4.1 to 4.4.

Creating a supportive culture and gathering internal experience

Participants were asked about their level of comfort regarding sharing information. As per Table 4.1, it was interesting to see that although a very high percentage (85.7%, 102/119) of respondents were comfortable with sharing their knowledge with colleagues, only 57.1% (68/119) of them felt that the organisation supported knowledge sharing between staff members. Similarly, a high percentage (72.3%, 86/119) of respondents reported that they documented learning in their own work but just over half of them (51.3%, 61/119) believed that The Foundation was encouraging the knowledge captured by individual staff members to be shared across the organisation. Respondents in Melbourne/Sydney/London (30.0%, 9/30) were most likely to disagree that FHF acknowledged mistakes as a part of the learning process.

Table 4.1: Survey participants' perceptions of FHF's performance on creating a supportive culture and gathering internal experience

	Response % (no. of participants) n = 119		
Statements	**Strongly agree/agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Strongly disagree/disagree**
Creating a supportive culture			
The organisational culture and environment acknowledges that mistakes are part of learning.	70.6% (84)	13.4% (16)	16.0% (19)
Sharing experience and knowledge through collaboration is a high priority at FHF.	57.1% (68)	16.8% (20)	26.1% (31)
Managers are open to suggestions on alternative ways of getting work done and value new ideas.	64.7% (77)	20.2% (24)	15.1% (18)
In our team we have already used a piloting approach when trying out new ideas.	64.7% (77)	19.3% (23)	16.0% (19)
In my role I am confident in making my personal knowledge and wisdom available to others.	85.7% (102)	11.8% (14)	2.5% (3)
Gathering internal experience			
I document project learning in my own work.	72.3% (86)	16.0% (19)	11.7% (14)
FHF has efficient procedures to monitor and evaluate its programs.	47.0% (56)	28.6% (34)	24.4% (29)
People at FHF are encouraged to share information about what does and doesn't work.	60.5% (72)	23.5% (28)	16.0% (19)
The organisation encourages formal and informal opportunities for staff to share lessons learnt.	63.0% (75)	18.5% (22)	18.5% (22)
People at all levels are encouraged to draw and share lessons with other parts of the organisation.	51.3% (61)	23.5% (28)	25.2% (30)

Accessing external learning and communication systems

Table 4.2 shows respondents consistently expressed satisfaction in accessing external learning via co-operative relationships (60.5%, 72/119) and networking (60.5%, 72/119). However, this did not necessarily translate into other types of external knowledge-sharing activities such as learning visits to other organisations, as shown by the fact that only 42.9% of participants (51/119) agreed with the related statement. Access to information and information flows were also seen as problematic, with 42.9% (51/119) of respondents reporting that accessing information on lessons learnt was difficult and only 40.3% (48/119) of them agreeing that information flowed freely at The Foundation. In particular, a very high proportion of respondents based in Sydney/Melbourne/London (93.3%, 28/30) did not believe that it was easy to access lessons learnt from other parts of the organisation.

Table 5.2: Survey participants' perceptions of FHF's performance on accessing external learning and communication systems

	Response % (no. of participants) n = 119		
Statements	**Strongly agree/agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Strongly disagree/disagree**
Accessing external learning			
FHF has open relationships with other organisations (partners in country, other eye health NGOs, other INGOs etc.) which enable mutual learning.	60.5% (72)	23.5% (28)	16.0% (19)
Networking is seen as an important activity: FHF encourages its staff to develop contacts with others.	61.3% (73)	16.0% (19)	22.7% (27)
Staff are encouraged to visit other organisations and are expected to share observations with colleagues.	42.8% (51)	24.4% (29)	32.8% (39)
The organisation is linked to a wide range of networks and uses them to gather useful knowledge and skills.	60.5% (72)	23.5% (28)	16.0% (19)
Communication systems			
It is easy to access information on the lessons learned from other parts of the organisation.	39.5% (47)	17.6% (21)	42.9% (51)
Staff have access to a wide range of communication media for sharing knowledge and experience with different functions, teams, departments and locations.	57.2% (68)	23.5% (28)	19.3% (23)
Information flows freely through the organisation.	40.3% (48)	28.6% (34)	31.1% (37)
In my role I know which mechanisms to use in order to make my personal knowledge available to others.	63.0% (75)	21.0% (25)	16.0% (19)

Mechanisms for drawing conclusions and developing an organisational memory

As shown in Table 4.3, mechanisms for drawing conclusions received mixed views from respondents. Participants were in agreement that finding better ways of doing things was of importance for both individuals (79.8%, 95/119) and teams (78.2%, 93/119) at The Foundation. However, only 47.9% (57/119) agreed that research translation into knowledge for the whole organisation was done well. Four out of five statements related to developing an organisational memory received low scores in terms of mechanisms for remembering experience and lessons learnt (43.7%, 52/119), access to key written documentation (37.0%, 44/119), retaining the knowledge of departing members (33.6%, 40/119) and resourcing of knowledge management (36.1%, 40/119). However, while participants felt that these mechanisms were not present at the organisational level, they agreed that in their teams these mechanisms existed, as reported by 60.0% (72/119) of them.

Table 6.3: Survey participants' perceptions of FHF's performance on mechanisms for drawing conclusions and developing an organisational memory

	Response % (no. of participants) n = 119		
Statements	**Strongly agree/agree**	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Strongly disagree/disagree**
Mechanisms for drawing conclusions			
At FHF, people are interested in trying better ways of doing things.	79.8% (95)	11.8% (14)	8.4% (10)
At FHF, learning from experience is seen as 'everyone's business' and not left to senior managers or specific positions.	58.8% (70)	21.9% (26)	19.3% (23)
Monitoring & evaluation reports and field visit reports are used to identify what has been learned from the work and what lessons could be applied in the future.	55.5% (66)	21.0% (25)	23.5% (28)
The organisation is skilled at converting information from research into knowledge for the whole organisation.	47.9% (57)	29.4% (35)	22.7% (27)
In my team we are encouraged to constantly ask ourselves: "How could we do this better?"	78.2% (93)	10.9% (13)	10.9% (13)

Table 4.3 cont.: Survey participants' perceptions of FHF's performance on mechanisms for drawing conclusions and developing an organisational memory

Statements	Response % (no. of participants) n = 119 Strongly agree/agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Strongly disagree/disagree
Developing an organisational memory			
FHF has mechanisms for 'remembering' the experience and lessons learnt from its current and previous work.	43.7% (52)	24.4% (29)	31.9% (38)
All key written reports and other documents capturing learning are easily accessible to all staff.	37.0% (44)	27.7% (33)	35.3% (42)
When individuals leave FHF we are able to retain their knowledge in the organisation.	33.6% (40)	32.8% (39)	33.6% (40)
Information and knowledge management is adequately resourced at all levels at FHF.	36.1% (43)	31.1% (37)	32.8% (39)
In my team we have efficient mechanisms (not necessarily electronic) in place to keep key data, information and records on our programs and projects up to date.	60.5% (72)	15.1% (18)	24.4% (29)

Integrating learning into strategy/policy and applying the learning

As per Table 4.4, participants were generally satisfied that there were opportunities to contribute to the policy-making or programming strategy processes in their context, both in their roles (67.2%, 80/119) and respective locations (66.4%, 79/119). However, only 42.0% (50/119) felt confident that the organisation supported senior management with decision-making around programming strategies. Among those, it is encouraging to note that a high proportion of country managers (77.8%, 7/9) felt supported by FHF in terms of evidence-based decision-making. Participants' assessment of mechanisms to apply the learning drew mixed and somewhat contradictory results. A high percentage of respondents (73.1%, 87/119) felt that the organisation was skilled at using new knowledge to reassess priorities and adapt practice. However, only 47.9% (57/119) of them reported that the organisation systematically used learning to improve internal practice or influence the policy and practice of others.

Table 7.4: Survey participants' perceptions of FHF's performance on integrating learning into strategy/policy and applying the learning

Statements	Response % (no. of participants) n = 119		
	Strongly agree/agree	**Neither agree nor disagree**	**Strongly disagree/disagree**
Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy			
As a program person I feel confident contributing to policy making in my context.	67.2% (80)	18.5% (22)	14.3% (17)
In my location, implementing a new project is organised as a continuous learning process.	66.4% (79)	21.8% (26)	11.8% (14)
In my location, we hold regular events to learn as a country team or department (e.g. time allocated during team meetings, specific workshops to share lessons learnt, annual review meetings…).	64.7% (77)	22.7% (27)	12.6% (15)
At FHF mechanisms exist at the organisational level to help senior managers make decisions on which programming strategies should be continued and which ones should be abandoned based on concrete evidence and experience.	42.0% (50)	42.0% (50)	16.0% (19)
Applying the learning			
In my location when developing a new project note, concept brief or a project implementation plan (PIP) we systematically review and integrate recommendations from past evaluations conducted in our location.	58.0% (69)	27.7% (33)	14.3% (17)
In my location when developing a new project note, concept brief or PIP we know how to access lessons learnt from other parts of the organisation (e.g. similar project implemented in another country).	39.5% (47)	37.0% (44)	23.5% (28)
FHF systematically uses learning to improve our own practice or influence the policy and practice of others (e.g. partners, other NGOs, institutional donors).	47.9% (57)	37.8% (45)	14.3% (17)
At FHF when we scale up an activity or a project, the decision is made based on thorough analysis of lessons learnt and a clear understanding of what does/doesn't work.	58.8% (70)	24.4% (29)	16.8% (20)
At FHF we are prepared to reassess our priorities and change the way we do things to reflect new knowledge.	73.1% (87)	16.8% (20)	10.1% (12)

Summary of perceptions of FHF's performance on specific aspects of organisational learning and knowledge management

Overall, participants agreed with most (25) of the 37 statements regarding their perceptions of the organisation's performance on specific aspects of organisational learning and knowledge management. Only 12 out of those 37 statements saw less than 50% of participants strongly agree/agree. 67.2% (80/119) of survey respondents estimated FHF's performance in terms of organisational learning to be good, very good or excellent with a weighted average of 6.2 out of 10.

The highest score was obtained in the 'Creating a supportive culture' grouping. 85.7% of respondents (102/119) agreed that they were confident in making their personal knowledge and wisdom available to others as part of their role. 'Developing an organisational memory' was seen as a real challenge by respondents, with four out of five statements obtaining a score of less than 50% (between 33.6% and 43.7%) of participants agreeing. The lowest score was obtained in this grouping, with only 33.6% (40/119) of respondents believing that when individuals leave, the organisation can retain their knowledge. The themes 'Applying the learning' and 'Communication systems' respectively had two out of five and two out of four statements obtaining a score of less than 50% of participants agreeing.

It was encouraging to see from the statements on integrating learning into programming strategy and policy that participants felt they were able to contribute ideas at the policy and strategy level in their roles and locations, as this aspect of organisational learning was reported as a high priority in Question 20 for staff members who took the survey. However, there seemed to be a disconnect in that area between the local and organisational level, as it was largely reported that the organisation did not sufficiently support senior management with decision-making around programming strategies.

Challenges to documenting and applying lessons learnt at The Fred Hollows Foundation and resources needed to better capture learning

Two open-ended questions were posed on the practice of capturing and using knowledge at The Foundation, including challenges and resources required to do so. Many survey respondents answered by providing detailed comments. In summary, they largely felt that documentation and sharing of lessons learnt was not sufficiently happening. Some of these reasons could be linked to the insufficiently supportive organisational culture, e.g. a lack of incentives to do so especially from management, as well as workload, competing priorities and a lack of confidence that the documented learning would be used. Respondents also reported that the resources required to store and share learning documentation were not in place, for instance inadequate electronic systems for filing and sharing documents and unclear processes for storing knowledge. An organisational structure operating in silos and an absence of personal connections between staff members working in different locations was deemed to make it difficult for information to flow at the organisational level. Interestingly, in contrast with many respondents reporting a lack of documentation, one respondent cited information overload as a challenge preventing lessons learnt from being applied.

It is worth noting that respondents advocated for earmarked time dedicated to learning and that they suggested introducing an element of compliance to do so. They also expressed a need for appropriate staffing for learning, both through an expert or experts with a specific skillset and through training of all program staff on aspects of organisational learning (e.g. reporting, documentation of lessons learnt).

These ideas were further elaborated on in the interviews as analysed below. A detailed account of the comments provided by participants is presented in this manuscript in Appendices 6 and 7.

Areas of OL & KM to be prioritised at The Fred Hollows Foundation

As per Figure 5, the three main areas of OL & KM mentioned by survey respondents as needing specific attention from the organisation were: (1) ‘Gathering and sharing internal experience’; (2) ‘Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy’; and (3) ‘Creating a supportive culture’. These three categories received quite even scores (between 48.7% and 49.5%), while the fourth category (‘Accessing external learning’) received a lower score (37.8%). Interestingly, the top three areas that respondents would like to see prioritised differed from the areas in which they deemed FHF was not scoring so well

('Developing an organisational memory'; 'Applying the learning'; 'Communication systems'), which they placed in fifth, sixth and seventh positions in terms of priorities.

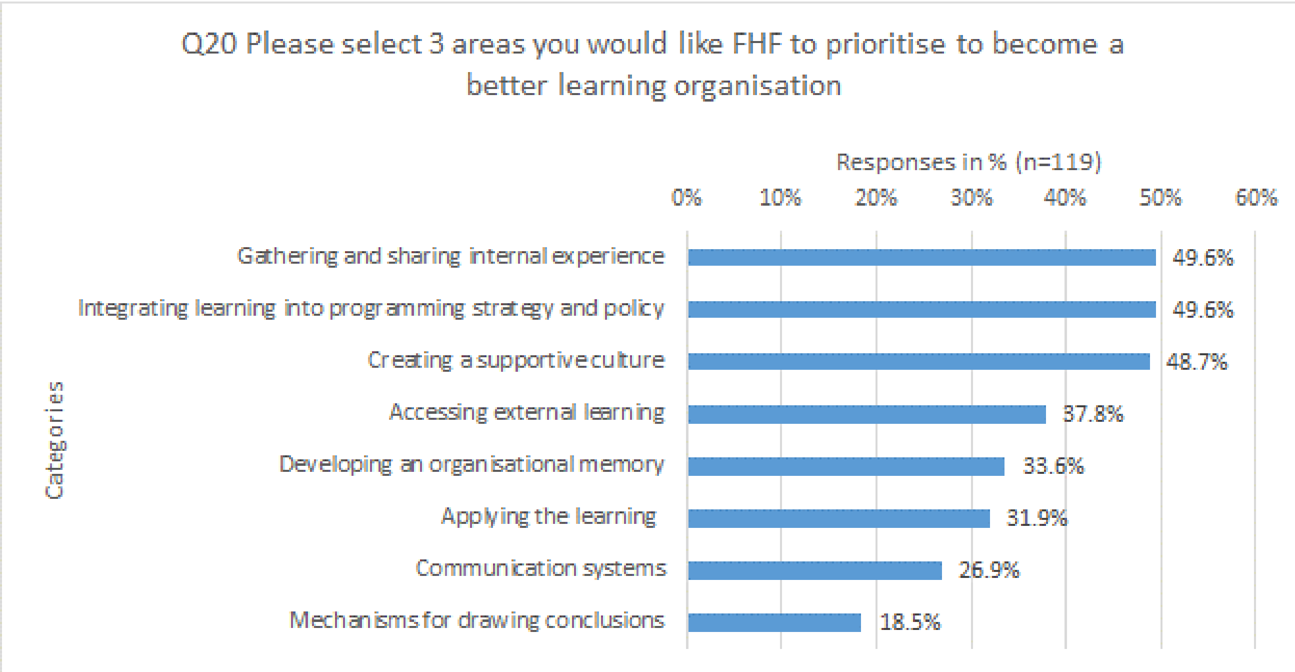

Figure 5: Survey participants' expectations of areas FHF should prioritise from 2016 onward to become a better learning organisation (n=119).

Preferences in terms of communication methods for organisational learning and knowledge management

As shown in Figure 6, email (72.3%, 86/119) was overwhelmingly the preferred form of communication according to survey participants, followed by the intranet (47.1%, 56/119) and reports/other types of documents (43.7%, 52/119). Yammer (a social networking service used for communication in organisations) was one of the less desirable means of communication (21.9%, 26/119). It is interesting to consider these results against the following survey statement: "Staff have access to a wide range of communication media for sharing knowledge and experience between staff in different parts of the organisation.", to which only 57.8% (68/119) agreed. Figure 2 shows that despite the wide range of methods for sharing learning available at FHF, participants had a clear preference for the three media mentioned above.

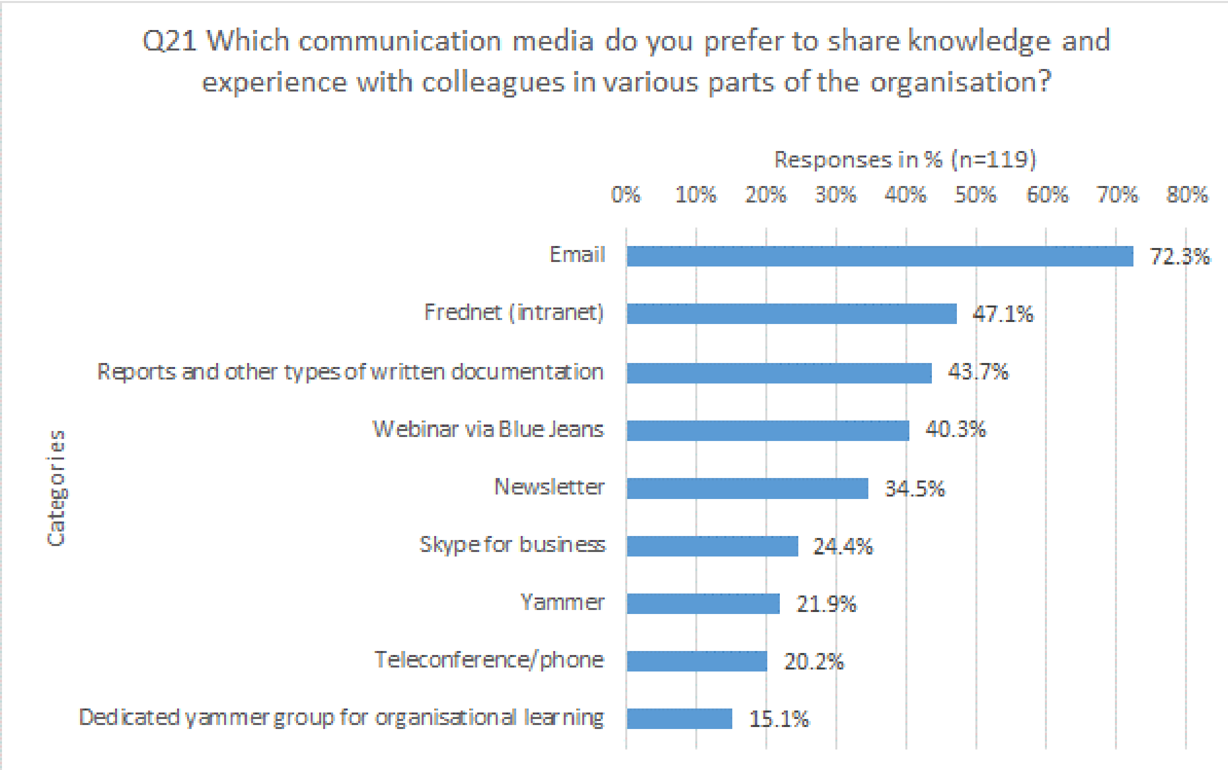

Figure 6: Survey participants' preferred communication media to share knowledge and experience within The Fred Hollows Foundation.

4.2 Findings from interviews and focus-group discussions

The findings from the interviews and focus-group discussions are presented jointly as per the four broad themes below, as the topics that emerged from both methods were largely the same.

Summary of participants

Seventeen semi-structured, in-depth interviews (nine women, eight men) were undertaken. Eleven participants were based in Australia while the remaining participants were based in or were representatives from other countries (Belgium, Pakistan, Rwanda, United Kingdom).

Internal interviews: nine FHF staff members (six women, three men) were interviewed including two in selected country offices and seven in Australia headquarters (Sydney and Melbourne).

External interviews: eight interviews (three women, five men) were undertaken with staff members representing external organisations. This included five participants from international NGOs (INGOs) among which two interviewees were working for INGOs with a specific focus on public health; and three interviewees from public health organisations outside the INGO sector (Australian Defence Force, health service delivery, public health research institution).

Focus-group discussions: ten internal focus-group discussions were conducted with Fred Hollows Foundation staff members from Australia headquarters, regional level and country offices who had not yet been part of individual interviews (48 in total, 29 women, 19 men). All the staff members from relevant teams with a focus or interest in organisational learning and knowledge management were invited to join the discussions and those who were available and interested in participating attended.

Self-assessment of knowledge management capacity at The Foundation conducted through ten focus-group discussions

As described in the Methods chapter (Chapter Three), ten focus-group discussions (n=48) were conducted using a benchmarking and self-assessment tool called 'Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool' or KM-CAST which has been designed specifically for INGOs (Mansfield, 2015). During discussions, participants were invited to rank FHF's performance against the nine knowledge management areas as per the criteria described according to five levels (novice to expert) and reach consensus on an average score for each area. The ratings for each FGD were then tabulated into an Excel spreadsheet and an average score across all FGDs was calculated for each criterion between zero (level 1 – novice) and 4 (level 5 – expert). These averages were used to produce a spider chart (see Figure 3 below), which provides at a glance a benchmarking and baseline self-assessment of The Foundation's performance regarding organisational learning and knowledge management. This spider chart can be quickly and easily understood by an audience of practitioners. It can also be compared with other organisational charts and applied during a later self-assessment exercise to track progress against the criteria.

The ratings across the ten focus-group discussions were consistent for each criterion. This provided a clear indication on areas The Fred Hollows Foundation should focus on. The highest score was obtained for the ‘Awareness and capacity’ criterion (1.5/4) and the ‘Measuring and assessing impact of knowledge management’ received the lowest score (0.3/4). ‘Strategy for knowledge management’ was another area that received a low ranking (0.7/4). The overall average scoring was low (1.11/4), suggesting that all nine areas would require attention and necessitate that corrective actions be put in place to address current gaps. While the categories outlined in the survey differed from the areas covered in the focus-group discussions, it is interesting to note that there is a concordance in the scorings received across these methods on the topic of organisational memory. The ‘Developing an organisational memory’ category was flagged by survey respondents as needing improvement with four out of five statements receiving low rankings. Similarly, the ‘Institutional memory’ area obtained a low score in the FGDs (1.02/4).

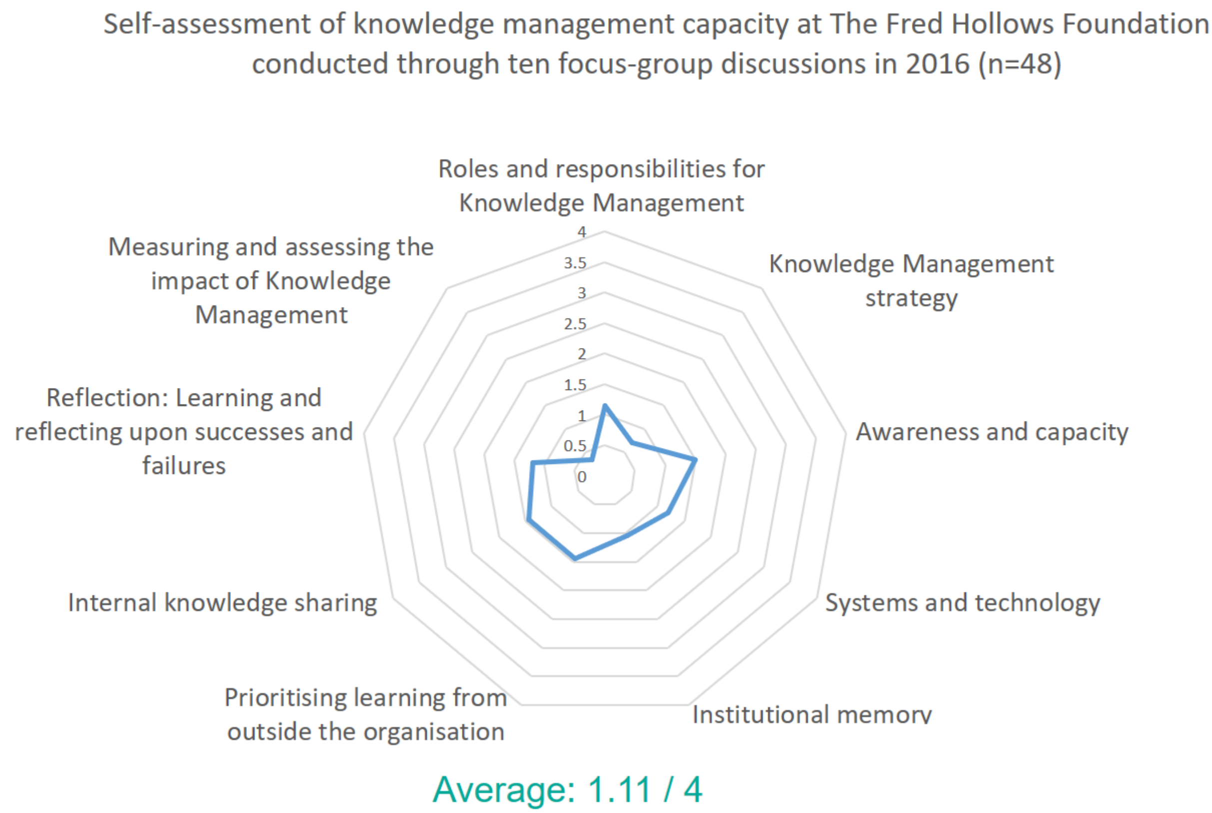

Figure 7: Self-assessment of knowledge management capacity at The Fred Hollows Foundation conducted through ten focus-group discussions in 2016 (n=48).

Themes emerging from interviews and focus-group discussions

Theme one: Rationale for becoming a learning organisation

Participants spoke about a rationale for building a learning organisation, which varied slightly from one institution to the next. Interviewees from FHF and from three other INGOs (including two public health INGOs) clearly articulated the link between the willingness and vision from leadership to strategically position their NGO as a thought leader in their respective sectors and an emphasis on learning at the organisational level:

> *The whole Learning & Knowledge Exchange team came about because obviously our [organization] prioritised, in this last strategy document, that learning and learning management was going […] to be a thought leader in this space. And part*

> *of being a thought leader in the sector was that it had to become better at learning, and improving itself from its own learning, to stay relevant in the industry […]. So, you know, it did come about because of a strategic intent, I guess, in the latest strategy document.* (external interviewee, INGO)

To achieve the outcome of being a thought leader, participants advocated for mechanisms to be implemented to share and disseminate the internal learning outside the organisation. They saw this internal knowledge as complementary to evidence-based external knowledge to ensure the theory documented in these sources is applied in a way that is relevant to the local contexts the organisation operates in:

> *We need to actually rely on theories that exist in the world about how best to do this at a primary health care level […] What is the theory and the evidence telling us as to the best way to run these projects and then how do we adapt these for our context to work in this way? […] So we take the learnings from what we've applied in our context, see where the similarities are, and then project them up and we're creating new knowledge that should be published. It should be getting out there into the public domain but we'll have that exciting info that's coming from across the program.* (internal interviewee, country office)

This participant also urged NGOs to leverage the literature by integrating proven models into their programs, and then demonstrate how they applied them by taking the context into account. This can position an organisation as a *"powerhouse of information"* (ibid) that is *"taking a global view of what works across nations"* (ibid) and has the necessary knowledge to advise other development and public health agencies.

The second reason given by interviewees to build a learning organisation was the need to adapt and change rapidly in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world. Participants from two organisations (one public health INGO and the Australian Defence Force) clearly articulated the need to be agile in the ever-changing context in which they work and outlined the negative outcomes of not implicating change to practice based on lessons learnt:

> *The first is that the context where we work is continuously changing and we're always going into different countries. Those countries themselves are constantly changing and the world is evolving at a phenomenal pace. And so, you know, the famous phrase, VUCA, volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous, is very, very relevant for us I think. […] I don't think we have any choice and I think we're comfortable with that and we embrace that. […] We embrace change. I mean I think a good example is the recent Ebola emergency.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

> *The fundamental key to becoming an adaptive organisation is needing to be a learning organisation first and foremost. […] Nothing teaches someone as quickly as when people get killed.* (external interviewee, Australian Defence Force)

The public health INGO interviewee explained knowledge management and the complex environments they operate in using a metaphor describing information as a jungle, knowledge flowing efficiently as a river and knowledge management mechanisms as a 'rucksack' for staff members:

> *[Information] is a jungle and what you have to do is you have to try and get the staff to find the way to the river. […] If you can help staff find their way out of the jungle into the rivers, then things will move better. If you're in Congo and you're stuck in the jungle it's a nightmare but if you can find a river you can move. And you give people a good toolkit, so a rucksack with loads of useful stuff in it like how to do an after action review, how to do a baton passing.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

Another stated reason to learn was the need to build learning mechanisms and strategies in order to mitigate the effects of staff turnover, which leads to loss of knowledge when staff members leave the organisation. Both representatives from the public health INGO and Australian Defence Force quoted above explained that they actively factored in and even embraced staff turnover to justify the need to invest into organisational learning:

Every two to three years we just change jobs, which is good in a way, because it allows us to not get too stale. (external interviewee, Australian Defence Force)

The average lifespan of the national staff is perhaps two to three years […]. The average period of stay of an expatriate […] can be as little as four to six months, and so there's very high turnover. And so when you've got turnover and complex situation, those two combined, that means you have to invest in being an organisation that learns from what it does and facilitates learning and continuously transforms itself. (external interviewee, public health INGO)

The two organisations quoted above recognised that frequent staff changes are a reality in their respective sectors. They both described how they were not only applying a proactive approach to turnover but saw the opportunities it created to regularly capture learning from departing staff and pass this knowledge onto new members, thus ensuring that knowledge flows continuously. In contrast, participants from The Fred Hollows Foundation as well as other INGOs described their agency's attitude as relatively passive in the face of staff changes, although they also saw staff turnover as a strong rationale for organisational learning and identified a real need to have mechanisms in place to mitigate it:

One of the challenges we have is that we have high staff turnover and a lot of transformation in terms of the organisational structure and so without systems to record the learnings, [accessing knowledge] is very difficult for new people and new divisions/areas/teams. (internal interviewee, Australia)

Theme two: Enablers of organisational learning and knowledge management

A number of enablers and principles positively influencing organisational learning in NGOs emerged during the interviews and focus-group discussions. These included a culture of learning; dedicated resources and technology; inspired leadership that acts as a role model for learning; the 'right' people supported by adequate skillsets and behaviours in the organisation; and structures and processes/systems.

A culture of learning

According to interview and FGD participants, a culture that strives for continuous improvement is required to create an environment that is conducive to learning:

> *We have to just constantly want to improve things [...]. And without knowing what we did in the past or being able to see what we're currently doing and being able to analyse it in an appropriate way, we can't improve what we're doing. And so knowledge management is one of the avenues that we can use to help create that sort of learning culture.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

Participants mentioned a number of mechanisms that make it possible to identify and even celebrate failures as lessons learnt from experience in their organisations. These include 'fail fairs', a type of forum in which staff members describe a project or activity that did not go well, analyse the reasons behind the failure and what they have learnt from it. Failure reports were also mentioned by a number of interviewees:

> *And then, of course, you see some best practice organisations like MSF who not only consolidate their learnings, but they also publish them openly and in my view, that's a real commitment to learning; they're openly willing to share and learn from what is and isn't working. They have these failure reports [...] questioning the decisions people are making, the decisions their processes are leading them to make and then some of the inevitable context decisions that happen in-country, which you can't really always avoid. [...] those reports, I think, are very transparent and they show a level of insight and reflection.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

These mechanisms *"increase the tolerance of failure"* (external interviewee, public health INGO) within the organisation, thus changing the organisational culture (ibid). However, an interviewee highlighted the need to also increasingly and more consistently recognise and commend successes in the workplace:

> *I would like to see us identify and celebrate our successes more because there are learnings in there as well as our learnings in our failures and I have heard people say, "Oh we don't learn from our mistakes." But we're not learning from our*

> *successes either. […] Sometimes successes are little.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

Participants noted that this in turns enhanced trust, transparency and collaboration in the workplace, allowing knowledge to flow freely from one part of the organisation to the next:

> *It's all about trust as well. […] the organisation has got to trust its people that [they're] going to make the right decisions […] for the right reasons. And we make, you know, sometimes you get it wrong, but that's the important thing is being adaptive […] and being able to change very quickly.* (external interviewee, Australian Defence Force)

Resources and technology

Participants advocated for the need to allocate adequate inputs such as technological solutions and other resources (time, space and budget for learning) to give staff members a clear signal that there is an organisational commitment to a culture of knowledge sharing. One participant stated that "*there is definitely an involvement […] of those foundational [IT systems]. And you need to make sure that those are in place*" (external interviewee, INGO) while another believed that "*encouraging an organisation to improve itself in a way that is actually tangible would be great. You'd need a budget, obviously*" (internal interviewee, Australia). The quote below nicely summarises the views expressed by a number of interviewees as regards inputs:

> *So people are given the time, people are given the space, people are given the money to go out and do things that – and still have a framework, they can't do anything [they want] – but, you know, they are given the opportunity to do things differently without the fear of being reprimanded.* (external interviewee, INGO)

However, as described by another interviewee, these systems need to be considered as the tangible inputs that support the other factors and aspects involved in a coherent organisational learning and knowledge management framework:

> *You do need a document repository; you do need an intranet; you do need a people directory for people to be able to look for people and find people and connect with people. So those are foundational things. They are not necessarily knowledge management things, but those are foundational elements of IT that, quite frankly, it would be very hard to ignore. […] And you need to make sure that those are in place, but the larger part is to get the other parts of the organisation involved, like […] organisational development, like senior management, to […] model those learning behaviours so that the staff […] can learn and also model them in their behaviour.* (external interviewee, INGO)

Inspired leadership

Most participants expressed a strong desire to have leaders in their organisation acting as champions of learning. They articulated the need to see senior managers inspiring staff members both through a clearly articulated vision for the learning organisation and role modelling of learning behaviours:

> *The idea is the leaders are supposed to model the behaviour, they're supposed to model the example, they're supposed to model […] the lessons we want learned. So they have to know that themselves, what are the principles, what are the values, what are the […] technically correct ways of doing things.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

More specifically, participants called for leadership to play an active role in socialising the concepts and importance of learning and knowledge management (internal interviewee, Australia). Also, employees expressed the need to have dedicated forums in which they could hear and learn directly from their leaders (external interviewee, health service delivery). In contrast, it was surprising to note that in the public health research institution, leadership was described as having a top-down approach to learning. Knowledge retention by managers was seen as a barrier to knowledge flowing into other parts and thus to people feeling empowered to not only learn, but also to act:

> *A lot of stuff is centred in a few brains at the top and those brains basically retain a ridiculous amount of knowledge and understanding of how things work and are able to carry it forward to make… to remember what we've learnt from things. But the… empowerment of people below them to do the same is not there. There is very much a 'go to the top, find out what to do, go away and do it' culture.* (external interviewee, public health research institution)

Supporting individuals to learn

Staff members want to be empowered to learn by their organisation. This is done through clearly defined roles driving the organisational learning and knowledge management agenda, as well as employees across the organisation being equipped with the relevant skillset to contribute to the learning organisation in their roles. Focus-group participants[6] all noted the need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities. A dedicated organisational learning and/or knowledge management position acting as a catalyst was identified as an effective strategy to help the organisation start the journey to building a learning organisation. Both focus-group and internal interview participants mentioned that learning should be driven by people who are passionate about it but that they should be acknowledged and rewarded as such to keep them motivated. This model has already been successfully tested by two public health INGOs:

> *I recruited across the organisation ... I preach knowledge management a lot and every time somebody says, "Oh I, I'm interested in knowledge management" I add their name to a mailing list […]. I call them knowledge champions […], and they're the ones that get updates on the knowledge management project, classic project style updates […]. They're also the ones who get to test the new tools or the new ideas.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

A number of internal interviewees also suggested that 'knowledge champions' should be identified in each country office. Beyond merely nominating them however, respondents emphasised the need for these champions to be offered regular training and other formal

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[6] These were all FHF staff members, as focus-group discussions were only conducted internally.

and informal capacity building opportunities on knowledge sharing to perform well in their role. In addition, a strong emphasis was put on the benefits of establishing direct relationships between staff members to enhance cross-country learning, as *"it's all about personal relationships"* (internal focus-group discussion, country office):

> *So I think previously we weren't sharing any of the information that we had between country programs. There was minimal interaction between country programs. […] Information was a one-way flow and that was probably from the country programs to the head office in a unilateral direction. But now we've got some mechanisms and systems in place where we're actually getting communication laterally across the organisation and […] forums available where we can share what's happening […] within the country programs […] with other parts of the organisation. So prior to [that] there was no connections made […] between the country programs, there was no interpersonal relationships, and there was no possible means of really sharing anything.* (internal interviewee, country office)

INGO participants noted that these interpersonal relationships are an efficient way to ensure that the information that cannot be captured formally (informal knowledge) flows on from one person and country office to the next without being lost. This is particularly important to develop and maintain an institutional memory: *"There is a lot of personally held contacts, history, context of why things are a certain way that's held and it's not shared or learned or passed on in a formal sense"* (internal interviewee, Australia).

Similarly, the importance of interpersonal relationships to facilitate learning was highlighted by other organisations across the public health sector. This shows that building a learning organisation is a combination of people's technical and behavioural skills, and that good relationships between staff members are the bedrock upon which technical skills can be shared:

> *Because we tend to be people who get along with each other, people are actually happy to go along and learn about what other people do in a more technical way.* (external interviewee, public health research institution)

Specific mechanisms that build and enhance direct interpersonal relationships with minimal involvement from the 'main office' such as people directories, communities of practice and cross-country learning forums were mentioned by both internal and external interviewees.

Structures, processes and systems

Finally, respondents highlighted the fact that the structures and systems need to be set up in a way that is conducive to building a learning organisation. In line with the literature on OL & KM in INGOs (Froggatt, 2011; Owusu, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002), a number of participants highlighted the fact that a decentralised and/or flat organisational structure is generally more conducive to learning: *"You know, knowledge and hierarchy don't mix very well"* (internal interviewee, Australia). This is particularly important in the context of a growing structure such as The Fred Hollows Foundation, which essentially used to rely on the fact that until relatively recently all staff members knew each other personally in order to gather and disseminate lessons learnt (see section 1.1). To mitigate the effects of rapid growth, some agencies have tested various models strengthening collaboration between different divisions or departments. An example from a public health INGO includes the successful creation of a coalition of all the leads of departments that have a role to play in knowledge management, facilitated by the Knowledge Management Specialist. This includes the heads of Learning & Development, Information & Communications Technology and Internal Communications: *"Those four positions are really the key positions […] driving us to become a learning organisation or increasing our knowledge management maturity further"* (external interviewee, public health INGO).

In order to clarify and embed the systems and processes upon which a learning structure can be built, the majority of internal focus-group discussion and interview participants as well as external interviewees recommended documenting existing and new strategies and mechanisms:

> *We don't have a knowledge management strategy and one of the things I've been trying to do recently is put one together so that there is that sort of […] guideline [on] what's this end point, instead of the disparate activities that I have currently*

> *been doing that are […] problem solving and they've addressed particular problems but […] what is the end goal.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

It was suggested by participants that this strategy should clarify the rationale, vision/goal, pillars and benefits of a learning organisation and be a living, *"user-friendly and practical"* document (internal focus-group discussion, country office). It was also suggested that its execution should be driven and facilitated by the dedicated knowledge management or organisational learning position, although it would be advisable for senior managers to be made accountable for its successful implementation to give it more weight.

Theme three: Limiting factors to building a learning organisation

A number of major blocks and limitations to organisational learning and knowledge management were identified in this study.

The handover process and in particular handover notes were considered to be inconsistent and highly reliant on individuals' goodwill at FHF (internal focus-group discussion, country office). As a result, there is an overreliance on individuals who have been in the organisation for a number of years to uphold the institutional memory: *"We are still relying on individuals […] that's one of the strategies we use whether it's right or wrong"* (internal interviewee, Australia). In the same vein, INGOs often fail to leverage their staff's past experience and skillset:

> *Sometimes working groups that are put together, they don't necessarily always draw on … they often represent people who want to be in them rather than drawing in the people who actually necessarily have the skills […] and that's a shame for the organisation because it does mean a lot of the learning is lost.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

A number of participants from both INGOs and other organisations also noted the lack of investment in dedicated resources for organisational learning and knowledge management, particularly in terms of budget and time allocation:

> *We're on this sort of downward trajectory of, of money at the moment and, as you know, learning is often the first casualty of a tight financial environment.* (external interviewee, health service delivery)

In the NGO sector in particular, the activist culture was highlighted by participants as being in direct contradiction with the need for employees to set time aside to reflect on how they operate and this often stems from a top-down pressure to *"get things done now"* (internal interviewee, Australia):

> *They just want to get it out and over and done with and move on to the next task rather than sit back and reflect on what we learned along the way.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

The 'trap' of information and communications technologies as the ultimate answer to fix all the issues related to organisational learning and knowledge management was described across organisations:

> *It's not to do with technology. […] The real challenge is obviously […] how do we change the culture of learning in the organisation. […] Because, you know, the systems are only as good as the people that use them. […] If people don't want to share, in the first place, then obviously the systems are not going to be of any use. […] We should ensure that we don't get carried away with an IT discussion.* (external interviewee, INGO)

At FHF in particular, a number of interviewees noted an overreliance on systems such as the new PRoject Information and Systems Management tool (PRISM – FHF's online project management system) to improve learning. One participant noted however that *"tools don't make better programs. People make better programs"* (internal interviewee, Australia). On a similar note, focus-group participants mentioned the fact that *"systems currently used are not fit for purpose […] Finding documents often currently relies on individual knowledge"* (internal focus-group discussion, country office).

Study participants observed that the organisational structures and processes currently in place *"get in the way"* of organisational learning (internal interviewee, Australia), particularly due to silos preventing employees from identifying areas that could lead to linkages and cross-team collaboration (ibid). Similarly, the reporting system at FHF was consistently described as not being conducive to learning:

> *The Board reports at the moment are not used for learning and they're kind of like an onerous task that we don't even understand if the Board reads or not.* (internal interviewee, country)

Inadequate processes and systems can also lead to information overload and a sense of overwhelm, as noted by this interviewee:

> *We try to tell people they need to learn quickly. And, again, you know […] evidence takes time sometimes – so we need to slow down and actually maybe review the amount of information and knowledge that we share, because I think that's where we can get caught up.* (external interviewee, Defence Force)

Study participants noted that discrepancies and gaps remained within the steps of capturing, accessing and using the learning. In particular, even when lessons learnt were analysed, it seems they were not necessarily used as described below. Also, a challenge was flagged around connecting the right people with the right information at the right time, which systems and processes are yet to address:

> *Once we have captured this and once the team has analysed any useful learning pieces, how do we then embed that learning into process or practice or program design or the next humanitarian response to make ourselves better? Yeah, I think we're still challenged in that regard. […] The information […] is not in one place, it's not easily findable, and a lot of the time, even when you do find it, […] the learning is not easily identifiable in those documents.* (external interviewee, INGO)

At FHF, the project development cycle was described by several participants as not being conducive to learning. Lessons learnt from previous projects were not seen as integrated into the design of new projects, as they "are already designed and budgeted for before the previous phase is over and there is no time for reflection or learning" (internal focus-group discussion, regional level). Inconsistent learning loops have been successfully addressed in the Defence Force, as described in the subsection on Mechanisms and strategies below (Theme Four).

There was a relative reluctance to share and reflect on past mistakes or failures:

> *I don't get the impression we did a critical review of the failures of TRIM (Total Records and Information Management, FHF's former document repository).* (internal interviewee, Australia)

Some participants described how failures can actually be used as 'ammunitions' instead of being recognised as a normal part of the lifecycle of every organisation and precious opportunities for learning:

> *There's always lots of mistakes to learn from and people are always really cautious about talking about exploring them because some people want to exploit them for their own internal political challenges as opposed to doing something for the organisation […] I think one of the trickiest things about sharing is ,one, is having enough of good and bad experiences and also, two, being somewhat out of the political hotspot […] Admitting failure […] because we look at really challenging areas, we're looking at new areas, it's more of a turf war. I would say that's the challenge [because...] we're meant to be […] risky.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

Finally, a *"culture of deficit thinking"* was described as prevalent is some INGOs, including FHF. One external INGO participant pointed to the fact that *"what we're not good at is […] is learning from ourselves*" while at FHF interviewees deplored an organisational imperative to 'bring the outside knowledge in' to the detriment of learning a lot more about what is achieved internally. This was linked to a relative inability to identify, celebrate and learn from successes:

> *We feel there's always something better to learn outside. […] Always there's something better we should be doing or something that we're not quite good enough at, when I think actually if you step back a bit, we are really quite successful as an organisation and I would like to see us […] identify and celebrate our successes more because there are learnings in there as well.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

Theme four: Mechanisms and strategies used by public health INGOs and other public health organisations

An array of mechanisms and strategies were described by participants, as shown in the concept maps below.

Due to the complexity of the analysis, the original figure (Figure 8) is too large to fit legibly on a single page. The original concept map is presented in reduced format below to present the overall analysis (Figure 8). It is then split and enlarged for legibility (Figure 8.1, Figure 8.2).

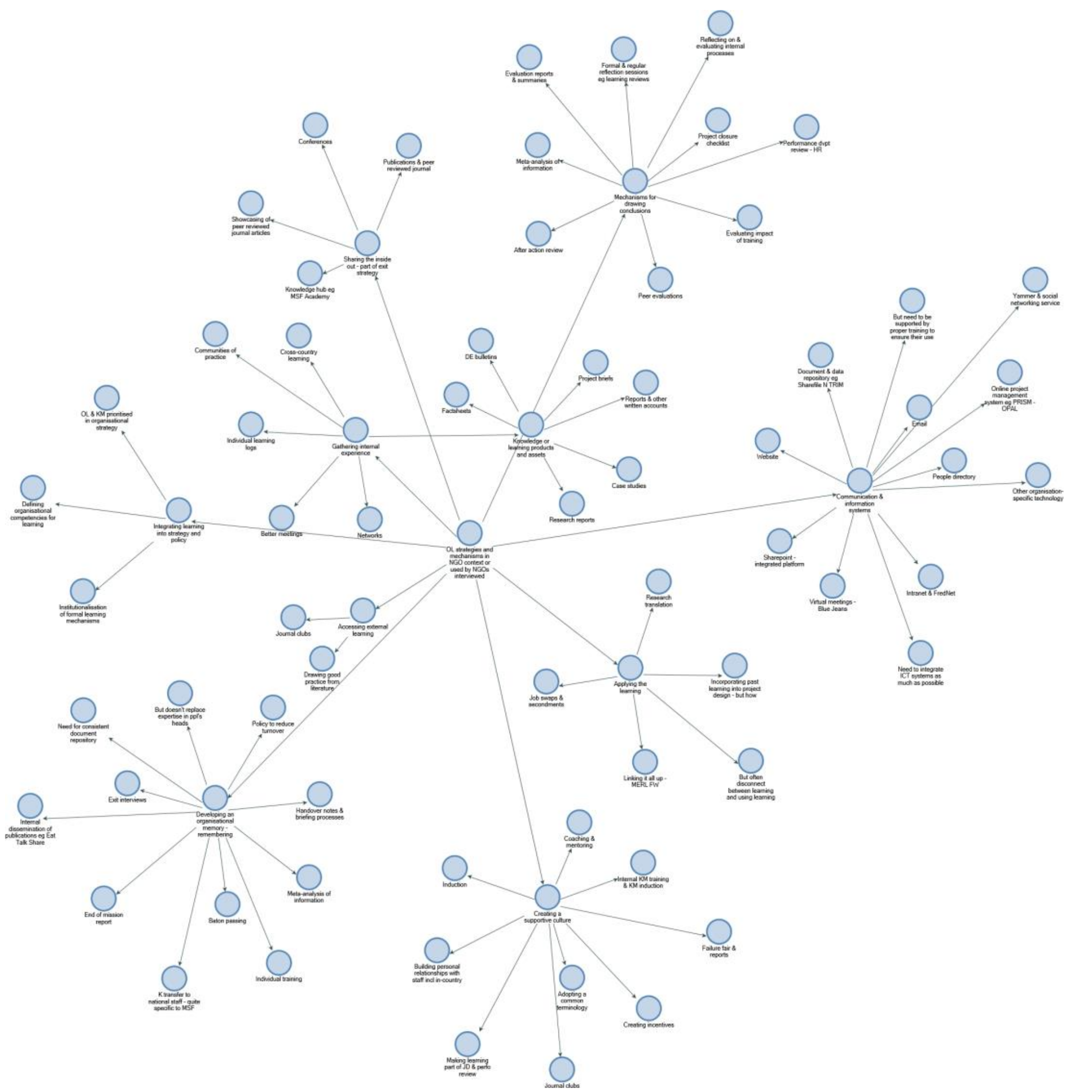

Figure 8: Overview of mechanisms and strategies described by focus-group discussion and interview participants from INGOs (including FHF).

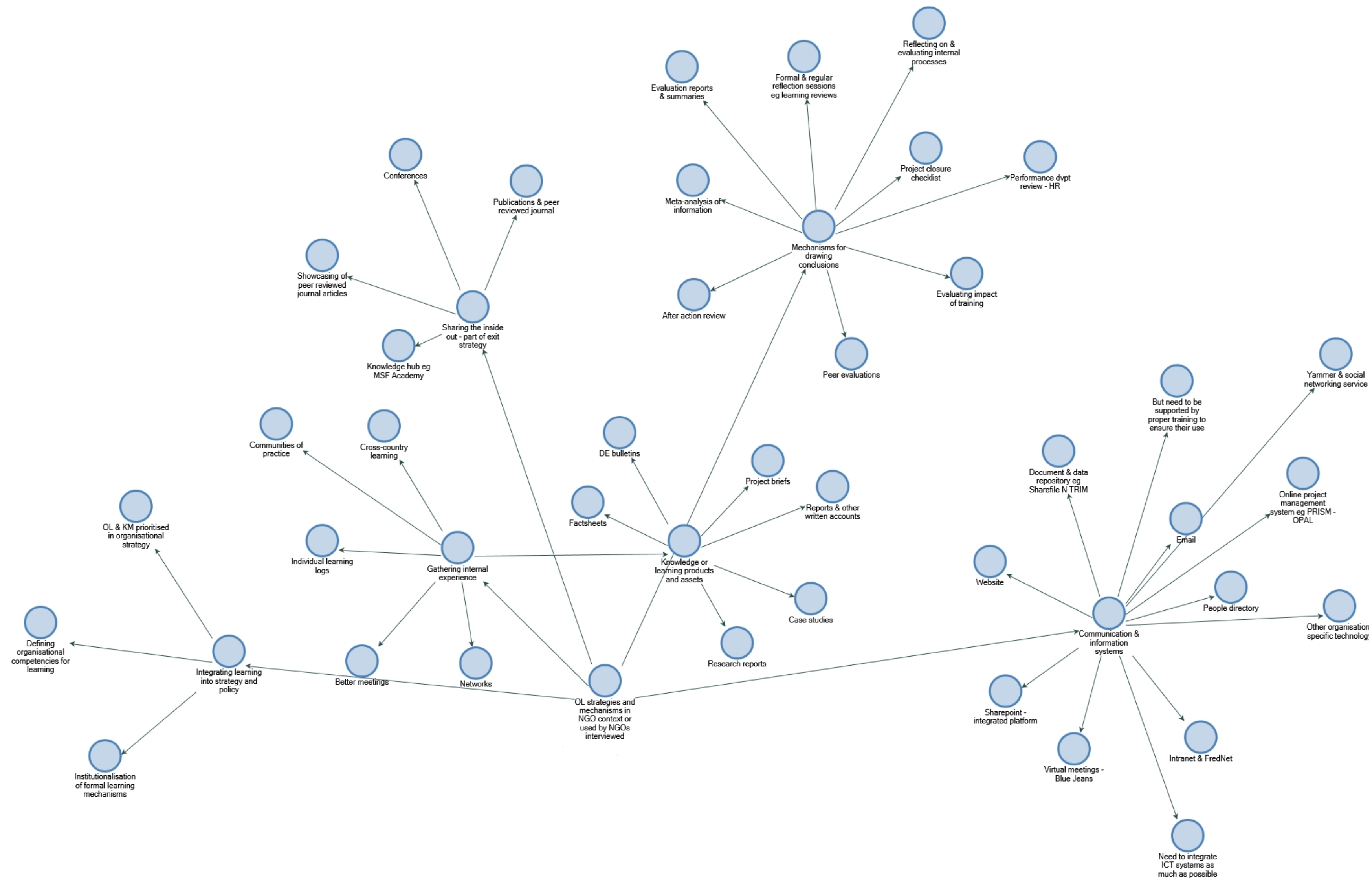

Figure 9.1 (top half of Figure 8): Overview of mechanisms and strategies described by focus-group discussion and interview participants from INGOs (including FHF) - continued.

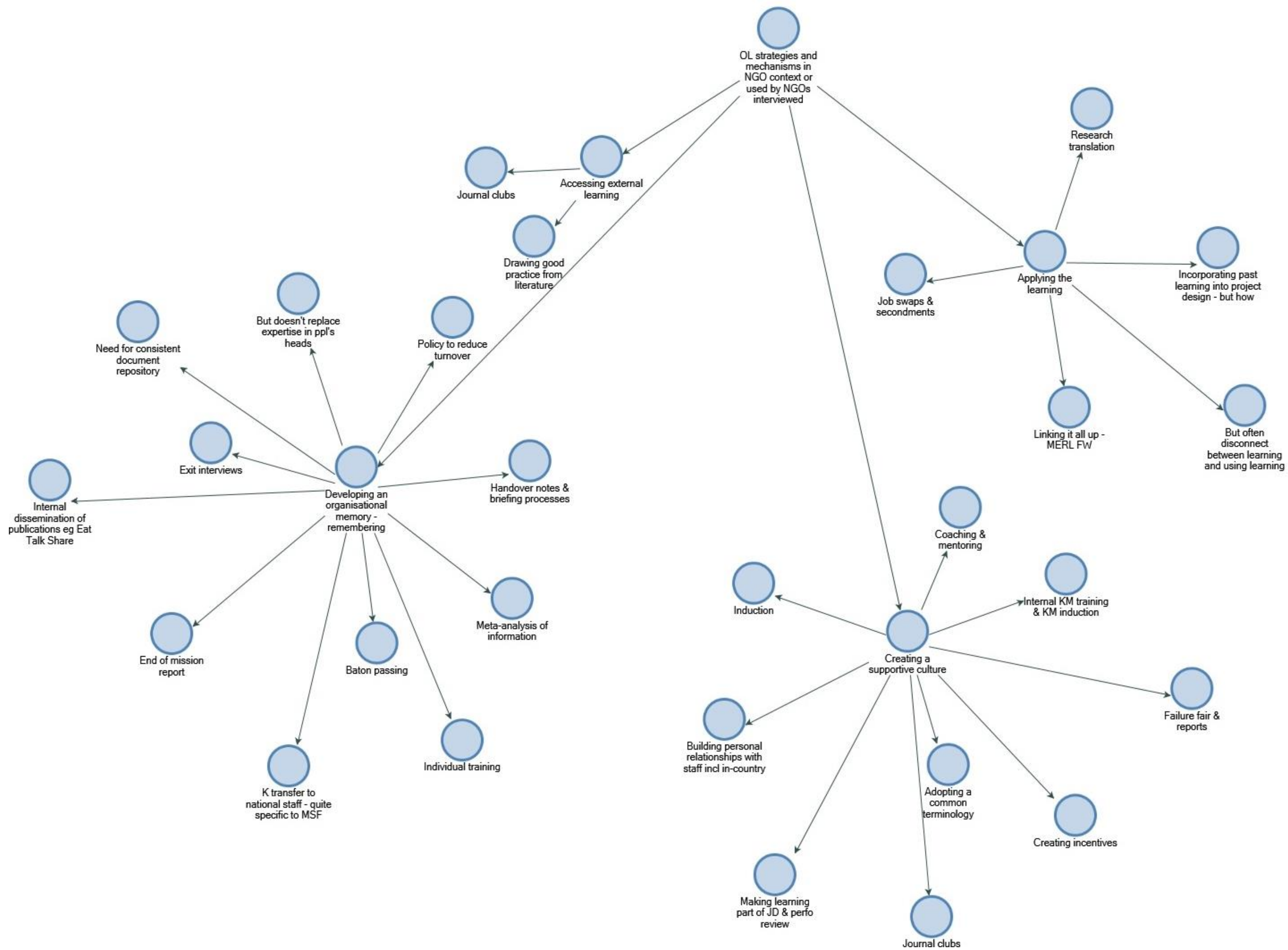

Figure 10.2 (top half of Figure 8): Overview of mechanisms and strategies described by focus-group discussion and interview participants from INGOs (including FHF) - continued.

In order to **build direct relationships between staff members from different locations and enhance cross-country learning**, communities of practice were mentioned by both internal and external participants as a particularly effective mechanism:

> *I think the community of practice is brilliant. Like I really think […] those things then build those relationships. […] Most of them could help each other like they've got more experience than we've got sitting here in [Sydney].* (internal interviewee, Australia)

Lunchtime presentations (also referred to across institutions as 'paperbag lunch' or 'brownbag lunch' presentations) are a popular type of knowledge-sharing event during which an internal or external speaker is invited to share information from recent experiences or findings that is relevant to other staff members (Janus, 2016). Held at lunchtime, these sessions include time for questions and answers and are recorded for later access (ibid). These learning forums were widely mentioned in internal as well as external interviews and focus-group discussions. They were noted as an effective way to share knowledge and learning on a wide array of topics with a broad audience and were therefore very praised by staff members:

> *We have [organised] so many brown bags, I can't even begin to talk about all of them!* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

Similarly, internal and external participants strongly advocated for regular exposure to in-country programming *to "get [country offices] out of that shell of countries not being able to share learning"* (internal interviewee, Australia). It was suggested that this could be done through cross-country learning visits, job secondments or job rotations, and internal project evaluations performed by staff members (rather than by external evaluators). From the latter, interviewees noted that it was seemingly a very effective way to build the capacity of staff members to conduct evaluations while retaining the knowledge generated in-house:

> *Developing the capacity of internal evaluators rather than systematically employing external consultants. We have done it on a regular basis and it worked really well.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

At FHF, the role of the regional structure and regional teams in the learning process was deemed to be essential to facilitating cross-country learning. Participants described how they benefit from a bird's eye view of programs across countries and as such, they are able to support them by identifying trends, strategically documenting lessons learnt and driving reflection processes (internal interviewee, Australia; internal focus-group discussion, regional level; internal focus-group discussion, country office).

Participants recommended that **formal reflection sessions at different levels** of the organisation be held on a regular basis to equip staff members with the necessary skills to conduct them and to ensure such practices become part of the workplace culture:

> *"If were to be the best NGO in the world, I think we would have regular reflection sessions on a country program level and be able to reflect those up in a format that we use, useful for other country programs."* (internal interviewee, country office)

An example of regular reflection sessions mentioned during internal consultations is described in the Monitoring, Evaluation, Reporting and Learning (MERL) Framework, which was recently developed and is being progressively rolled out at FHF. Based on a model implemented in another INGO, it sets out minimum requirements for monitoring, evaluation, reporting and learning activities relating to the program work of The Foundation at the organisational, regional, country and project levels. The MERL framework aims to implement a comprehensive system for reflective 'moments' in which lessons learnt and conclusions drawn at each level inform the next level (project to country, country to region etc).

Participants from other sectors such as the Defence Force have set up and perfected processes enabling **fast learning loops**:

> *At one stage we had three, four simultaneous major operations, […] so from that we had to learn very quickly. And one of the things that we establish is fast learning loops where something will happen in Afghanistan, say, and we've never seen that before, or we've addressed it [in] a new way, and [for example] one of the units that's been, as a learning organisation, came up with a very novel and effective solution to how to address and deal with the enemy in that situation. They will then share that information and we can have that from the*

> *battlefield to our training systems […] and change the way we do business within seven days, and that's really because of the systems that we've put in place and […] we have learner mentors through the organisation who are able to share that information. And their job is to get information passed to them and they progress it through and manage it. […] It's all about trust as well. […] The organisation has got to trust its people that you're going to make the right decisions […] for the right reasons.* (external interviewee, Defence Force)

In this model, the interviewed described how solutions to addressing issues were generated because they were systematically recorded in a learning database, analysed and further investigated if they had arisen multiple times. It is interesting to note that even though the INGOs sampled are not currently equipped with systems allowing fast learning loops, this was identified as a strong aspiration in a context where innovation and rapid testing are key components of an agile organisation:

> *So, and I think [the best learning organisation] would be a much more agile, it would be seen as a much more agile and flexible organisation than it currently is. So it would, it would be known for learning from its mistakes and implementing. Not only learning from them, but embedding them quickly.* (external interviewee, INGO)

On a similar note, participants identified a need to better **incorporate past learnings into the design of new projects** and suggested a number of mechanisms to enable the learning to be applied, for instance by *"putting evidence into planning for next year"* (internal focus-group discussion, country office). Internal interviewees advised that during the design phase countries needed to share each other's expertise and consult with colleagues who had implemented similar projects (internal interviewee, Australia; internal interviewee, country office). At FHF, a formal project appraisal mechanism called 'peer review' enables lessons learnt to be shared and used across countries during the design stage. The peer review process is a quality assurance and risk management instrument whereby projects proposed by country teams are appraised by a panel of technical and program advisors with relevant and broad-ranging expertise at the country, regional and headquarters level. During peer review meetings, decisions are made about which projects should proceed and advice is offered to enhance the implementation of approved projects[7]. To complement this mechanism, once fully rolled out in the second half of 2018, it is expected that PRISM (FHF's online project management system) *"will be a good opportunity for system or technology to enable sharing"* (internal focus-group discussion, country office). It will *"make it easier to directly identify and consult with those who have already done [similar projects]"* in real time every time the information is needed (internal interviewee, Australia), rather than only during the design phase as is currently the case with peer reviews. The development of this system is part of a broader effort to **develop an organisational memory**, which was flagged by both internal and external participants as needing attention in their respective organisations. To mitigate the effects of staff turnover and retain the knowledge of departing colleagues in their organisation, they suggested face-to-face handover mechanisms beyond the traditional written briefing notes addressed to incoming staff members:

> *Then, then there's these techniques in headquarters like baton passing [...] where we [...] use a third person to facilitate the transfer of knowledge between outgoing and incoming staff [...] to debrief an outgoing staff and re-brief an incoming staff and the third person ensures that the knowledge is transferred from the outgoing to the incoming.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

This statement is consistent with the literature, which outlines that as face-to-face handover methods such as baton passing are an efficient and effective way to conduct induction of new staff in terms of time and money spent. It is more successful than a combination of non-face-to-face mechanisms such as handover notes, exit interviews and a series of induction meetings (Klein & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016).

The need to develop mechanisms to **evaluate and reflect on internal processes** was also highlighted by a number of participants, both internal and external. Several FHF interviewees advocated for country offices' views to be formally captured about the various new processes introduced by headquarters:

> *If they've been any kind of 360 [...] reviews to say [...] what does country programs think of [headquarters]. And [...] there's no reflection on [...] an*

[7] Source: The Fred Hollows Foundation (internal source): https://frednet.hollows.org/our-work/programs/programs-handbook/program-cycle-management/identification/concept-brief

update of a template or there's a rollout of the handbook or there's something, you know, that kind of comes along and says 'here have a meeting' and it gets evaluated at the end of the meeting. […] I don't see that there's any way that those learnings are captured, you know. (internal interviewee, country office)

I'm not aware of once doing a … what's the word, after the event analysis […] of any overseas training. […] We don't have a formal approach to post-mortem-ing. (internal interviewee, Australia)

So there we have a dead project and we're building another project and yet did we do a review of that dead project to say, 'This is what happened, this was wrong'? (internal interviewee, Australia)

In contrast, an external participant from a public health INGO clearly outlined her organisation's approach to after-action reviews, which aligns with FHF's aspirations as described above:

One of the cool things that the summer institutes is we've instituted after action reviews after the first one which then went into feeding how we've do the second one and we've done an after action review after the second one to then feed into how we're going to do it next year and […] beyond itself being a learning opportunity for the people who are involved in it, it's been an interesting way to test out learning about learning. (external interviewee, public health INGO)

Another participant from a public health INGO described how her organisation used two-yearly staff surveys to collect and action feedback on internal processes from all parts of the organisation.

Accessing learning from outside the organisation was deemed as *"not really happening strategically"* at FHF (internal focus-group discussion, country office). In contrast, other agencies have effectively put mechanisms in place such as journal clubs to encourage employees to look for and process external knowledge:

The first one are journal clubs. So if a staff member who brings an article or topic of interest to them, presents it to people at a lunch time session and then we have a discussion about it. It ranges everything from interesting Ted talks to very in depth academic articles that people have trouble reading. So it's a very enjoyable *experience and with a lot of these events actually it's less about the topic or the content […]. It's also more about bringing people together to […] get them […] to talk freely […] and admit when you don't know something or say 'well that article was very challenging'. And it's an interesting thing to really bring forward that idea of a learning organisation.* (external interviewee, public health research institution)

Coalitions and networks were identified by several participants inside and outside FHF as a key and effective strategy to accessing external learning that was deemed as going hand in hand with fast learning loops:

> *Our learning organisation isn't just the Australian Army, so we're a part of a system and we've got a coalition that we're very close to. There's two coalitions that we're part of […] and […] we're an open system. We're a living being, if you look at that from an organisational perspective. […] So lessons learnt in one army get shared, very quickly, through […] the fast learning loops and the organisational learning framework that we have as a collective. So, each one of our coalition partners is […] very focused on fast turnaround of knowledge.* (external interviewee, Australian Defence Force)

One internal interviewee recommended developing strategies to foster an enquiring mindset helping to identify the external trends organisations ought to stay abreast of rather than accessing outside learning on a 'need-to-know' basis only:

> *That's not the same things as having an approach of, of absorbing information and […] having an enquiring organisation that has its finger on the pulse of what's going on.* (internal interviewee, Australia)

In line with the need for INGOs to position themselves as thought leaders in an increasingly volatile and complex world, a number of mechanisms to **share the learning produced inside the organisation with the 'outside world'** (i.e. the wider sector) emerged during interviews. Participants from two different public health INGOs and the Australian Defence Force noted that this could successfully be done through presenting research findings at conferences, and publishing articles on blogs or in peer-reviewed journals. Organisations that seem further along the organisational learning path have put more 'advanced' mechanisms in place, such as organising conferences themselves and setting up ‘academies’ and clearing houses on a particular area of expertise or strength:

> *We do a lot of conferences. We partake in a lot of conferences but we organise a lot of conferences and workshops and seminars. There's all kinds of stuff online, social media we're investing in heavily as well. There's a huge team that work on that. […] Our latest project is something called the […] Academy where we're going to try and build, for want of a better word, a university where we can train our nationally recruited staff in ... because they find it very hard to get access to training in universities in their own countries, in Liberia for example. […] In Sierra Leone […], Ebola also decimated the medical force and so […] they're all dead and […] we need to train new ones now and [...] this is the whole point of the […] Academy to really contribute to […] the learning, not of our organisation but of the Ministries of Health and the Ministry of Health staff with which we work.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

One participant described how the peer-reviewed journal recently created in her organisation stemmed from a desire to see staff members write more journal publications. This was also used as an opportunity for capacity building, as authors were invited to describe the ‘making-off’ process behind their article:

> *We recently started a peer reviewed journal […]. We have been making a bigger push to write more peer review journal articles and so now when they are published and in the journal, the author and team presents what they did to create a journal article in the first place as well as the project article it is focusing on. So it gets a bigger conversation about all of the different pieces in it ... One of the goals with this, beyond just sharing what the content of the article is, is to get people aware of how you can write a peer review journal article and sort of demystify how you can go about that.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

An interesting aspect of sharing knowledge with the outside world noted by an external interviewee was the collaborative nature of learning in the public health research sector. This means that it naturally lends itself well to organisational learning across institutions when compared to other sectors and possibly other research disciplines (ibid). This saw described as allowing the maintenance and dissemination of organisational learning beyond an individual structure:

> *In our sector a lot of things are based on good will. And we are highly dependent on collaboration across organisations. So if I left, there would be two or three people who I almost certainly would maintain very strong collaboration with because it would actually be mutually beneficial. So... it's maybe a little bit different in terms of the way an organisation loses when someone goes, say, in the private sector.* (external interviewee, public health research institution)

A good example of how this collaboration could be enhanced in practice was provided by the same participant based on lessons learnt from another university:

> *It would be beneficial for the group […] to have a formal role for former employees who've moved on who they see high value in to their organisational learning. So for example, I am a research associate at a university in England where I previously worked […] I have a title there […] and it helps me in certain ways. But it also means that I have a formal role there to come in and contribute in some way.* (external interviewee, public health research institution)

In the public health and health sectors more broadly, a capacity to share knowledge between institutions was also highlighted by some participants as a comparative advantage:

> *Whilst [the Australian Defence Force] is a learning organisation in Australia, we link in to a network of other learning organisations, and so that gives you such a great power […] And so we do that by sharing of knowledge. […] We have databases for specific types of activities, and health is, we're very well connected. And […] I think medicine, as a whole around the world, has always been a very learning organisation because […] their conferences are […] there to share knowledge. […] it's a very health and medical way of doing stuff. [The Australian Defence Force] just put information up all the time.* (external interviewee, Australian Defence Force)

Another participant also described how public health and health organisations share what they learn with each other, as it is rooted in their culture and ways of working:

We publish a lot in British Medical Journal, Public Health Action, Plus One, […] all the kind of peer review medical journals. We publish a lot and we've got whole operational research units in Luxemburg and Canada and South Africa and we're publishing, publishing, publishing. So I guess within the medical world, that's the easiest for us because this is how medics learn. Somebody discovers 'oh, someone transmitted Ebola through sperm six months after being cured, that's never happened before'. And so they'll document the case finding and they'll publish it. […] And then the medical community as a whole benefits from that new knowledge. So within the medical side of things that's ... yeah, it's pretty easy to do it. (external interviewee, public health INGO)

In terms of **communication and information systems,** FHF participants pointed out to the need for *"consistent filing structures and version management"* (internal focus-group discussion, country office). An external interviewee from an INGO expanded on this point by providing his vision for a successful suite of technological solutions that support knowledge management. This comprised of:

- a document repository for all living documents built on a taxonomy known and applied by all users;
- an Intranet platform making it easy to find all final, latest and signed-off versions of key documents such as policies and templates;
- an up-to-date people directory listing employees' areas of expertise and skills. This was deemed as particularly important in organisations that have experienced a rapid growth and used to rely on people knowing each other personally to share information.

Some platforms such as SharePoint were described as integrating these three systems into one central location and supplemented by a powerful search function:

Our platform […] is a SharePoint 2010 based environment so a lot of our materials are stored in one [location] that is meant for all 800 staff globally within the whole organisation. […] And it has both the curated information for staff to access as well as collaboration sites which are internal project […] sites for people to use. […] We also have a searchable directory of expertise and experience. […] Every staff member has a profile within SharePoint 2010 and it has their photo, their name, their job title, what city they work in, what office they

> *work in, what country they work in, phone number, email address, Skype information. […] And within all of SharePoint, if you use the […] search bar, that allows you to search the content on SharePoint, you can use that same search box to search the content of the profiles and the people's results will just show up next to the content results of SharePoint.* (external interviewee, public health INGO)

4.3 Discussion

A triangulated review of the findings across the survey, interviews and focus-group discussions outlined key themes. In a complex and rapidly changing operating environment, study participants outlined a strong rationale and incentive for INGOs to become learning organisations. Enablers of the learning organisation identified by respondents included: allocation of dedicated resources; developing adequate structures, systems and processes; inspired leadership that acts as a role model; encouraging and promoting individual learning; and fostering a culture of learning, including by promoting relevant skillsets and behaviours. The eight categories outlined in Britton's framework (1998) to classify specific mechanisms were validated by this study: creating a supportive culture; gathering internal experience; accessing external learning; communication systems; mechanisms for drawing conclusions; developing and maintaining an organisational memory; integrating learning into policy and practice; and applying the learning. A new category emerged outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector.

A detailed comparison of findings from the survey, interviews and focus-group discussions shows some interesting parallels as well as contrasting opinions. While a strong majority of survey respondents (63.03%) believed The Fred Hollows Foundation is a learning organisation, the score obtained on the knowledge management self-assessment undertaken in the focus-group discussions was less than average (1.11 out of 4). The explanation of this apparent discrepancy can be found through further examination of the survey and focus-group discussion results. Survey participants recognised that The Foundation had a culture that was supportive of learning, as shown by the fact that this category obtained the highest score (85.71%). However, respondents consistently flagged issues and gaps as regards the organisational processes, systems and technology in place at the time of the study. The 'Communication systems' grouping obtained some of the lowest ratings in the survey, and similarly ‘Systems and technology’ in the focus-group discussions scored an average 1.2 out of 4. In other words, the ‘spirit’ or software of the learning organisation was identified as present at The Foundation, but the systems/processes or ‘hardware’ was not yet in place.

Another interesting finding is that The Foundation’s staff members were eager to see the knowledge they held as individuals or in their teams better leveraged and utilised at the organisational level. ‘Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy’ came as the area of highest priority (49.58%) for survey participants. The survey also showed that the majority of respondents (67.23%) felt that they could meaningfully contribute to the strategic and policy-making process in their context thanks to the knowledge they had acquired. In contrast however, less than half of them (47.90%) believed that The Foundation frequently used these local learnings to improve its own practice or influence the policy and practice of other organisations. In line with this finding, The Foundation’s respondents consistently outlined gaps, inconsistencies and weaknesses as regards the factors and enablers of a learning organisation, both in interviews and the survey comments sections.

The categories outlined by participants were consistent with the building blocks found in the literature: better allocation of resources (time, budget) and inputs (technological solutions) for learning (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016); leaders who act as champions of learning and encourage their employees to do the same (Kasper, 2007; Owusu, 2008; Soal, 2008); processes and systems that introduce an element of compliance and clarify requirements as regards knowledge management and sharing (Kasper, 2007; Lewis & Madon, 2004); and a culture that strives for continuous improvement (Bloch & Borges, 2002; Goold, 2006; Soal, 2008). Based on the definition of the learning organisation developed by Pedler et al. (1991) as “an organisation that facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself as a result” (p. 1), this tends to show that The Foundation still has some way to go in implementing a comprehensive model that would lead to becoming greater than the sum of its knowledge and learning parts.

Findings from interviews pointed towards a clear rationale for Pedler’s definition (1991) to be applied in practice in INGOs. Interviewees articulated a strong incentive to become a better learning organisation in order to keep abreast of new trends in a knowledge economy. They also emphasised the need to be responsive and agile in a complex and constantly changing environment such as the international development sector. This is well aligned with the idea found in the literature on organisational learning that in a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) world, learning on the spot and sharing learning across boundaries have become essential competencies that organisations need to master to remain relevant and competitive (Varney, 2015). In this context, the issue of staff turnover and its consequences on organisational learning and knowledge management was raised as a major concern. In both the internal interviews with The Foundation's staff members and in external interviews with participants from other INGOs, staff turnover was highlighted as a barrier to organisational learning in general and developing an institutional memory in particular. Participants also described their agency's attitude as relatively passive in the face of staff changes. Unsurprisingly, the 'Institutional memory' criterion received one of the lowest scores in the focus-group discussion self-assessment (1.05 out of 4) and the 'Developing an organisational memory' grouping consistently received the lowest ratings in the survey. In contrast, two organisations (a public health INGO and the Australian Defence Service) recognised that frequent staff changes are a reality in their respective sectors and have embraced it as an opportunity to regularly capture learning from departing staff. This knowledge can then be passed onto new members, thus ensuring that it flows continuously.

It is interesting to note that the common characteristic of these two organisations is that they both deliver operations in emergency situations, while the other INGOs interviewed operate in slower-paced, development contexts. These differences in the way agencies articulate the rationale for building a learning organisation might explain why some INGOs interviewed have not been particularly proactive in this space, as they are not yet acutely 'feeling the pain' of having to adapt in a fast-changing world due to the more developmental nature of the activities they deliver.

This is consistent with the concepts of the "burning platform" and "burning desire" outlined by John Kotter (2014, pp. 139-140). Kotter described how leading change in an organisation is best achieved through a positive narrative describing a strong aspiration for enhancement, rather than by outlining the negative consequences of keeping things the same in order to "scare us out of our complacency" (pp. 139-140). The public health INGO and the Australian Defence Service cited above were able to positively articulate the rationale for better learning mechanisms in the face of staff turnover and therefore proactively address it by implementing adequate processes and systems. To do so, they moved beyond a 'burning platform' approach describing turnover as inevitable and shifted to a 'burning desire' narrative highlighting the benefits of collecting knowledge from departing employees on a regular basis to disseminate it to the rest of the organisation. In doing so, they demonstrated the strong potential agencies could tap into while embracing their changing operating environment in a positive and proactive manner through adapted organisational learning mechanisms (Diedrich, 2005).

Findings from the survey comments (free text section), interviews and focus-group discussions validated the eight categories outlined in Britton's framework (1998) to classify organisational learning and knowledge management strategies and mechanisms. Most of the mechanisms described by INGO participants as being implemented in their respective organisations were also referenced in the literature on organisational learning and knowledge management in the NGO sector (Goold, 2006; Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007; Owusu, 2008; Prasad, 2008; Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002; Soal, 2008; van Klinken, 2012; Whatley, 2013; Wrigley, 2008). The mechanisms that were most frequently identified in the findings were document and data repositories (Roper & Pettit, 2002), intranets (Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007), handover notes (Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007), lunchtime presentations (Janus, 2016), reports and other types of written documents capturing knowledge and lessons learnt (Janus, 2016; Owusu, 2008), communities of practice (Goold, 2006), networks (Kasper, 2007) and regular reflection sessions (Ramalingam, 2008).

It is interesting to note that the interview and focus-group findings showed a lack or even an absence of mechanisms implemented by NGOs in three out of the eight categories: 'Creating a supportive culture'; 'Integrating learning into strategy and policy'; and 'Applying the learning'. This is mostly congruent with The Foundation's survey results in which the 'Applying the learning' and 'Integrating learning into strategy and policy' categories were flagged as areas for prioritisation as described above. There is also a scarcity of mechanisms describing ways to integrate learning into strategy and policy in the literature as outlined in the literature review of this thesis (Chapter Two).

One way to foster a more strategic approach to knowledge management is to develop and implement a knowledge-sharing and learning strategy (Janus, 2016), as per the example presented in Chapter Five of this thesis. The lack of mechanisms identified in the interview and focus-group findings for the ‘Creating a supportive culture’ category is an interesting outlier, as it is also an area that scored highly in The Foundation’s survey as described above. One explanation could be that fostering a culture of learning is less about implementing formal processes and mechanisms specifically dedicated to knowledge management and organisational learning, and more about capitalising on what already exists and works in the organisation, such as coaching and mentoring (Goold, 2006).

In addition to Britton’s eight areas (1998), another category of mechanisms emerged from the study findings outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the ‘outside world’. This includes the eye health sector, the INGO sector and the public health sector. This finding was consistent with the appetite expressed particularly by FHF respondents in survey comments, interviews and focus-group discussions to see their organisation position itself as a knowledge hub for eye health and beyond. In addition, both internal and external research participants clearly linked the need to be a learning organisation with an aspiration to durably strengthen their organisation’s position as a thought leader. This is a new finding that did not appear in the literature on OL & KM in NGOs. A possible explanation can be found in the ‘activist culture’ mentioned in both the interviews and the literature (Lewis & Madon, 2004; Goold, 2006; Whatley, 2013) that is historically common among NGOs. However, participants noted that this historic bias for action is now changing with agencies increasingly embracing their role as knowledge brokers between institutional donors and local implementing partners.

Interviewees from two different public health INGOs and one generalist INGO described how their organisations recently set up internal research units, publishing departments, peer reviewed journals and started organising international conferences. Agencies that are eager to increasingly share their internal knowledge outside their organisation might want to draw inspiration from the public health academic sector, as outlined by an external interviewee. Academic institutions have adopted an efficient approach to cross-organisational learning, as they encourage long-lasting professional ties between employees that remain after they have left the organisation. This is achieved through conferences, collaboration on academic papers and opportunities for ‘guest’ teaching. This model could be replicated and adapted among INGOs in general and public health / eye health NGOs in particular to enhance information flows and minimise duplication of knowledge between agencies.

Study limitations

The survey and focus-group respondents relied on purposive sampling, while internal interview participants were recruited via convenience sampling. Only 56.4% of invited participants fully completed the survey. All data collection methods were administered in English, which in most locations is not the first language of The Foundation's staff members based overseas. Therefore, the findings might not be representative of the views of the entire Fred Hollows Foundation's workforce. The questions asked during the survey were a mix of closed- and open-ended questions while interview and FGD questions were open-ended. Although this variety in the type of questions posed and the breadth of methods used allowed to triangulate information and to overall cover the original research objectives and questions for this study, some of the statements might have been misleading or confusing for participants. For example, questions asking respondents to identify effective strategies for organisational learning somewhat presupposed an unequivocal understanding and/or definition for such strategies among all participants and that they would be able to identify which strategies were more effective than others. Also, the formulation of some questions could be interpreted as leading, which might have biased respondents' answers. In the previous example, participants might have favoured the strategies they were directly involved in over other strategies in their responses. External interview participants were identified via convenience sampling and the sample was small (five INGO representatives; three representatives from public health organisations other than INGOs). It would have been useful to have a more representative sample of INGO interviewees, and of public health NGOs in particular to more confidently establish trends and mitigate the effects of self-selection bias. Due to time limitations and difficulties in recruiting interview participants, a series of focus-group discussions were conducted in lieu of interviews. Although the degree of interaction between FGD participants was beneficial to nuance the findings, the focus-group discussions did not allow the same depth of inquiry as the in-depth, semi-structured interviews due to time limitations and the number of participants in each FGD. A number of interviews were conducted over the phone, which is not as conducive to establishing rapport with participants as face-to-face interviews, particularly for those conducted with external interviewees. Finally, the data gathered at FHF was collected across methods over 18 months in an organisation experiencing structural and operational changes. Therefore, the perceptions, beliefs and aspirations might reflect the views expressed at the time.

4.4 Concluding summary on the study findings

A comparison of this study findings with themes identified in the literature shows that a thriving learning organisation should be built upon a comprehensive set of enablers and mechanisms covering different aspects and sequences of learning (gathering, sharing/disseminating, reflecting on and using/applying knowledge). This applies to various levels (individual, team, country program, region, organisation-wide) for both internal and external audiences.

Based on these findings, an evidence-informed strategy tailored to the needs of The Foundation was developed as set out in Chapter Five. Importantly, a one-size-fits-all approach is not recommended for the learning organisation. The building blocks for OL & KM need to reflect and enhance the existing culture, processes and systems of the workplace and the mechanisms identified in these findings and the literature should therefore not be indiscriminately implemented as a compliance exercise. They ought to be collaboratively tested and piloted with a representative group of key stakeholders across divisions and adapted to the level the organisation is currently operating at, which requires a comprehensive assessment to be conducted as described in this thesis. Detailed recommendations for The Foundation and the wider INGO sector are outlined in Chapter Six.

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Chapter 5: Strategy for organisational learning and knowledge management at The Fred Hollows Foundation

Purpose of this chapter

The purpose of this chapter is to present an approach to addressing the gaps identified at The Fred Hollows Foundation in terms of organisational learning and knowledge management which were presented in Chapter Four. It is displayed in the form of a strategic document, which includes a background section, a vision and objectives, a strategic framework and metrics to track progress against implementation. The format is a standard FHF template and the content structure reflects the way reports are usually set out for internal dissemination and use at The Foundation.

While the diagnosis is based on the results presented in Chapter Four, the solutions outlined in the strategic framework drew from the concepts identified in the literature review and findings from this study on mechanisms that have successfully been implemented to date at FHF, in other INGOs including eye health INGOs and in other types of public health institutions. These have been adapted in a manner tailored to the specific needs of The Foundation. The vision for this strategy is to use a cross-organisational approach to building a learning organisation together, that is, collaboratively and across divisions at FHF. This is turn will allow The Foundation to establish and strengthen its position as a leading knowledge hub and innovator in eye health as an INGO.

This document outlines specific recommendations for the first year of the strategy's implementation while the next chapter (Chapter Six) discusses wider recommendations for OL & KM for The Foundation and the wider sector that have arisen from the overall work of this organisationally embedded research study.

The strategy development process included:

- The collection and in-depth analysis of results (Chapter Four) from an internal survey (n=119), semi-structured interviews (n=17) and focus-group discussions (n=48). This process is described in detail in Chapter Three (Methodology);
- Four participatory data analysis workshops with The Fred Hollows Foundation's staff members organised and facilitated by the senior independent OL & KM consultant (see Chapter Three) and myself. During these workshops, representatives

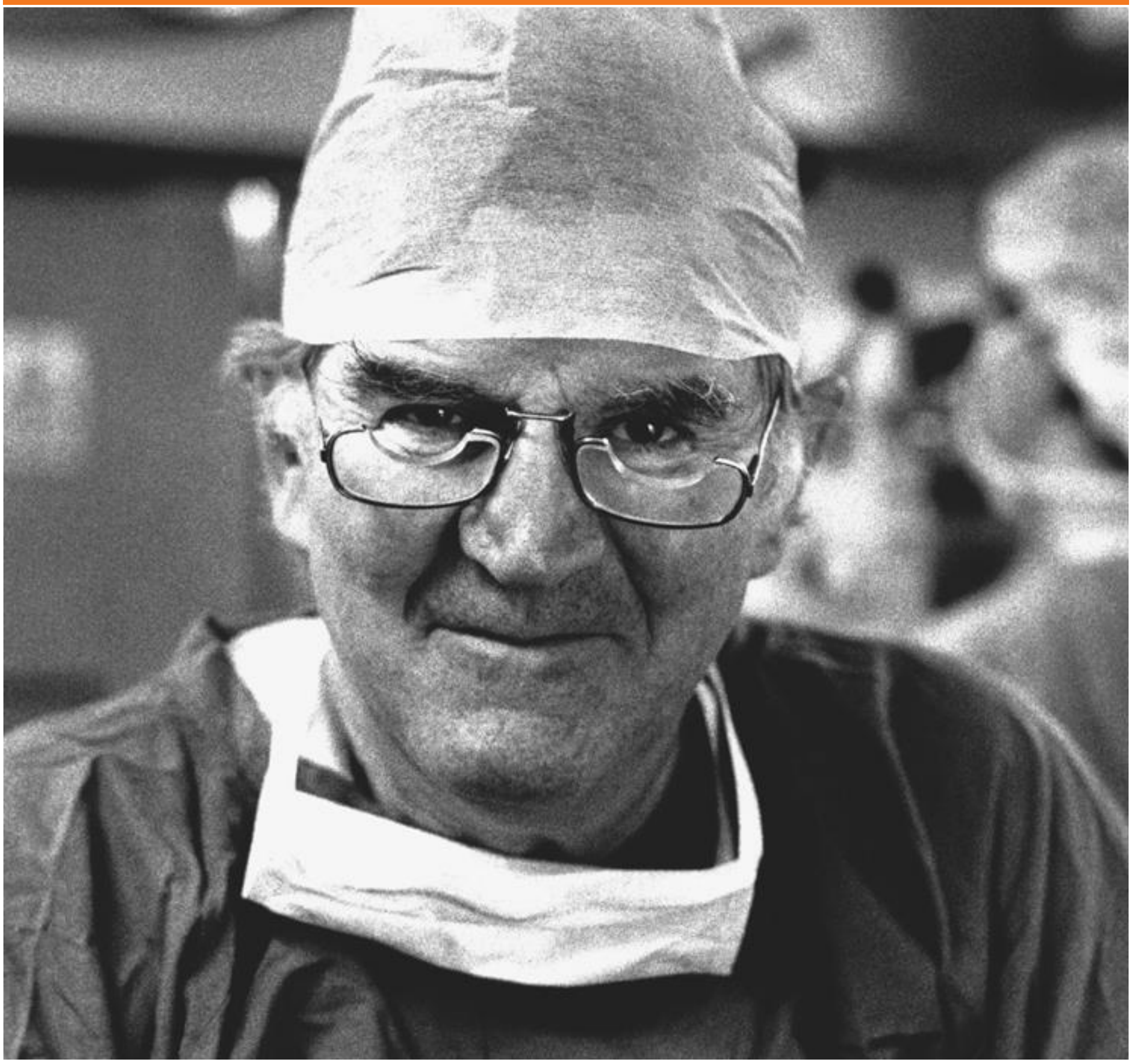
from a cross-section of teams and divisions who had a stake or an interest in building a learning organisation were invited to examine the consolidated study findings. Based on the research results and collated outputs from the first three workshops, the senior consultant and I proposed a draft version of a vision and thematic areas that may be prioritised for the desired future of The Fred Hollows Foundation as a learning organisation. These were developed and refined during in-depth facilitated discussions with workshop participants who used their practitioner lens and experience to produce a refined vision statement and three strategic objectives that are directly applicable and useful to the organisation and its staff members. The process of holding these workshops is described in detail in Chapter Three (Methodology). The consolidated outputs from the workshops formed the basis for an early draft of the OL & KM strategic document, which I compiled before submitting it to key stakeholders for further input;

- An extensive consultation on the draft strategic document, which I led and facilitated through a series of one-on-one meetings conducted over a period of three months (December 2017 to February 2018). A number of key stakeholders across divisions (n=18) identified through a stakeholder mapping exercise were invited to provide detailed feedback on the draft strategy. This included the five Division Directors and the CEO. After each meeting, I refined the strategy document accordingly based on the feedback received. The report presented below is the final version that I produced by the end of the consultation process.

This document represents an important artefact of the collective cycles of iterative research I conducted across time culminating in this strategy describing how one organisation envisages its approach to embodying a learning organisation within the INGO sector.

BUILDING A LEARNING ORGANISATION

A strategy for organisational learning & knowledge management at The Foundation



Authored by Camille Neyhouser (Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management Specialist, The Fred Hollows Foundation)
with contribution from Marie O'Brien (The Partnership People)

The Fred Hollows Foundation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This document presents our agreed vision, strategic objectives and operating model for organisational learning and knowledge management (OL & KM) at The Foundation and roadmap to implement this strategy. As part of the model, Cross-Organisational Groups (COGs) will be established. They will be in charge of a set of activities or projects to achieve these objectives and will develop actions plans with support from the OL & KM Specialist. This document also establishes a series of metrics to track progress against the strategy and COG action plans.

Background and scoping

The Fred Hollows Foundation's (The Foundation) Programs Strategy 2014-2018 states that *"A management system that actively promotes, facilitates, and rewards organisational learning"* should be established. Since 2015, a number of systems, processes, and products aiming to promote or contribute to organisational learning and knowledge management have been introduced and/or strengthened at The Foundation. However, an in-depth scoping exercise conducted in 2015-2016 highlighted a number of areas for potential improvement. Recent staff consultations along with four workshops held with Australian-based staff in November and December last year, helped identify a *vision* for The Foundation as a learning organisation and an associated set of *strategic objectives*. This is particularly relevant in a rapidly changing and complex environment that increasingly requires quick but efficient capture, dissemination and application of lessons learnt, both in terms of failures and successes.

Our vision for organisational learning & knowledge management at The Foundation

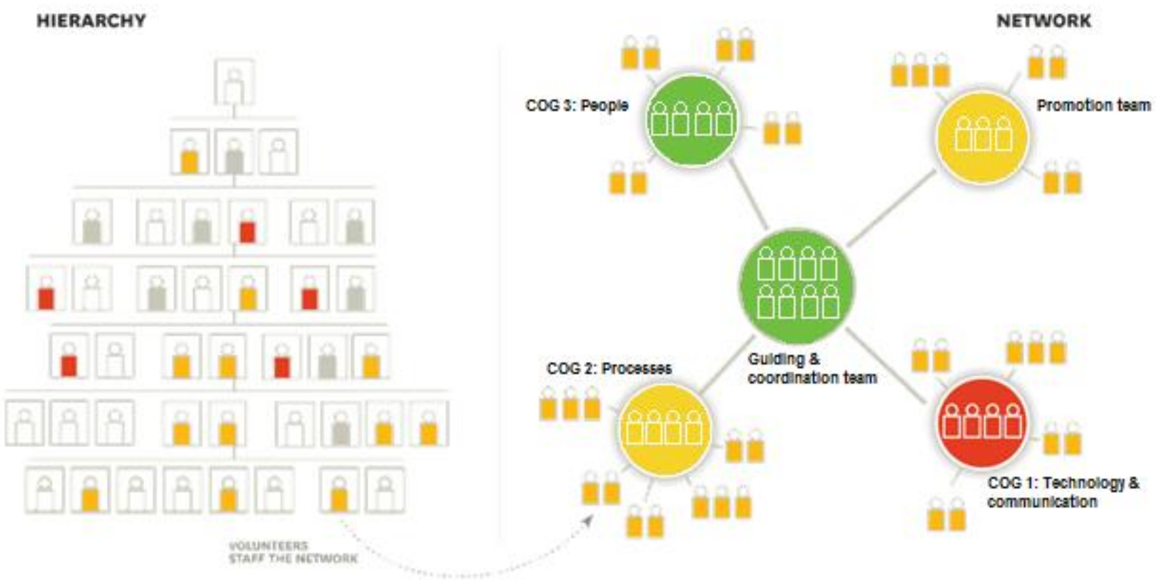
The Fred Hollows Foundation seeks to become a **leading knowledge hub and innovator in eye health** by continually and consciously learning and transforming itself to end avoidable blindness and improve Indigenous Australians' health. This will require achieving the following strategic objectives:

- Strategic Objective 1 (technology and communications): Effective approaches to storing, sharing/communicating and using the outcomes of our work. We seek to ensure that our people are enabled to and understand how to apply clearly-defined, streamlined, and role-modelled **communication** and knowledge translation approaches that leverage appropriate **technological tools** to promote transparency in how we work.

- Strategic Objective 2 (processes): Effective **processes for effectively sharing knowledge and learning,** and linking people with the knowledge and information they need to make decisions. We seek to ensure that evidence, knowledge and expertise are proactively shared and discussed across boundaries, internally and externally as appropriate in a streamlined, supported and timely manner.

- Strategic Objective 3 (people and culture: A strong **culture of learning**, innovation and continuous quality improvement. We seek to ensure our people have forums to share learning and generate new ideas and that they are clear about their contribution to the learning organistion; they will be enabled to 'think beyond' (their role, team, division, or even The Foundation); and they will have key performance indicators (KPIs), action plans and performance & development plans (PDPs) that reflect this.

Our operating model



The Foundation's operating model for organisational learning & knowledge management.
Adapted from 'The dual operating system' by John Kotter in Accelerate, Harvard Business Review Press, 2014.

In order to implement the vision statement and the three strategic objectives, different groups will be formed as follows:

- We will create a **Guiding and Coordination team**, which is a coalition of all the leads of departments that have a role to play in organisational learning and knowledge management, facilitated by the Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management team.
- **The Cross-Organisational Groups (COGs)** will provide a forum for people to prototype, pilot and facilitate/socialise new, different, better ways of working towards achieving the strategic objectives in line with the vision statement.
- **The Promotion Team** will be made up of people from across the organisation at different levels and in different divisions who believe in the 'Building a Learning Organisation Together' project and want to help drive engagement and participation throughout their circles of influence.

PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

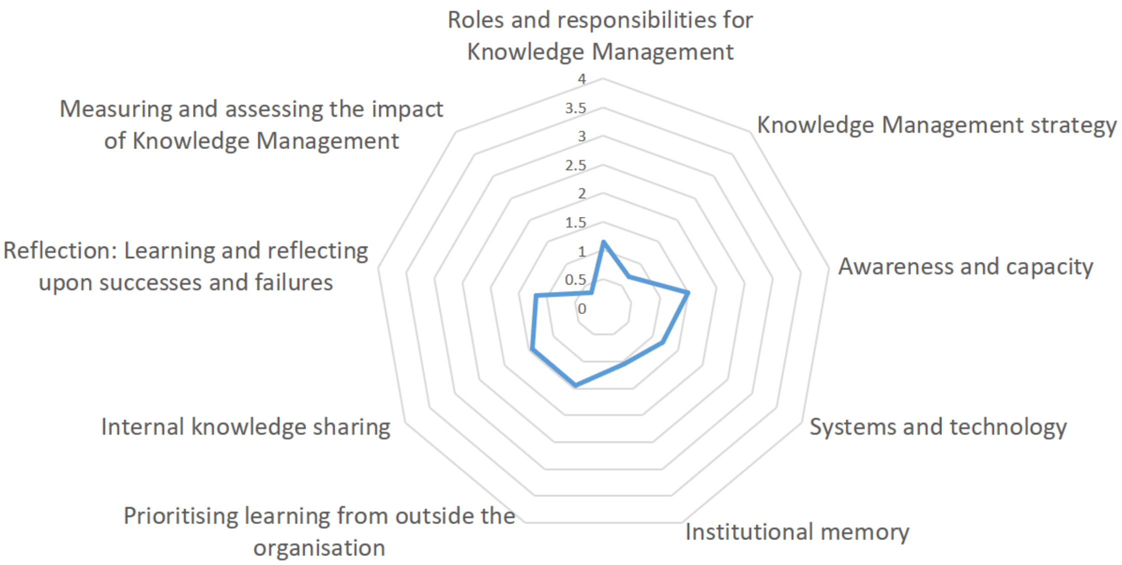
This document presents our agreed vision, strategic objectives and operating model for organisational learning and knowledge management (OL & KM) at The Foundation and a roadmap to implement this strategy. As part of the model, Cross-Organisational Groups (COGs) will be established. They will be in charge of a set of activities or projects to achieve these objectives and will develop actions plans with support from the OL & KM Specialist. This document also establishes a series of metrics to track progress against the strategy and COG action plans.

BACKGROUND AND SCOPING OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT THE FOUNDATION

Objective 12 of The Fred Hollows Foundation's (The Foundation) Organisational Strategy states that the organisation will strive for "disciplined and effective management of all of our work, from planning to monitoring, evaluation and learning". In addition, the Programs Strategy 2014-2018 states that *"A management system that actively promotes, facilitates, and rewards organisational learning"* should be established. Since 2015, a number of systems, processes, and products aiming to promote or contribute to organisational learning and knowledge management have been introduced and/or strengthened at The Foundation. However, an in-depth scoping exercise conducted in 2015-2016 through an applied research project on building a learning INGO highlighted a number of areas for improvement at The Foundation, as well as opportunities to better 'learn how to learn' from the best learning organisations in the public health and international development sector.

The diagram below shows opportunities for improvement in a number of areas. It is based on an assessment conducted via an industry-standard tool that allows for benchmarking in the sector:

Self-assessment of knowledge management capacity at The Fred Hollows Foundation conducted through ten focus-group discussions in 2016 (n=48)



Average: 1.11 / 4

A detailed mapping (see Annex 1) of The Foundation's existing organisational learning and knowledge management initiatives against Nancy Dixon's '3 Eras of Knowledge Management' (see Annex 2) suggests a number of gaps and inconsistencies in the information management tier. They prevent the organisation from consistently capturing, using and disseminating proven practice and lessons learnt from both internal and external sources. In addition, a number of mechanisms (Make Your Ideas Matter, communities of practice, lunchtime presentations, peer coaching program etc.) have been successfully tested and implemented in the areas of experience management and idea management since 2015.

Based on the extensive scoping research mentioned above, a series of workshops were designed and organised through close collaboration with a Knowledge Management expert (Marie O'Brien). These workshops were conducted with staff members across divisions to take stock of all the findings from the research complemented by participants' perspectives and clarify The Foundation's desired future. It is timely to implement a framework that will guide us from where we currently are to where we want to be in order to build a learning organisation that continually improves and delivers excellence and innovation in eye care.

The Foundation has the opportunity to position itself as a knowledge broker between different sectors (public/private) and stakeholders (institutional donors/local partners), and to make the most of its unique position at the crossroads between eye health, public health, international development and social justice. This is particularly relevant in a rapidly changing and complex environment that increasingly requires quick but efficient capture, dissemination and application of lessons learnt, both in terms of failures and successes.

OUR STRATEGY FOR ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT THE FOUNDATION

> "Think of it as people working together at their best. How do we grow organisations where that's the norm?"
>
> *-Peter Senge*

A **learning organisation** is the term given to an organisation that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself as a result. **Knowledge management** can be seen as a subset of organisational learning, including the methodologies, enablers, systems and processes upon which a learning organisation is built.

International NGOs have a responsibility to increasingly focus on organisational learning and knowledge management in order to continuously improve the quality and cost-effectiveness of the programs they deliver. This requires establishing a set of effective systems, processes, products and skills to enhance the creation, storage, retrieving and sharing of knowledge, as well as embed reflection and learning.

Our vision statement and strategic objectives

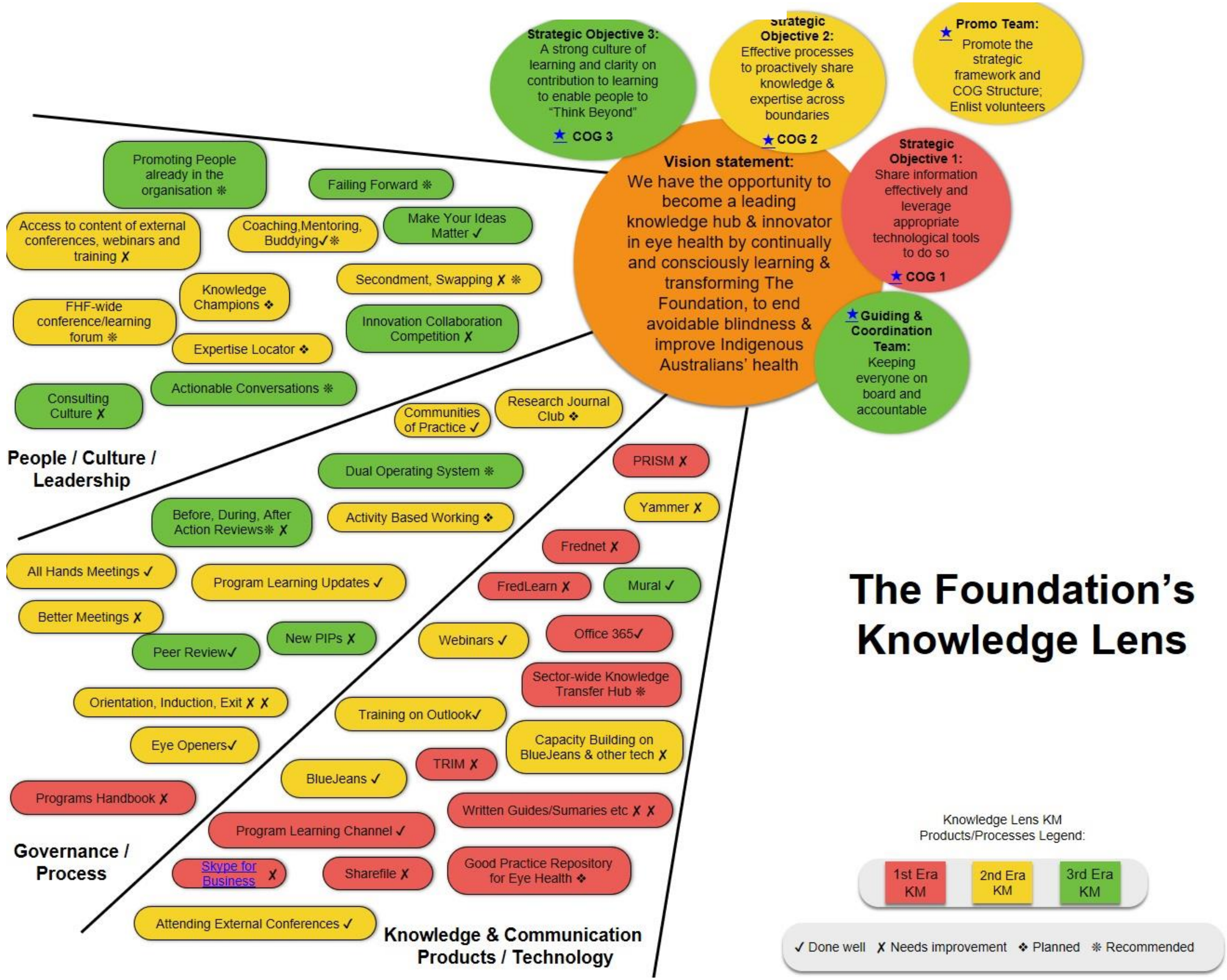
Vision statement: The Fred Hollows Foundation seeks to become a **leading knowledge hub and innovator in eye health** by continually and consciously learning and transforming itself to end avoidable blindness and improve Indigenous Australians' health. To do this we will aim to achieve the following strategic objectives:

- Strategic Objective 1 (technology and communications): Effective approaches to storing, sharing/communicating and using the outcomes of our work. We seek to ensure that our people are enabled to and understand how to apply clearly-defined, streamlined, and role-modelled **communication** and knowledge translation approaches that leverage appropriate **technological tools** to promote transparency in how we work.

- Strategic Objective 2 (processes): Effective **processes for effectively sharing knowledge and learning,** and linking people with the knowledge and information they need to make decisions. We seek to ensure that evidence, knowledge and expertise are proactively shared and discussed across boundaries, internally and externally as appropriate in a streamlined, supported and timely manner.

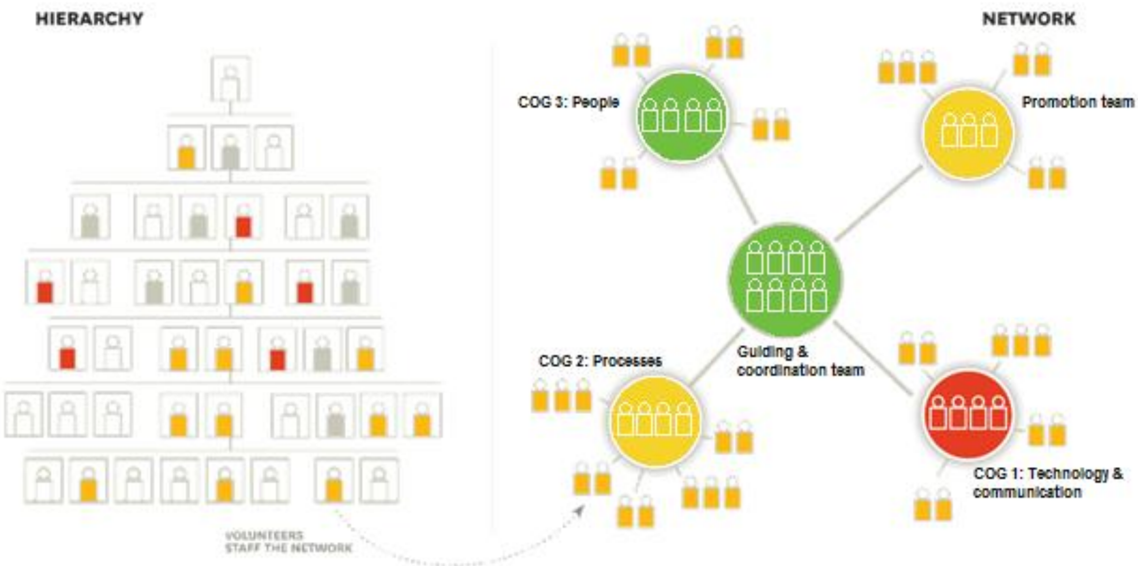
- Strategic Objective 3 (people and culture: A strong **culture of learning**, innovation and continuous quality improvement. We seek to ensure our people have forums to share learning and generate new ideas and that they are clear about their contribution to the learning organisation; they will be enabled to 'think beyond' (their role, team, division, or even The Foundation); and they will have key performance indicators (KPIs), action plans and performance & development plans (PDPs) that reflect this.

Our strategic framework – The Foundation's Knowledge Lens



Note: The Knowledge Lens is a living, evolving document that provides the framework to identify, visualise, coordinate and prioritise all the existing and new initiatives implemented across The Foundation that contribute to organisational learning and knowledge management. It uses the following categories: Done Well; Needs Improvement; Planned; and Recommended. The 'Recommended' category lists a number of mechanisms that do not currently exist at The Foundation but will complement existing elements of the framework to build a learning organisation together. They were drawn from the literature, recognised from our research as successful in other high performing learning organisations, and/or identified by the Knowledge Management expert as proven practice.

OUR OPERATING MODEL FOR ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING & KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AT THE FOUNDATION



The Foundation's operating model for organisational learning & knowledge management.
Adapted from 'The dual operating system' by John Kotter in Accelerate, Harvard Business Review Press, 2014.

The Fred Hollows Foundation

How does it work

In order to implement the vision statement and the three strategic objectives, different cross-divisional groups will be formed, which will each focus on a particular aspect of the strategic framework as follows[8]:

- **The Guiding and Coordination (G&C) team** will act as a coalition of all the leads of departments that have a role to play in organisational learning and knowledge management. The Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management team will play a key role in strongly facilitating this group and overseeing the work of the Cross-Organisational Groups (COGs). The G&C team includes the heads of Learning & Development, Information & Technology, as well the Director of KID and at least one or two other members of the Executive Management Group (EMG) as senior sponsors. The Guiding and Coordination Team exists to ensure the activities delivered by the COGs align with the vision statement, the strategic objectives and with each other's portfolios. This team also provides a direct link to senior leadership to ensure that COG initiatives are aligned with the strategic direction and work plans of each division and the wider organisation. It does not provide a 'signoff' function for the COGs' activities, which require some freedom, flexibility and space to pilot and prototype new ideas. However, they guide, open doors, provide support where appropriate, direct COGs to other complementary organisational initiatives/strategies and advise where there might be duplication of effort or conflict with existing or planned initiatives.
- **The Cross-Organisational Groups (COGs)** will provide a forum for people to prototype, pilot and facilitate/socialise new, different, better ways of working towards achieving the Strategic Objectives in line with the vision statement. Their role is also to encourage integration of existing initiatives and practices across divisions wherever appropriate in order to avoid duplication and/or conflict. They will comprise of highly motivated and committed volunteers from across the organisation who are keen to collaborate and have flexibility and space to implement new and innovative cross-divisional activities. They could be designated through self-nomination, managers' nomination, or a combination of both.
  The COGs are similar to the Our Say action planning groups formed in 2016, except for the fact that they will not be time-bound and that their scope will evolve depending on the initiatives they choose to develop and implement. Upon establishment, they will set clear deliverables aligned to their respective strategic objectives, identify roles and responsibilities within the COG, and corresponding metrics to track progress will be set. They will each develop an action plan including timeframes for phasing of mechanisms that will operationalise/activate each strategic objective and turbo-charge the change process. To ensure the work of the COGs is aligned with the organisational strategy and each Division's strategic initiatives, it is proposed that a Director or Associated Director will sit on each COG as a senior sponsor as follows:

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[8] We will use John Kotter's Accelerate Model (see Annex 3) and the Dual Operating System (see above) to engage people across the organisation to actively promote it and participate in its success. This model has already been used effectively in high performing learning NGOs such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). This involves the successful creation of a coalition of all the leads of departments that have a role to play in knowledge management, facilitated by the Knowledge Management Specialist. This includes the heads of Learning & Development, Information & Communications Technology and Internal Communications as quoted by a senior manager: *"Those four positions are really the key positions […] driving us to become a learning organisation or increasing our knowledge management maturity further."*

- COG 1: Associate Director of Technology & Business Service;
- COG 2: Director of Programs with support from Associate Director of East Asia region and/or Associate Director of South Asia region;
- COG 3: Associate Director of People & Organisational Development.

- **The Promotion Team** will be made up of people from across the organisation at different levels and in different divisions who believe in the 'Building a Learning Organisation Together' project and want to help drive engagement and participation throughout their circles of influence (champions). They could be designated through self-nomination, managers' nomination, or a combination of both. They will promote the vision statement, strategic objectives and COGs throughout the organisation (usually during the execution of their existing duties) to inform and educate people at The Foundation around the benefits and value of becoming a "leading knowledge hub and innovator in eye health" through organisational learning. This process is also aimed at further enlisting volunteers to participate in the COGs, thus expanding the piloting and role-modelling of organisational learning across the organisation.
  The Promotion Team will be coordinated by the Internal Communications Specialist and Change & Engagement Advisor, with the Director of Public Affairs and/or Associate Director for Marketing & Fundraising as senior sponsors. This will ensure that the OL & KM work is fully aligned with the Internal Communications portfolio and the initiatives outlined in the International Communications strategic priorities and recommendations 2018.

As participation in the operating model for OL & KM (especially COGs and the Promotion team) is voluntary and relies on the commitment of motivated staff members, their engagement must be recognised and supported by senior leadership. In particular, the time required to contribute to this project should be allocated as an integral part of their existing day-to-day role. There should not be an expectation that they will participate in the COG initiatives on top of their existing roles, nor an assumption that they will contribute only if time allows and/or in their own time. Therefore, their contribution to this project should also be reflected and recognised in their KPIs and / or Performance Development Plans.

Note: the operating model will initially be piloted for a period of six months between April and October 2018 to start implementing initiatives that form part of the OL & KM strategic framework (Knowledge Lens). This will be followed by a review and refinement process in October-November 2018. If successful, it could be envisaged that this operating model be used to implement initiatives beyond the OL & KM strategy such as the Our Say action planning process.

Tracking progress against our vision statement and strategic objectives

- To measure high-level progress against the strategy (objective/outcome level), it is proposed that progress against the assessment criteria presented in the spider chart above will be regularly monitored through focus-group discussions on a regular basis using the Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool (KM-CAST), an industry-standard tool that allows for benchmarking in the sector. It is suggested that the focus-group discussions be complemented with anecdotes and short case studies. The spider chart will be used as a baseline and the next assessment will be conducted in October 2018. The findings from this assessment will inform the refinement and further implementation of the operating model in October-November 2018.

- These assessment criteria should also be built into the next organisational strategic plan 2019-2023 that is currently being developed.
- To measure progress at the output level (COGs), it is recommended that a set of **quantitative or 'exploit'** (i.e. anything that can be counted and captured in a graph) and **qualitative or 'explore'** (anecdotes, case studies, statements) metrics[9] be established and reported on.
- Each Cross-Organisational Group (COG) will be in charge of setting metrics for their respective initiatives and action plans to demonstrate how they will measure success via both explore and exploit metrics.

  As an example, COG 1 might propose an initiative aiming at role modelling the use of Yammer in facilitating and accessing the knowledge of the wider organisation beyond its current usage as a socialisation and internal promotion platform. Metrics that might be captured both before and after the new initiative is launched might include:

  - Exploit: number of passive users on Yammer; number of active users on Yammer; number of questions posted; and number of responses received.
  - Explore: statements or case studies of how the use of Yammer has helped people in their day-to-day work.

Year 1 (2018) proposed initiatives for COGs to review and action

This list of initiatives will be proposed for review, further development and take-up by the COGs with support from the OL & KM team and in collaboration with the Guiding & Coordination team in order to 'kick-start' the implementation of the OL & KM strategy. These projects arose as a result of the internal research project conducted at The Foundation in the last three years as well as through discussions during the stakeholder engagement workshops:

Initiative	Brief description	Responsible COG	Contact team
1. Consistent processes for document storage, referencing and finding	Develop a document management protocol including storing, indexing and referencing should be developed and consistently applied across Sharefile, FredNet and PRISM systems. A powerful search function that ideally searches through all three systems at once should be established.	COG 1	Program Operations

[9] March, J. (1991). Exploration and Exploitation in Organizational Learning. *Organization Science, 2*(1), 71-87.

2. Creative approaches to rollout and capacity building of users on new technologies	Develop simple and engaging ways to roll out new technologies upon their introduction and build the capacity of users in ways that are adapted to various audiences (e.g. need, technological proficiency, geographical location, role).	COG1 COG 2	IT
3. Leverage creativity- and collaboration-enhancing technologies	Explore current use of existing creativity- and collaboration-enhancing technologies (e.g. Mural, Sharefile) and map whether/how they could be maximised to meet our needs, including in terms of uptake and rollout.	COG 2 COG 1	IT OL & KM
4. Explore options and characteristics for a people skills directory	Brainstorm required criteria for an online directory where staff can list their skills for others in The Foundation to utilise when required. This will inform the development of the new HR Management System, which will be rolled out in 2018.	COG 3	POD
5. Develop strategies to maximise use of the Program Learning Channel	Brainstorm how to improve access and use of the Program Learning Channel and consider whether and how it could be expanded to all knowledge products (including written documentation).	COG 2	OL & KM
6. Explore job secondment and/or job swapping	Assess how successful existing and past secondment opportunities have been to date as part of the 70-20-10 framework, and formulate recommendations as regards a potential policy and process for expansion of secondments as a vehicle for enhancing on-the-job learning and sharing of experience.	COG 3 COG 2	POD
7. Build a culture of learning and knowledge sharing into job descriptions, work plans and PDPs	Establish a list of skills and behaviours that contribute to the learning organisation and propose a process for incorporation into job descriptions. Consider how learning and knowledge sharing activities can be incentivised and rewarded at The Foundation, including in work plans and through performance appraisal plans (PDPs) and rewards.	COG 3 COG 2	POD

The Fred Hollows Foundation

STRATEGY ANNEXES

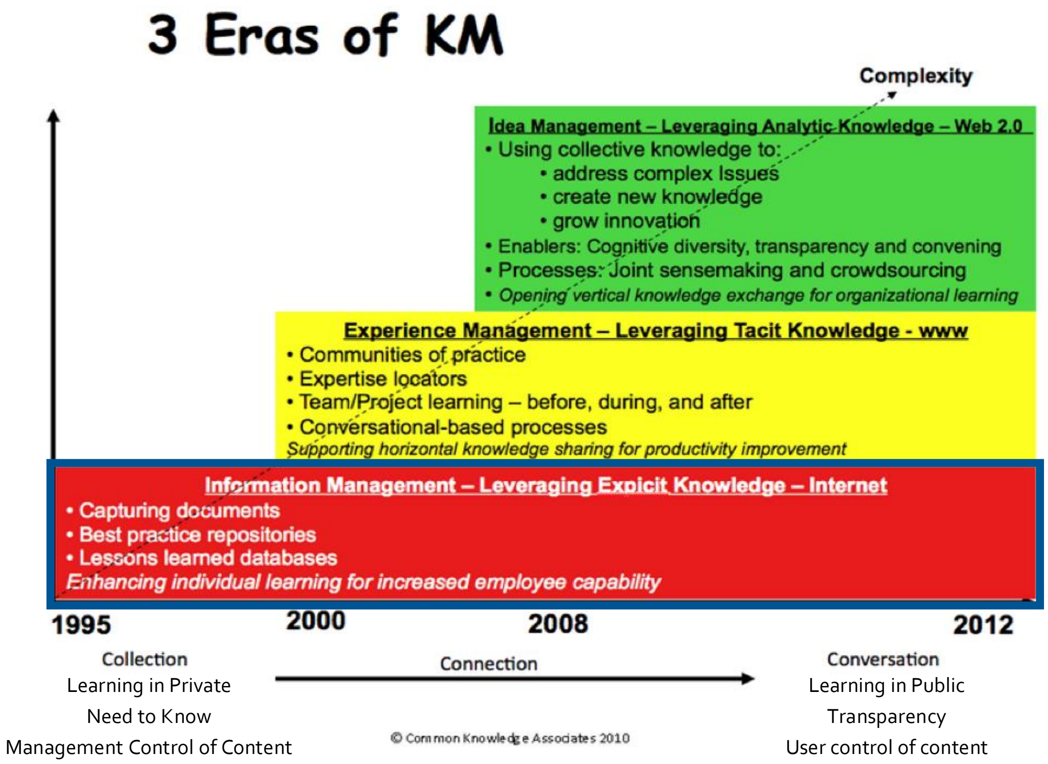
Annex 1: Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management Diagnostic Tool – appraising The Foundation's products, processes and cultural components

- Done well
- Needs to be improved or planned
- Not done
- Tried and not successful

Key components of an Organisational Learning system	People/skills/culture/leadership	Resources, KM products & technology	Structures, systems & processes
Creating a culture that supports organisational learning	Coaching program	People skills directory	Make Your Ideas Matter
	Capacity building & networking through EOs, PLUs, CoPs, training (EBPT)…		Yammer
	L&D study support		Dual organisation model
	Secondment		Activity-based working
	Job swapping		
	Dual organisatio model		
Gathering internal experience	Mentoring on technical skills	Programs Handbook	FredNet
	CoPs	Case studies	Communities of Practice
	FHF-wide conference / learning forum	Rough Guides	Program Learning Updates
		Evaluation summaries	Program Learning Channel
		Best practice repository for eye health	PRISM
		Sector-wide clearing house of effective practices in eye health	Sharefile (document repository)
		Evidence briefs	TRIM
		Internal newsletters	Eye Openers
			Webinars
			All Hands meetings
	Research journal club	Evidence briefs	Program Learning Channel

Accessing external learning	Attendance at conferences	Information sheets	Yammer
	Buddy system for employees who are studying at FHF	Newsletters from other organisations	Eye Openers
	Secondment		Access to external conferences & webinars
	Actionable Conversations		
	Consulting culture		
Communication systems	Capacity building on Blue Jeans	How-to guides to Blue Jeans and other ICT systems	Blue Jeans
	Training on Outlook		Outlook
			Office 365
			Mural
Mechanisms for drawing conclusions	Failing forward (through pre-mortems)	Evaluation reports	Peer review
	Admitting failure	Formative & implementation research	Project pre-mortems
		Fail reports	PRISM
			Fail fests
			End-of-evaluation workshops
Developing an organisational memory	KM champions / mapping bridges	Handover notes	Exit interviews
	Inductions		Orientation workshop
	Promoting people already in the organisation		Induction process
			Sharefile (document repository)
Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy	Better meetings e.g. open/standup division meetings		Make Your Ideas Matter
			Peer review
			FredLearn
Applying the learning	Innovation Collaboration Competition	New PIPs	Annual/quarterly/regional learning reviews
		Variations to PIPs	

Annex 2: Three Eras of Knowledge Management by Nancy Dixon, Common Knowledge Associates



Annex 3: Applying Kotter's "Accelerate" framework to Build a Learning Organisation Together at The Foundation

The Eight Accelerators for leading organisational change by John Kotter - ***from Accelerate, Harvard Business Review Press, 2014.***

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Chapter 6: Recommendations and conclusions

Purpose of this chapter

This chapter presents an overview of the main themes that emerged from this body of work together with recommendations for The Fred Hollows Foundation and the wider sector, and potential future directions for further investigation. It also highlights the strengths and limitations of this study, noting the methodological approach as an insider-researcher undertaking a professional doctorate using organisational ethnography and action research drawing on aspects of collaborative inquiry.

6.1 Opening summary to thesis recommendations and conclusions

This thesis presents a study of change at The Fred Hollows Foundation, an international public health NGO working in low-income settings and specialising in eye health on its journey to becoming a learning organisation.

This research sought to address the following questions:

- How are the terms 'organisational learning' and 'knowledge management' defined and used in the international development sector, including in public health organisations within that sector?
- What is the pathway to becoming a learning organisation for INGOs?
- What does a learning INGO look like and what is a suitable framework to identify and build a learning INGO?

In Chapter Two, I examined how organisational learning, knowledge management and the learning organisation are defined in the NGO literature. This review of academic papers and grey documentation uncovered commonalities in terms of the stated rationale, enablers, mechanisms for and barriers to OL & KM in the international development sector. Britton's framework described in *The Learning NGO* (1998) was identified as seminal in identifying a learning organisation in this sector, as it continues to inform the body of research focusing on practical application of OL & KM in NGOs that has been undertaken to date (Hill & Aarnoudse, 2011; Makuwira, 2013; Ringa, 2012; Walton, 2005).

In Chapter Three, I captured and described the processes I used to identify the needs and suitable initiatives in terms of organisational learning and knowledge management at The Foundation by way of an audit trail (Ritchie, 2001) from study design and sampling to data collection and analysis. I outlined the methodological reasoning for the approach taken and the scope of methods used to illuminate the need for transforming The Foundation into a learning INGO. In doing so, I thus documented the steps I undertook to guide the organisation on its journey.

In Chapter Four, I described the outcomes of the comprehensive scoping exercise I undertook to assess The Fred Hollows Foundation's performance as a learning organisation. This allowed to establish the extent to which the principles and mechanisms found in the literature were applied on the ground. I also captured a number of good practice examples for mechanisms that other learning organisations have successfully put in place but that are not yet documented in existing sources. Gathering the views of practitioners at FHF and in other organisations further informed my understanding of how the terms 'organisational learning' and 'knowledge management' are defined and used in the international development sector, including in public health organisations within that sector. My findings validated the eight key functions for the learning organisation described in Britton's framework (1998) and identified an additional feature outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector.

Chapter Five documented and analysed the development of an OL & KM strategy, model and mechanisms at The Foundation within a changing internal context and the broader domain of international non-governmental organisations. It provided concrete evidence of the pathway currently followed by FHF to become an INGO with a strong ability and focus on learning and sharing knowledge. The strategic framework outlined in the strategy document (Knowledge Lens, p. 136) offers an evidence-informed example of a comprehensive model for the learning organisation tailored to the needs of The Foundation.

6.2 Themes arising from this study and recommendations

Overview of themes from findings identified in this thesis

A number of thematic areas that may be prioritised by The Foundation arose from the review of the literature documented in Chapter Two and study findings outlined in Chapter Four with a view to implement a strategy to "build a learning organisation together" in order to "become a leading knowledge hub and innovator in eye health" as outlined in Chapter Five.

Rationale for an NGO to become a learning organisation

In line with the literature on OL & KM in NGOs, this study has suggested that the rationale for building a learning organisation needs to be clearly identified and should specifically articulate the benefits of improved OL & KM for the structure and its employees. While this varied from one organisation to the next, the most common reasons cited by participants in Chapter Four of this study and corroborated by the literature review in Chapter Two to become a learning NGO were: the constant need to embrace change in a volatile and complex environment (Goold, 2006; Varney, 2015); knowledge management as a powerful antidote to mitigate the negative effects of staff turnover (Britton, 1998; Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002; Whatley, 2013); increased efficiency and credibility through knowledge sharing within and outside the organisation (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Korten, 1984; Whatley, 2013); and an ability for learning organisations to firmly position themselves as knowledge brokers and thought leaders with institutional donors, local partners, other NGOs and the public (Bebbington & Riddell, 1995; Hulme, 1992; Lewis & Sobhan, 1999; Mitlin, Hickey & Bebbington, 2007; Norton, Howell & Reynolds, 2016).

It was strongly recommended by participants in this study that a clear rationale be outlined in a strategy document for OL & KM together with a vision/goal, areas to be prioritised and specific initiatives for implementation. These recommendations informed the design and development of the FHF strategy as documented and presented in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Factors enabling to build a learning environment in NGOs

The review of the literature identified five categories of enablers or preconditions that are necessary for the learning NGO to arise: better allocation of resources (time, budget) and inputs (technological solutions) for learning (Britton, 1998; Goold, 2006; Janus, 2016; Lewis & Madon, 2004); leaders who act as champions of learning and encourage their employees to do the same (Hailey & James, 2002; Janus, 2016; Kasper, 2007; Owusu, 2008; Soal, 2008); individuals who feel supported and empowered to routinely learn and share knowledge (Britton, 1998; Froggatt, 2011; Roper & Pettit, 2002); processes and systems that introduce an element of compliance and clarify requirements as regards knowledge management and sharing (Britton, 1998; Janus, 2016; Lewis & Madon, 2004); and a culture that strives for continuous improvement, including by promoting relevant skillsets and behaviours (Bloch & Borges, 2002; Goold, 2006; Janus, 2016; Soal, 2008; Whatley, 2013). This is consistent with the building blocks of the learning environment outlined by participants in this study.

As well as validating these enablers, my findings emphasised the need to embed the principle of 'failing forward' into the culture of INGOs. Study participants strongly advocated for failure to be seen as a normal part of learning in their organisations. They also highlighted the importance of regularly and collectively celebrating successes in order to counter the 'deficit thinking' mentality that is prevalent in INGOs, that is, external knowledge being viewed as more legitimate or important than internal learning, which is seen as valuable or valid. According to respondents, celebrating both successes and failures as opportunities for learning is a key factor in building a culture of knowledge sharing and openness. However, participants consistently expressed that the lack of resources dedicated to OL & KM remains a reality in most of their organisations. They noted that insufficient resourcing sends a powerful message that knowledge dissemination is not actually valued by their organisation, even when their leaders apparently hold discourses that encourage employees to learn and share.

In the OL & KM strategy for FHF presented in Chapter Five, the learning environment model has been slightly simplified as per input from key stakeholders who contributed to its development as follows: technology and resources for knowledge and communication;

processes and structures; and culture (which includes leadership and individual learning). This is due to the fact that during the stakeholder engagement workshops, participants consistently expressed the need to have fewer categories to make the model easier to disseminate and implement. They felt that an inspired leadership and increased focus on individual learning were integral parts of building a learning culture at FHF and therefore recommended grouping these three categories under a more generic 'culture' label. As demonstrated in The Foundation's strategic framework (Knowledge Lens, Chapter Five), each of these factors (technology/resources; processes/structures; culture) should be considered when implementing a set of mechanisms under each of the nine functions of the LO.

Validating and expanding on Britton's framework

My findings further suggested that nine key functions define the learning organisation. Through this research, I have verified the validity of Britton's model (1998) describing the eight key features of the learning organisation and the usefulness of this framework in the current context within which INGOs operate. These functions are: creating a supportive culture; gathering internal experience; accessing external learning; communication systems; mechanisms for drawing conclusions; developing and maintaining an organisational memory; integrating learning into policy and practice; and applying the learning (Britton, 1998). My study results have also uncovered a new function outlining the importance of sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector, which I proposed naming 'Sharing internal knowledge and learning with the wider sector'.

The findings from this study suggest the importance of this additional ninth feature for INGOs as learning organisations within the current international context. It was found that in today's rapidly changing world, study participants viewed this feature as increasingly essential for INGOs to be able to strategically position themselves as knowledge brokers and thought leaders and engage in inter-agency knowledge sharing. Given the dynamic, highly complex and fiscally constrained environment they operate in, it was also found that INGOs may need to consider gradually investing in and strengthening learning and collaboration mechanisms across organisations. As per my findings, this may lead to similar benefits observed from inter-agency knowledge sharing and mobilisation in the public health academic sector, as has been promoted for effective public health policy and practice.

Documenting FHF's journey: developing and implementing a strategy for OL & KM at The Foundation

Important findings on the most appropriate and efficient ways to implement the strategic framework at The Foundation arose from discussions with key stakeholders during the engagement workshops and are reflected in the strategy document as set out in Chapter Five. It has been recognised that OL and KM cut across many parts of the organisation and ought to be seen as 'everyone's business'. To be successfully embedded at The Foundation, implementing the framework should therefore bring together individuals from different teams and divisions across the organisation. The operating model for the strategy has thus been established in such a way that different cross-divisional groups (or Cross-Organisational Groups – COGs) are formed with a view that each COG focuses on a particular aspect of the strategic framework (technology and resources; processes and structures; culture). In addition, it is proposed that a Guiding and Coordination Team ensures the activities delivered by the COGs align with the strategic vision statement and with each group's portfolios to avoid duplication and ensure synergy between the activities delivered. Furthermore, the Promotion Team's role is to inform the rest of the organisation on the benefits and value for The Foundation of increasingly focusing on becoming a learning organisation. It is also mandated to provide regular updates on the progress made by the COGs as per their respective portfolios of activities.

Based on my research findings described in Chapter Four combined with the review of the literature documented in Chapter Two and the learnings from The Foundation's strategy for OL & KM in Chapter Five, I have developed a set of evidence-informed recommendations for organisational learning and knowledge management that are applicable to The Foundation and the wider INGO sector and are presented in the next section.

Recommendations and proposed mechanisms for The Fred Hollows Foundation and the wider sector

As outlined in this thesis, building a learning organisation requires assessing which areas should be prioritised and selecting a suite of mechanisms to address the identified gaps. Based on the findings from this study and in keeping with my initial goal to offer this thesis as a manual or blueprint for FHF and the wider sector as described in Chapter One, I have developed a series of specific, evidence-informed recommendations drawing upon the nine key functions of the learning organisation.

To facilitate the implementation of these recommendations, I have mapped a number of potential mechanisms that have been identified from this study's literature review and findings to efficiently and comprehensively address each of the nine functions under which they are listed. In keeping with my goal to make the study documented in this thesis useful and usable by practitioners at The Fred Hollows Foundation and beyond, I have presented the recommendations associated with each key function and related mechanisms in a table format (Table 5). It was designed as a user-friendly framework that NGO workers interested in OL & KM can refer to as a guide to evidence-informed strategies that can be adapted and used for their own contexts. While Table 5 simply offers a list of mechanisms as per the functions, further detail can be found in section 2.5 of the literature review and section 4.2 of the study findings, which provide a brief description of each of them.

As described in Chapter One, it has been my hope since the commencement of this research project that other INGOs and public health organisations might draw inspiration from the results and evidence-based outcomes of the study presented in this thesis to inform better practice on OL & KM in their respective organisations. My findings confirmed and possibly further illuminated the literature to date on enablers, barriers, applied mechanisms and rationale for building a learning INGO and outlined shared characteristics among the INGOs examined in this thesis. Based on those common traits and given the changing context of INGOs and the importance of remaining competitive and agile in a complex and constantly evolving environment, it could be argued that my results and related recommendations may be applied in the INGO sector beyond The Fred Hollows

Foundation. Consequently, I propose that the recommendations presented in Table 5 below might be of use to other INGOs that are willing to embark on their own journey to becoming learning organisations.

In Table 5, I am presenting the nine key functions for the learning organisation as evidenced from the research findings building on Britton's model (1998) and results from this study. The recommendations for implementation and specific proposed mechanisms are drawn directly from the in-depth literature review and findings from the study and have been distilled here in a ready form for use by INGO practitioners.

Table 5: Proposed mechanisms and recommendations for The Fred Hollows Foundation and wider INGO sector to address the nine thematic areas identified in this study

Key functions for the learning organisation identified in this study[10]	Recommendations for implementation of the key functions	Mechanisms identified in findings from this study for possible implementation
1. Creating a supportive culture for learning	1.1 Incentives and recognition for involvement in OL & KM activities should be formalised and actively supported by leadership to get the message across that these activities have a high strategic value and are not just 'nice to have'. 1.2 Learning & KM activities should be factored in and incorporated into job descriptions and individual/team/divisional/organisational key performance indicators, performance assessment plans and work plans. 1.3 OL & KM should be clearly mentioned in the organisational strategic plan, including in the organisational objectives, and metrics should be defined to track progress. 1.4 Senior managers should act as role models by frequently talking about their own lessons learnt as well as failures and what they learnt from it. 1.5 A culture of admitting and even celebrating failure as a normal part of implementing projects and an opportunity to learn should be fostered. 1.6 A process and policy to enable and encourage secondments and job swapping including across countries should be defined.	Failure reports Fail fairs[11] Coaching and mentoring Creating incentives encouraging participation into learning & KM activities Revising job descriptions to include OL & KM activities and incorporate into KPIs and work plans Journal clubs Appreciative inquiry[12] Regular collective time and space for learning Job swaps and secondments

[10] As per Britton's framework (1998) and findings from this study.

[11] As mentioned in Chapter Four, a fail fair is a type of forum in which staff members describe a project or activity that did not go well, analyse the reasons behind the failure and what they have learnt from it.

[12] As described in Chapter Two, appreciative inquiry is form of collective reflection to identify activities and moments of success in the past, and capitalise on which factors created that success.

Key functions for the learning organisation identified in this study[10]	**Recommendations for implementation of the key functions**	**Mechanisms identified in findings from this study for possible implementation**
		Specific budget allocation for OL & KM
2 Gathering internal experience	2.1 A user-centred online project management system should be established and include a powerful search function. The processes around its rollout, maintenance and tracking should be carefully defined in close collaboration with end users. 2.2 The document repository should be centralised and accessible by everyone from everywhere. The folder and file structure should be replicated from one location to the next to facilitate consultation and navigation by users in a different location. 2.3 Mechanisms that build and enhance direct interpersonal relationships and promote cross-country learning with minimal involvement from the 'main office' should be promoted to encourage their ownership and sustainability.	Communities of practice Lunchtime learning sessions Centralised content management system or document repository (e.g. Sharefile) Building direct relationships between staff members from different locations e.g. via peer coaching programs Intranet People directory / expertise locator
3 Accessing external learning	3.1 The organisation should opt for mechanisms and strategies that foster an enquiring mindset and identify the external themes and trends the sector needs to stay abreast of rather than an approach to accessing outside learning on a 'need-to-know' basis only. 3.2 Organisations that have an ambition to develop a knowledge brokering profile or knowledge hub in their sector should consider establishing an internal research unit so they develop an in-house expertise on accessing external knowledge and generate new knowledge from their own applied research.	Journal clubs Partnerships, coalitions and networks Recruiting researchers
4 Communication systems	4.1 Organisations should consider adopting an all-encompassing technological solution (e.g. Sharepoint) that integrates all three key KM components: document repository; intranet; people directory.	Centralised document repository Intranet People directory / expertise locator

Key functions for the learning organisation identified in this study[10]	Recommendations for implementation of the key functions	Mechanisms identified in findings from this study for possible implementation
	4.2 The key to building and maintaining a successful people directory / expertise locator is to define clear processes to maintain it and update the information. Managers should have a key role in making their employees accountable for the information displayed in their profile. 4.3 Once key information management systems are in place (see above), creativity- and collaboration-enhancing technologies (e.g. Yammer) can be explored, including their uptake and rollout. 4.4 Processes to build the capacity of users around new technologies should be defined (including owners and timeframes in the rollout process) every time a new solution is introduced.	Technology that enhances video conferencing and online presentations (e.g. Blue Jeans) Yammer[13]
5 Mechanisms for drawing conclusions	5.1 A suite of regular, formal reflection sessions at various levels (project, country program, regional, organisational) should be defined collaboratively with end users to ensure these meet their needs in terms of knowledge sharing, learning and reflection processes. These sessions should be briefly documented and include an action planning component (tasks, owners, deadlines) to enhance the use of lessons learnt. These sessions could replace or decrease the reliance on other strategies such as ‘heavy’ reporting. 5.2 Mechanisms to evaluate and reflect on internal processes and training should be established. This includes consistently capturing country offices’ views about new processes introduced by headquarters.	After-action review 360 reviews Staff surveys Meta-analysis of evaluations
6 Developing an organisational memory	6.1 Current employees should be provided with regular information view on which mechanisms are in place so the organisation can	Handover notes Exit interviews

[13] As per Chapter Four, Yammer is a social networking platform for organisations.

Key functions for the learning organisation identified in this study[10]	Recommendations for implementation of the key functions	Mechanisms identified in findings from this study for possible implementation
	better 'remember things' and should be heavily involved in the design and planning of such initiatives. 6.2 It should be recognised that staff turnover is a reality of the international development sector and this should be embraced as an opportunity for learning to circulate between departing and new staff members. 6.3 A collaborative brainstorming session mapping the employee experience throughout their time in the organisation and identifying critical moments (e.g. induction, handover, exit) should be carried out with a view to facilitate the passing of information from departing to new staff members. 6.4 Effectiveness and efficiency should be paramount in choosing which mechanisms to apply. For example, face-to-face handover such as baton passing is an efficient and effective way in terms of time and money spent on a new staff induction in comparison with a combination of handover notes, exit interviews and a series of induction meetings[14].	Policy to reduce staff turnover Baton passing[15] Meta-analysis of evaluations Consistent, well maintained document repository Knowledge champions
7 Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy	7.1 The OL & KM strategy should be developed and implemented in a highly participatory manner and the development process should be used to build momentum and excitement around the vision to build a learning organisation. The processes described in this thesis and strategy document in Chapter Five are one such example that could be adapted in other agencies. 7.2 It is essential to measure and assess the impact of OL & KM initiatives as part of the strategy implementation. To do so, clear	OL & KM strategy developed in a collaborative, cross-divisional manner Participatory policy development using collaborative online platforms

[14] Klein & Shapira-Lishchinsky, 2016.
[15] As suggested in Chapter Four, baton passing is a handover mechanism in which a third party ensures the transfer of knowledge between outgoing and incoming staff members by holding a debriefing session with their departing colleague and a subsequent briefing session with the incoming employee to pass on the information collected.

Key functions for the learning organisation identified in this study[10]	Recommendations for implementation of the key functions	Mechanisms identified in findings from this study for possible implementation
	metrics need to be defined as part of the strategy development process, and baseline information should be collected. Regular monitoring data against these metrics should then be collected on a regular basis to track progress against strategy implementation. 7.3 Organisation-wide initiatives to crowdsource new ideas from all staff members should be implemented and include a clear process for how these ideas will be used. For instance, they could draw the organisation's attention on new thematic areas to be explored and feed into new policies or the development of an organisational strategy. 7.4 The skills, competencies and behaviours required from staff members to build a learning organisation should be defined - both for staff members in general and for key functions (e.g. Learning & Development function, IT function, internal communications function, OL & KM function). They should be incorporated into job descriptions and performance appraisal processes. 7.5 A responsive and transparent approach to budgeting should be adopted. For example, financial systems could be integrated with review cycles and program planning so that the review process directly impacts on planning and budgeting.	Revising job descriptions to include OL & KM activities and incorporate it into KPIs and work plans Responsive budgeting
8 Applying the learning	8.1 Mechanisms to identify and incorporate lessons learnt into every step of the project cycle should be defined e.g. a combination of premortem project reviews, action learning sets during implementation, after-action reviews, and evaluations performed by a peer from another country office. 8.2 Incorporating past learnings into project design within and across project locations should be prioritised. This requires facilitating users connecting with people with relevant expertise	Peer reviews Powerful search function in online project management system People directory / expertise locator

Key functions for the learning organisation identified in this study[10]	Recommendations for implementation of the key functions	Mechanisms identified in findings from this study for possible implementation
	in their organisation, for which the people directory is a powerful tool. This can also be achieved by ensuring the search function in the online project management system allows search of projects and documentation by keyword and that two contact persons (project manager and project officer) are identified in the system for each project who could share lessons learnt on the project of interest.	Research translation workshops – and other types of evidence (e.g. evaluations) Job swaps and secondments Action learning sets Premortem project reviews / peer assists Evaluations (especially peer evaluations)
9 Sharing internal knowledge and learning with the wider sector	9.1 A suite of mechanisms that can facilitate increased collaboration with the wider sector should be defined in close collaboration with staff members in country offices to ensure their motivation in contributing to the strategies chosen. 9.2 Each mechanism should include a capacity building strategy. For instance, presenting at an international conference or writing an article for a peer-reviewed journal will require significant upskilling for staff members who do not have an academic background. 9.3 There should be clear incentives for in-country staff members to take part in these initiatives and this should be recognised and adequately rewarded as part of performance appraisal processes.	Presenting at national and international conferences Writing articles for peer-reviewed journals Setting up academies on a particular area of expertise Setting up clearing houses of good/preferred practices

Suggestions on applying these recommendations for The Fred Hollows Foundation and the wider sector

In alignment with Britton's model and the overall findings of this research study, the nine key functions of the learning organisation need to be considered as interdependent and needing to be in synergy. In looking to Table 5, the recommendations for implementation of the nine features and the evidence-informed mechanisms in the third column for each of the functions are not intended as discrete but as potentially interrelated and reinforcing processes. A number of mechanisms listed in the third column therefore apply to more than one thematic area. For instance, journal clubs can both contribute to 'Creating a supportive culture for learning' and 'Accessing external learning'.

In addition, as highlighted in The Foundation's strategic framework (Knowledge Lens, Chapter Five), it is important to consider every set of enablers (technology, processes, culture) that constitute the learning environment when implementing a series of mechanisms under each of the nine functions. Discussions held during stakeholder engagement workshops to develop an evidence-informed strategy at FHF clearly demonstrated that each of the technology, processes and cultural dimensions should be carefully considered when implementing a chosen mechanism.

Here is a specific example to illustrate how to set up a particular mechanism under Function 4 – 'Communication systems': the implementation of a new *technological solution* such as Yammer (a social networking platform for organisations) may include the development of *processes* to enhance its uptake and use during and after rollout. For instance, Yammer champions/moderators shall be identified and trained with a mission to encourage their colleagues in various locations to familiarise themselves with the platform and explain its benefits. Performing such activities can be considered as professional development and on-the-job training and might be supported and rewarded as such by the organisation to encourage a *culture* of learning. The analysis and design process described in this example can be used to adequately and comprehensively plan the implementation of each selected mechanism.

Suggestions on using these recommendations to foster inter-agency collaboration and maximise learning and knowledge sharing

As described in the Discussion section of Chapter Four (section 4.3), the international development sector could draw inspiration from the public health academic sector by fostering better inter-agency collaboration, thus servicing organisational needs both in terms of accessing external knowledge and sharing internal knowledge with the wider sector. The INGO public health sector and eye health sector in particular are in an ideal position to lead the way with this approach, as described in section 6.3 below.

As highlighted by participants in this study, a number of mechanisms allowing the gathering of internal knowledge could be replicated outside the organisation and used as such to increase collaboration between INGOs. Consequently, the recommendations and mechanisms presented in Table 5 could be adapted and implemented between and across organisations to foster inter-agency knowledge sharing and learning. This includes inter-organisational mentoring, coaching, academies and clearing houses to widely disseminate externally the documentation produced internally.

6.3 Critical reflections and potential directions for further exploration

Britton's framework (1998) and the paucity of available literature on the learning NGO

This study found that the principles and recommendations outlined by Britton in his paper *The Learning NGO* (1998) are still applicable today. In particular, the eight areas defining the key functions of the learning organisation were validated by my findings. Unsurprisingly, Britton's statements about technological solutions are now outdated since his paper was written at the end of the 1990s. However, his metaphor describing information and communication systems as an organisation's "circulatory system for learning" that "[stimulates] and [refreshes] all its component parts" while learning is its "lifeblood" (ibid, p. 15) is still relevant today. This concept was confirmed by this study, particularly in the approach used by a public health INGO and the Australian Defence Army that embrace staff turnover by using it as an opportunity to regularly capture learning from departing staff and pass this knowledge onto new members, thus ensuring that knowledge flows continuously and is constantly renewed.

While Britton's paper forms a key part of the literature upon which this study is founded, additional seminal published papers and grey literature specifically tackling OL & KM in NGOs are scarce and the majority of them were written in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Observation and informal discussions held with OL & KM practitioners at various forums (e.g. conferences and workshops) I attended provided some explanation for this situation. Organisational learning and knowledge management is a fast-moving, fast-paced environment in which technological solutions are constantly evolving. As an example, the internet revolutionised information management in the 1990s and artificial intelligence is about to have an even greater impact on knowledge management and organisational learning at large.

Knowledge managers tend to be action-oriented practitioners who rapidly prototype new solutions and models but do not often put their reflections and thoughts in writing, particularly in academic journals. They communicate frequently and extensively with each other as a sector but they use face-to-face forums such as conferences and training sessions or technology-based solutions such as blogs, webinars and communities of practice rather than publications. Therefore, attending conferences, workshops and training is particularly important in the OL & KM sector to stay abreast of the most-up-to date technology and processes and latest trends in terms of organisational development practices that support learning.

In order to somewhat balance the scarcity of published resources dedicated to OL & KM in international NGOs, it is hoped that this thesis can provide practitioners with a comprehensive yet succinct and practical overview of what building a learning INGO entails in terms of principles, processes and strategic model.

Rationale for building a learning organisation: do we need to choose between a burning platform and a burning desire?

As described in Chapter Four, John Kotter (2014) suggested that building a compelling change narrative in an organisation should be "less like a statement about a 'burning platform', which seeks to scare us out of our complacency, and more like a statement of a 'burning desire'" (pp.139-140). In line with the findings from this study and experience developing a strategy for OL & KM at The Foundation as documented in Chapter Five, I would like to propose that the rationale for building a learning NGO should be articulated in terms of both a burning platform (i.e. what might be the short- and longer-term negative consequences of not becoming a learning organisation) and a burning desire (what are the foreseen benefits of building a learning organisation). This implies developing messages that are adapted to the concerns and aspirations of various audiences (e.g. senior managers, staff members in country offices, staff members in headquarters). The following statements are suggestions related to The Foundation's OL & KM strategy, which other INGOs might want to draw inspiration from.

On the side of the 'burning platform', several participants in the survey, interviews and focus-group discussions as reported in this study's findings, called for formal mechanisms to be set up and an increased level of compliance to be introduced as regards OL & KM systems and processes. This was particularly in order to address the gaps and discrepancies they identified in terms of document storage and management (information management). In addition, the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous (VUCA) context in which organisations in general and international NGOs in particular operate creates a "sense of urgency" (Kotter, 2014, p. 139), which might operate as a catalyst for this change. This points towards the need to articulate which problem or series of issues can be addressed by rethinking and 'turbo-charging' knowledge management systems and processes as part of the strategy rollout and socialisation. Such a narrative would be efficient in addressing the concerns of senior managers who often focus on fixing problems and troubleshooting as part of their role.

This should be complemented by messages supporting a 'burning desire' rationale for the learning INGO, especially to elicit momentum and excitement from prospective participants in an operating model relying on the recruitment of an 'army' of volunteers. Participants in this study expressed a strong desire to see The Fred Hollows Foundation strive to become and remain a leading knowledge hub and innovator in eye health. This narrative should be widely used and repeated by senior management as a way to promote the organisation's efforts to become a learning organisation, as it deeply resonates with the aspirations of staff members to see their organisation grow and thrive. Another way to stimulate staff's intrinsic motivation is to highlight opportunities for professional development (on-the-job capacity building and skill development) available through involvement in the delivery of the operating model. Other incentives could be envisaged in the form of recognition awards and public encouragements from senior managers. Once people have enrolled in OL & KM initiatives, their sense of ownership over the model and broader OL & KM strategy should be maintained through participation in engaging and creative activities, for example in the collaborative development of detailed action plans. Regular consultations should also be held to hear their thoughts and perceptions on how initiatives are progressing and take action based on their feedback.

The Fred Hollows Foundation, an eye health INGO at the crossroads between eye health, public health and international development: a comparative advantage for the learning organisation?

As demonstrated throughout this thesis, organisational learning and knowledge management is a burgeoning field in the INGO sector. Participants interviewed as part of this study also highlighted the fact that the public health and health sector more broadly have a culture and ways of working that enhance knowledge sharing between institutions. A review of the literature shows that the learning organisation model is highly relevant to the public health sector (Birleson & Brann, 2006; Friedman & Rigby, 2013) and public health organisations that have applied such a model have demonstrated significant and sustainable benefits in Australia (Birleson & Brann, 2006; Inglis, 2013; Rowley, 2006) and elsewhere (Awosusi, 2012; Edmondson, 2004; Lambin et al., 2013).

The eye health INGO (EH INGO) sector is a small, well-organised, well-connected and ‘close-knit’ community (see Chapter One) that has a clear and very targeted mandate to eradicate the main causes of avoidable blindness and a tradition of strong collaboration (International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness, 2018a). It also has a significant comparative advantage, as it sits at the intersection between eye health, public health and international development (see Figure 9 below). It is nested within the wider eye health sector and therefore benefits from the structures and systems available to eye health professionals. This allows them to gather subject matter expertise and share knowledge on clinical best practice with each other (published articles, conferences, communities of practice, networks, working groups, databases of subject matter expertise…). The eye health INGO sector also draws on public health concepts and frameworks (social determinants of health, health system strengthening models etc.) and on the values and disciplines of international development such as social justice, equity, and participatory and sustainable development.

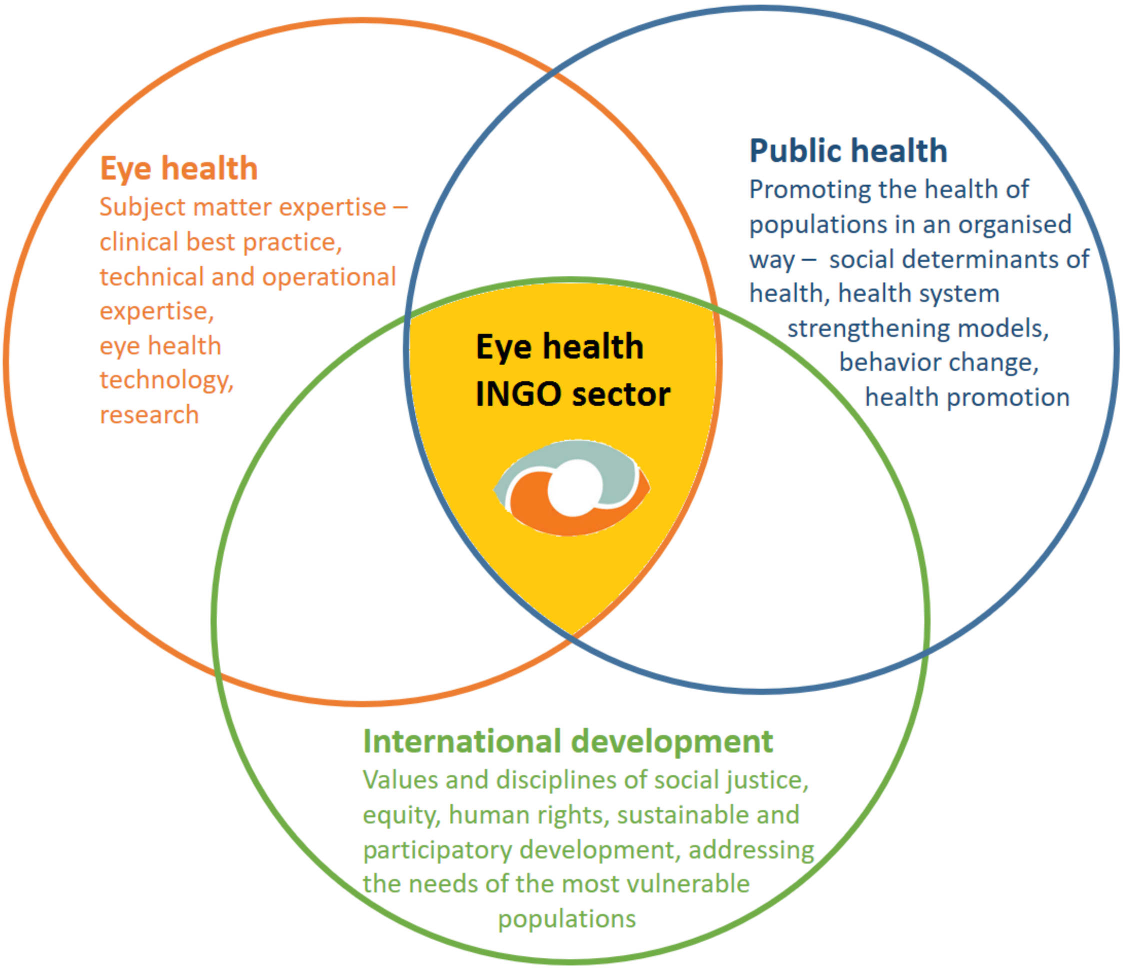

Figure 11: The Fred Hollows Foundation, an eye health INGO at the intersection between eye health, public health and international development.

These overlapping identities (eye health, public health and international development) place the sector and The Fred Hollows Foundation in particular in a unique position to create new knowledge drawing from all three areas of expertise, both in terms of content (lessons learnt and best practice), access to a multitude of networks and ways of working. However, to capitalise on the synergy between these mixed backgrounds, EH INGOs need to embrace all these identities and the opportunities and challenges they each pose. Findings from this study suggested that this has implications on how the learning environment might be established in terms of technology and resources, processes and most importantly a culture conducive to knowledge sharing.

These organisations therefore ought to keep this idea of synergy of identities at the forefront in the way they set up their OL & KM strategy including recruiting a workforce with a diverse range of expertise (ideally, a mix of international public health specialists, eye health specialists and international development specialists), how proactively they learn and whose learning they prioritise. For instance, the international development aspect means that these organisations have a wide geographic spread, which leads to challenges in terms of connecting people to each other and to information. It is also a significant advantage, as it creates opportunities for mutual learning from a multitude of contexts. If an organisation can implement mechanisms that support people from a multitude of countries to connect and learn from each other, it becomes greater than the sum of its parts (Edmondson, 2014; Senge, 1990).

Nonetheless, as the findings in this study clearly demonstrated, participants consistently reported that organisations should better integrate lessons learnt by their employees in country offices at the organisational policy and strategic level. This is critical, as in-country staff members apply these intersecting organisational identities into their work and context on a daily basis. However, for this tacit knowledge to be captured and shared, it needs to be proactively valued and used by the organisation.

To make the most of this intersectionality of organisational identities, it is paramount for EH INGOs to firstly recognise that they are in a unique position to become a sector that considers and applies learning as a strategic focus and outcome. As the findings from this thesis indicated, sharing the learning produced inside the organisation with other EH INGOs and the wider international public health and international development sectors can be greatly enhanced by inter-agency collaboration. This could be formalised by forming a coalition of EH INGOs that would have a strategic vision towards cross-organisational learning and knowledge sharing.

EH INGOs in general and The Fred Hollows Foundation in particular are in an ideal position to act as subject matter experts for eye health programming in developing countries. Therefore, they have a specific role to play as facilitators and knowledge brokers (Bebbington & Riddell, 1995; Hulme, 1992; Lewis & Sobhan, 1999; Mitlin, & Hickey & Bebbington, 2007; Norton, Howell & Reynolds, 2016) towards their key stakeholders such as local and national partners (eye health facilities, local and national authorities), institutional donors and international policy-makers (e.g. the World Health Organisation).

Secondly, leaders in eye health INGOs should actively promote inter-organisational learning in order to turn this significant tacit opportunity into an explicit comparative advantage. This is particularly important, as this is a small sector addressing the major public health issue of avoidable blindness in poorly resourced, fragile and often unstable international contexts. The fact that it is in the sector's best interest to learn together and share knowledge should be clearly articulated and mechanisms implemented, not by accident but by design. As discussed in Chapter Four, the mechanisms successfully applied in the public health academic sector to enhance cross-organisational learning (cross-organisational conferences, collaboration on academic papers, communities of practice, networks, opportunities for 'guest' teaching and presenting via webinars and paperbag lunches) could be replicated and adapted by the EH INGO sector.

Due to its interest and significant investment into becoming a learning organisation as presented in this thesis, The Fred Hollows Foundation might soon be in a strategic position to propel the movement forward that will make the eye health INGO sector a 'learning leader' in the wider international aid context. The strategic framework proposed in this thesis could be replicated and adapted by other eye health INGOs to explicitly articulate their learning organisation model. This should be done with a view to encourage cross-organisational collaboration in order to enhance information flows, facilitate the transfer of lessons learnt and minimise duplication of knowledge between agencies. This model and the principles upon each it is built could also be considered by public health INGOs and generalist INGOs more broadly.

6.4 Reflexive perspective on the strengths and limitations of the study presented

Strengths

The methodological approach chosen for my research involved 'bricolage' (Steinberg, 2006), which included a combination of organisational ethnography and action research drawing on aspects of collaborative inquiry. It offered a toolbox of research traditions that supported my positioning as both a researcher and practitioner. It provided the flexibility required to navigate and adapt my research design to the complexities of my working environment, which was an efficient way to tackle the problems I had identified to answer my research questions. In addition, the way the DrPH program is set up to foster practitioner-scholars, practical academics and reflective practitioners (Bourner, Bowden & Laing, 2000; Costley & Lester, 2012; Meyer, Ritchie & Madden, 2011; Scott, Brown, Lunt & Thorne, 2004; Wasserman & Kram, 2009) lends itself well to the action research methodology conducted by an insider-researcher (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha, 2000; Reed & Proctor, 1995). As a researcher, I was able to gather findings in an evidence-informed, objective manner. As an insider specialist, I was in a position to propose a framework to implement these findings that was tailored to the needs of The Foundation. Undertaking a DrPH in my organisation brought a rigorous rationale to the need for fundamental change in the way The Foundation approached organisational learning and knowledge management. This is the very definition of triple-loop learning (Argyris and Schön; Goold, 2006; Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002), in which an organisation uses its learnings to question its structure, practice and culture and radically transform itself as a result. It is the highest form of learning an organisation can undertake (Ramalingam, 2008; Roper & Pettit, 2002). My research provided the motives, mean and opportunity for triple-loop learning to arise and be directly applied at The Foundation.

As an insider-researcher (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha, 2000; Reed & Proctor, 1995) undertaking a professional doctorate in my organisation, I was mindful of my prerogatives as both the person in charge of the research project, as well as leading the development and the implementation of the OL & KM strategy. Reflexive practice allowed me to remain as objective as possible in the data collection, analysis and design process while making the most of my privileged position as an insider observer, active participant and project lead in my organisation. This is particularly relevant to my research focus, as reflective practice is an essential component of organisational learning.

A significant strength of this research is that the mere fact that I was consulting my colleagues about organisational learning and knowledge management clarified these concepts for them. It also contributed to putting OL & KM ‘on their radar’ as useful disciplines that have direct and important implications for their work and what FHF does. The research I undertook has left a trace or imprint in my organisation both in terms of the findings collected through this study and of the approach to building a collaborative process to OL & KM, which gathered momentum and culminated into the development of the strategy. Being both an insider-researcher and the project lead as the Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management Specialist, I was the key driver for this research and the proposed changes arising as a result of this work as demonstrated in the Foundation's OL & KM strategy as set out in Chapter Five. However, as described in the study design section and spiral diagram of the methodology chapter (Figure 4, section 3.2), each method included an element of awareness raising for participants to educate them about the concepts of OL & KM and what it means to build a learning organisation. For instance, definitions were provided in the survey, interviews and focus-group discussions and each of these methods explored the various characteristics of a learning organisation in more or less detail and depth. Similarly, during the interviews and focus-group discussions, a number of participants confided that they did not know what organisational learning was (many were equating it with training) until I had explained it to them. Several participants also noted that until that point they had never thought about what it meant for FHF nor why it was important, not only for the organisation but to help them to do their work better. I received both verbal and written feedback showing that the survey triggered similar reactions and reflections among the colleagues who took it.

This educational intent achieved by the research project is actually well aligned with the organisational learning paradigm (Hilden & Tikkamäki, 2013) of the insider-researcher (Asselin, 2003; Kanuha, 2000; Reed & Proctor, 1995) doing action research in an inclusive, collaborative manner. This process brought to life new concepts for my colleagues and hopefully provided them with the tools to continue reflecting on these issues beyond the completion of this study. By the time this research project ended three years after its inception, a vast amount of internal investigation, dialogue and awareness-raising on the findings was being shared widely and in a number of forums within the organisation. According to Reynolds and Vince (2004), these collective and interactive reflection processes ensure the learning 'sticks' in the organisation. It is hoped that an action-oriented, collaborative approach to OL & KM is sustained in the future at The Foundation.

Limitations

Being a practitioner researcher in my organisation involved difficulties and challenges. For instance, during the analysis phase of the survey data, I was tempted to apply my insider's lens to 'interpret' the results. A discussion with my supervisors helped clarify that a contextual explanation of the results was to be presented in the discussion, while the analysis needed to reflect the findings exactly as identified in the survey. Reflexivity in the form of a research journal as outlined in Chapter Three also contributed to mitigating the effects of the 'me' as both a researcher and practitioner affecting my workplace environment during the analysis and write-up phases of my research project.

Producing a piece of work as per academic standards whilst also meeting organisational needs such as the development of a strategy document proved a tightrope to walk. Abiding by the gold standards required in research can be difficult to reconcile with the reality of working in the fast-changing, complex environment of an international aid organisation. As expected, the research process I used did not follow a linear path. However, as an insider-researcher I was able to introduce an element of emergent design while using 'bricolage' to combine and complement research strategies and disciplines. This allowed academic rigour to be maintained while delivering outcomes for the organisation in a timely manner and with high quality. As an example, the strategy development process was both evidence-informed and reflected the changing needs of The Foundation thanks to a combination of 'traditional' research methods and participatory workshops to validate the research findings.

6.5 Thesis conclusion

This thesis aimed to document, analyse and reflect on the process of developing an organisational learning and knowledge management model, strategy and mechanisms in an international development NGO focusing on eye health.

In today's rapidly changing and complex world, INGOs increasingly have a strong incentive to become learning organisations. However, referring back to the title of this thesis, this study of change at The Fred Hollows Foundation showed that building a learning NGO can only achieved by design, not by accident. Organisational learning and knowledge management remain little understood and applied in INGOs, both by staff members and leaders. Therefore, successfully focusing the efforts of the organisation in these domains requires a highly participatory approach to both the data collection process and strategy development.

A range of mechanisms selected on the basis of the evidence collected and covering the eight key functions of the learning organisation (Britton, 1998) validated by this study together with a new category that emerged from this research should be considered. These categories are as follows: creating a supportive culture; gathering internal experience; accessing external learning; communication systems; mechanisms for drawing conclusions; developing an organisational memory; integrating learning into programming strategy and policy; applying the learning; and sharing the knowledge produced within the organisation with the wider sector. The latter category arose from the study findings and highlights the importance of incorporating a broader external interagency focus to OL & KM in INGOs.

Building a learning INGO requires a multipronged strategic approach that is tailored to the specific needs of the organisation and backed by strong evidence, as demonstrated in this thesis. Proactively and consciously adopting a strategic approach provides the means to embed learning at every level and across activities so that it eventually becomes an ‘unconscious competence’ of the organisation (Crawford, 2004, p. 258). The following elements should be considered: the allocation of dedicated resources (time, money and space); developing structures, systems and processes that support ongoing learning; inspired leadership that acts as a role model; promoting individual learning; and encouraging a culture of learning, including by promoting relevant skillsets and behaviours. These factors also require the ability to influence others outside the organisation by collaborating and sharing knowledge and ideas (including through inter-agency partnerships) and to foster reflective practitioners if we are to strengthen the capacity of INGOs to become learning organisations.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Interview participant consent and revocation form

Approval No (TBC)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM

Successful strategies for organisational learning in international NGOs: the views of key stakeholders (internal interviews)

At The Fred Hollows Foundation we are committed to achieving program effectiveness through a culture of knowledge sharing and continuous improvement across all our programs. Our new Program Strategy 2014-2018 states that "*A management system that actively promotes, facilitates, and rewards organisational learning"* should be established. The Development Effectiveness team was established in January 2014 and a Learning & Best Practice Coordinator position was subsequently created within this team.

In partnership with the University of New South Wales, we are conducting a study to identify existing strategies for organisational learning at FHF, the potential barriers to their implementation and how to improve our organisational learning model. Your extensive knowledge of the organisation is extremely valuable for us to understand what works and what we should do differently. With your support we want significantly improve the way we learn as an organisation. If you agree to participate, we would like to conduct one (telephone / face to face) interview with you, at a time which is convenient. The (telephone / face to face) interview will take approximately 30 to 40 minutes to complete.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission, except as required by law. If you give us your permission by signing the attached consent form, we plan to use the results internally to inform the development of our organisational learning strategy. We also intend to discuss/publish the results in one or several articles on organisational learning in the NGO sector submitted to peer reviewed journals, as well as in a professional doctorate (DrPH) thesis by one of the researchers (Camille Neyhouser). In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified.

We do not anticipate any risks or discomfort to you from being in this study. There may be no direct benefit to you by participating in this study; however the data collected may be useful in informing policies and procedures regarding organisational learning at FHF and in the wider NGO sector.

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. Your decision on whether or not to participate will not prejudice your future relations with the University of New South Wales or the Fred Hollows Foundation. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw your consent and to discontinue participation at any time without prejudice.

If you would like to participate, please complete the attached consent form and return it via email, or simply contact us via email (cneyhouser@hollows.org) to confirm your participation. We will then contact you within a week to schedule a time for the interview.

If you would like further information, or you have concerns about the conduct of the study, please phone and discuss them with Camille Neyhouser (co-investigator) on (+61) 04 1817 5311 or on (+61) 02 8741 1958. Complaints may be directed to the Ethics Secretariat, The University of New South Wales, SYDNEY 2052 AUSTRALIA: phone (+61) 029385 4234, fax (+61) 02 9385 6222, email humanethics@unsw.edu.au. Any complaint you make will be investigated promptly and you will be informed out the outcome.

Prior to the interview commencing, we will ask you whether you agree to the interview being recorded. You will also be notified when the recording commences and concludes.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

ID number: [______]

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Successful strategies for organisational learning in international NGOs: the views of key stakeholders (internal interviews)

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT AND CONSENT FORM (continued)

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that, having read the information provided above, you have decided to participate.

……………………………………………………
Signature of Research Participant

……………………………………………………
(Please PRINT name)

Date: / /2015

…………………………………………………….
Signature of Witness

……………………………………………………
(Please PRINT name)

Date: / /2015

REVOCATION OF CONSENT

Successful strategies for organisational learning in international NGOs: the views of key stakeholders

I hereby wish to **WITHDRAW** my consent to participate in the research proposal described above and understand that such withdrawal **WILL NOT** jeopardise any treatment or my relationship with The University of New South Wales, *(other participating organisation[s] or other professional[s])*.

………………………………………………………..
Signature

……………………………………………………….
Please PRINT Name

Date: / /2015

The section for Revocation of Consent should be forwarded to **Dr. Anne Bunde-Birouste, School of Public Health and Community Medicine, Level 2, Samuels Building, the University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW 2052 or via email to ab.birouste@unsw.edu.au**

Appendix 2 Interview guide

Interview guide – internal and external consultations

Note: A number of questions will be selected from the list below (identified with a *) and adapted slightly for external interviews with INGOs.

Introduction

The interviewer will introduce the interview topic and give a short definition of what a learning organisation is:
"A learning organisation is the term given to an organisation that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself."

The interviewer will explain the difference between organisational and individual learning and will note that a Learning & Best Practice position was recently created.

The interviewer will then explain the interview process:

- Relaxed/informal chat
- No right/wrong answers
- Privacy/confidentiality
- Audio-recording
- Any questions
- Obtain verbal consent to record interview

Interview questions

- Would you say that FHF is a learning organisation? Why/why not? *
- In your experience does FHF currently have mechanisms for 'remembering' the experience and lessons learnt from its current and previous work? If so, can you give examples in your team, in your country and at the organisational level? *
  - Do you think any of these strategies or mechanisms work well? How do you know they work well? Which ones do you think should be replicated to other countries or levels of the organisation?
  - Are you aware of any other organisational learning strategies or mechanisms that were implemented in the past but no longer exist? If so, how successful were they? Do you know why they stopped?
  - Do you document learning in your own work? If so, how? Do you think the organisation could better support you with this documenting process? In what way? *

- What are the challenges you face in your own work that make it difficult for you to document learning? *

- Do you think the organisation shares and uses the lessons gained from individuals' experience? What methods are used to share these lessons? Can you think of ways it might be done better? *

- Which communication systems are you aware of at FHF? Which ones do you think help us to learn better as an organisation? How do they enhance organisational learning? *

- Who do you think are the key actors in the learning process? Are you aware of what they do to enable learning to happen at the organisational level? *

- In your experience, when individuals leave FHF are we able to retain their knowledge in the organisation? How could this be improved? *

- If we were to become the best **learning** NGO in the world, which key things do we need to do differently? E.g. key messages, ways of working? *

- Do you have any other ideas or suggestions for organisational learning strategies or mechanisms that do not exist yet but could realistically be implemented at The Fred Hollows Foundation?

- On a scale of 0 (no organisational learning occurring) to 10 (excellent organisational learning occurring), how good would you say FHF is at organisational learning? *

Appendix 3 Survey guide

FHF Programs staff survey

Introduction

Thank you for helping us by completing this survey.

The survey will take about 15 minutes to complete and will help us to understand how well you think we currently learn as an organisation at FHF. We also would like to know what your expectations are for the Learning & Best Practice position that was recently created at FHF.

Note: In this survey we are focussing on **organisational learning** and not on individual learning / training needs. A learning organisation is an organisation that facilitates the learning of its members and continuously transforms itself.

The answers are confidential and will **only** be seen by the survey team.

Consent

(Next page) By clicking NEXT, you are making an informed decision to participate in this survey. Proceeding beyond this page by clicking NEXT indicates that, having read the information provided above, you have agreed to participate.
If you are willing to continue, please click NEXT.
If you do not wish to continue, simply close this webpage in your browser.

Survey questions

Demographic information:

Note: the questions identified with a * will only be asked to country staff

- Gender

  ☐ Female
  ☐ Male
  ☐ Prefer not to say

- Age group

  ☐ ≤24 years
  ☐ 25-34 years
  ☐ 35-44 years
  ☐ 45-54 years
  ☐ 55-64 years
  ☐ 65 years

☐ Prefer not to say

- Where are you located:
  - Sydney
  - Regional or country office:
    - Indigenous Australia Program
    - Africa
    - East Asia
    - South Asia / Middle East
- Which thematic area do you most contribute to in your role *
  - Program / project management
  - Monitoring & Evaluation
  - Communications
  - Advocacy
  - Other – please specify
- What type of position best describes your current role *
  - Country manager
  - Senior manager
  - Officer
  - Community mobiliser
  - Other – please specify
- Length of service at FHF
  - Less than 3 months
  - Less than 6 months
  - Less than 12 months
  - 1 to 2 years
  - 3 to 4 years
  - 5 to 9 years
  - 10 years and over
- Number of months / years in current position: ………… months and ……….. years

<u>Organisational learning at FHF</u>

- In your country team, who is mainly responsible for the learning process e.g. learning is part of job description and / or performance objectives, or learning is a significant part of their role: *several choices possible* *

    - Country manager
    - Program / project manager
    - Monitoring & Evaluation person
    - Program / project officer
    - Communications person
    - Advocacy person
    - Other – please specify

- Please rank the following propositions as follows: strongly disagree / disagree / neither agree nor disagree / agree / strongly agree

- Overall, FHF is a learning organisation.

Creating a supportive culture

- The organisational culture and environment acknowledges that mistakes are an inevitable part of learning.
- Sharing experience and knowledge through co-operation and collaboration between staff is a high priority at FHF.
- At FHF managers are open to suggestions on alternative ways of getting work done.
- The organisation values new ideas.
- In our team we have already used a piloting approach when trying out new ideas.
- In my role I am confident in making my personal knowledge and wisdom available to others.

Gathering internal experience

- I document learning from programs / projects in my own work.
- FHF uses systematic and efficient procedures for the regular monitoring, review and evaluation of all of its program / project and advocacy activities.
- People at FHF are encouraged to share information about what does and doesn't work.
- The organisation creates and encourages formal and informal opportunities for individuals to share the lessons they have learned with others.
- People at all levels of the organisation are expected and encouraged to draw lessons from their work and feed this learning to other parts of the organisation.

Accessing external learning

- FHF has open co-operative relationships with other organisations (partners in country, other eye health NGOs, other **non-eye health** international NGOs etc.) which enable mutual learning from each other's experience.
- Networking is seen as an important activity: the organisation encourages its staff to develop a wide range of contacts with other agencies.
- Staff are encouraged to visit other organisations and are expected to write up and share with colleagues what they learned from their visit.
- The organisation is linked to a wide range of networks and uses them to gather useful knowledge and skills.
- In our country office we have mechanisms to systematically gather information on those who are the most vulnerable to avoidable blindness *

Communication systems

- It is easy to access information on the lessons learned from other parts of the organisation.
- Staff have access to a wide range of communication media for sharing knowledge and experience between staff in different functions, teams, departments and locations.
- Information flows freely through the organisation.
- People do **not** hold on to information which would be useful to others.
- In my role I know which mechanisms to use in order to make my personal knowledge and wisdom available to others.

Mechanisms for drawing conclusions

- At FHF, people are interested in better ways of doing things.
- At FHF, learning from experience is seen as 'everyone's business' and not left to specialist units or senior managers.
- Monitoring & evaluation reports and field visit reports are routinely analysed to identify what has been learned from the work and what lessons could be applied in the future.
- The organisation is skilled at converting raw information from evaluations and research into knowledge for the whole organisation.
- In my team we are encouraged to constantly ask ourselves: "How could we do this better?"

Developing an organisational memory

- FHF has mechanisms for 'remembering' the experience and lessons learnt from its current and previous work.
- All key written reports and other documents capturing learning are easily accessible to all staff.
- When individuals leave FHF we are able to retain their knowledge in the organisation.

- The information and knowledge management function is resourced adequately at every level of our organisation.
- In my team we have efficient mechanisms (not necessarily electronic) in place to keep key data, information and records on our programs and projects up to date.

Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy

- As a program person I feel confident that I can meaningfully contribute to the policy making process in my context.
- In my location, implementing a new project is deliberately organised as a continuous learning process (e.g. field visit monitoring reports, midterm review or evaluation, lessons learnt meetings including partners…).
- In my location, we hold regular events to learn as a country team or department (e.g. time allocated for sharing lessons during team meeting, workshops to share lessons learnt on a theme, action learning sets…)
- At FHF feedback loops exist at the organisational level that enable to make decisions on which programming strategies should be followed and which ones should be abandoned based on clear evidence and experience.

Applying the learning

- In my location when developing a new concept note or project design document (PDD) we systematically review and integrate recommendations from past evaluations conducted in our location.
- In my location when developing a new concept note or project design document (PDD) we know how to access lessons learnt from other parts of the organisation (e.g. similar project implemented in another country) and we incorporate them into our design.
- FHF systematically uses learning to improve our own practice or influence the policy and practice of other organisations (e.g. partners, other NGOs, institutional donors).
- At FHF when we scale up an activity or a project, the decision is made based on thorough analysis of lessons learnt and a clear understanding of what works / doesn't work.
- The organisation is constantly building its capacity and investing in new and innovative approaches based on what it has learned.
- At FHF we are prepared to reassess our priorities and change the way we do things to reflect new knowledge.

Summary

- On a scale of 0 (no organisational learning occurring) to 10 (excellent organisational learning occurring), how good would you say FHF is at organisational learning?

<u>Barriers and resources for organisational learning</u>

- What are the challenges you face in your own work that make it difficult to document learning?

- What resources do you need in your own work to support better documenting and organisational learning practices?

Learning and Best Practice coordinator

- Please select the three (3) aspects of organisational learning that you would most like the Learning & Best Practice coordinator to focus on in 2015:

- Creating a supportive culture
- Gathering internal experience
- Accessing external learning
- Communication systems
- Mechanisms for drawing conclusions
- Developing an organisational memory
- Integrating learning into strategy and policy
- Applying the learning

- The Learning & Best Practice coordinator position is based in Sydney and will therefore deliver support remotely to country teams. What is the best way for the Learning & Best Practice coordinator to communicate and share information with you about organisational learning and best practice: *several choices possible*

    - Email
    - Yammer
    - Dedicated Yammer group on organisational learning
    - Lync
    - Teleconference / phone
    - Webinar (web-based conferencing: online workshops or presentations)
    - Newsletter
    - Reports and other types of written documentation
    - FredNet (Intranet)
    - ShareFile
    - Do not communicate directly with me => if this option is chosen: “please indicate the name of the person to contact in your location regarding organisational learning and best practice”
    - Other – please explain

Appendix 4 Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool - KM-CAST (Mansfield, 2015)

Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool: KM-CAST

Introduction

International Development Knowledge Management and Learning Network[16] members (from a range of humanitarian and development organisations) have agreed to carry out a Knowledge Management benchmarking exercise utilising the Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool (KM-CAST).

A KM-CAST assessment enables organisations to self-identify their level of knowledge management maturity ranging from Level 1 (Novice) up to Level 5 (Expert) across a range of indicative knowledge and learning areas.

The assessment may also help organisations to identify gaps, raise awareness, and determine areas where further attention or investment is required. It is also hoped that these assessments will encourage cross-sector learning and sharing of experiences and best practices.

Results, if shared, will help identify areas in which organisations have achieved advanced levels of knowledge management capacity. This, in turn, may encourage reflection and discussion of which approaches, actions or processes have supported improvements in knowledge management.

Objectives and benefits

KM-CAST has been designed to help:

- Establish benchmarked levels of KM maturity (across a team, office or organisation)
- Provide a common language and framework to discuss knowledge management and its constituent components
- Identify areas of strength as well as areas for improvement in knowledge management within organisations
- Provide evidence for network members to engage with senior management

[16] The International Development Knowledge and Learning Network was established in 2014 to facilitate the co-creation, development and sharing of thinking and good practice in knowledge management in the international development and humanitarian aid sector. More information on the network can be found at its website: http://ingokmnetwork.ning.com/

- Provide case studies to feed into ongoing knowledge and learning assessment activities across the development sector

Using the tool: Guidance

The KM-CAST has nine indicator areas, each of which is split into five levels, from Level 1: Novice, to Level 5: Expert. For each indicator area, the organisation completing the tool should choose one Level which best reflects the current maturity of the organisation. A higher level should not be selected unless all the requirements of the lower levels within the same area are also met, i.e. level 5 should not be selected unless the requirements of Levels 2 to 4 have also been met. Where elements of higher levels have been partially met this can be noted within the comments section of the scoring table. When completing KM-CAST, thought should be given to potential actions and next steps. This may be captured and recorded in the benchmarking score table (Annex 1).

Scoring

Scoring is simple. A score (1-5) is given for each of the nine levels equal to the assessment level of maturity level e.g. achieving a Level 2 in Area 1 equals a score of 2 for that area. Scores should be added to the scoring table (Annex 1).

How to undertake a KM-CAST assessment?

A KM-CAST assessment can be implemented in a number of ways:

- Desk based assessment by an expert or experts: The organisation's knowledge / learning manager(s) or team complete the assessment as a desk based exercise. This may be supported by interviews with staff, organisational leaders and key stakeholders.
- Facilitated workshop assessment: The tool may be applied using one or more workshops, during which participants are introduced to the tool and asked to self-assess against it. The knowledge / learning manager (s) or team should facilitate this process. This approach may be repeated for different areas of the organisation.
- Staff survey: The tool is circulated to member of staff via a survey in which they are asked to complete the tool and their results collated.
- Peer assessment/ Peer assisted assessment: Partnership with another peer organisation to share expertise and knowledge, enable greater impartiality and to validate results.
- External assessment: External expert(s) invited to assess the organisation using the tool.
- Any combination of the above

Case study: <u>Facilitated workshop assessment.</u> An organisation that recently completed a similar assessment took the following approach; A separate

assessment was completed for each team within a single office. A one hour workshop was held for each team, facilitated by the knowledge manager. During the workshops every team member was allocated a number of stickers equal to the areas of the assessment (for this case it would be 9 stickers). Each team member then placed a sticker on the level that they judged to be appropriate for each area. To derive overall assessments for each area, the median level was taken (eg if there was 1 sticker on level 2, 3 stickers on level 3, 4 stickers on level 4 and 1 sticker on level 5 then the overall rating would be taken as level 4). Where votes were tied between two levels, the lower level was taken.

We hope agencies will document and share experiences of undertaking KM-CAST assessments through case studies, shared via the INGO KM and Learning website http://ingokmnetwork.ning.com/:

We are a large organisation - should we complete more than one KM-CAST?

It is up to your organisation how to use KM-CAST. Medium or large organisations could choose to undertake a single assessment, or could instead undertake separate assessments for different functional areas, departments, or offices. Organisations undertaking more than one assessment could aggregate their scores to calculate averaged levels of maturity, or could take the lowest level per category as representing an organisational base level of maturity.

Sharing of Anonymised Results

After completing the KM-CAST assessment, please complete the scoring table (Annex 1 -page 12) and please also complete the accompanying questionnaire (Annex 2 page 13). Return both to the KM&L Network collators[17]. Results will be compiled, anonymised and shared amongst all participating organisations. This will allow organisations to see how their maturity in different areas compares to others, whilst maintaining anonymity. Results will not be shared outside of the KM&L network without prior discussion/agreement (the KM&L group may decide to share anonymised results with e.g. DFID).

[17] Andre Clarke (Andre.Clarke@plan-international.org) and Brian Steenson B.Steenson@savethechildren.org.uk)

Knowledge Management Capacity Assessment Tool: KM-CAST

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
1. Roles and responsibilities for Knowledge Management (KM)	We have not yet defined roles and responsibilities for knowledge management (KM). We lack senior leadership for knowledge management.	We have begun to define roles and responsibilities for KM. Senior leaders have responsibility for improving KM within parts of the organisation. Some staff have defined KM responsibilities	A senior leader has taken responsibility for improving KM across the organisation. Roles and responsibilities for KM have been defined.	A senior leader has responsibility for improving KM across the organisation. Roles and responsibilities for KM have been defined. KM responsibilities are captured and monitored within individual workplans	A senior leader has taken responsibility for improving KM across the organisation. Roles and responsibilities for KM have been defined. All staff with KM responsibilities have these captured and monitored within individual workplans. Staff have the mandate and resources to fulfil their KM responsibilities.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
2. Knowledge Management strategy	We do not have a knowledge management strategy or framework and we do not have a strategic approach to knowledge management.	We have started to develop a knowledge management strategy/framework (to underpin a strategic approach to knowledge management) but this is not yet complete.	We have a knowledge management strategy/framework, however it is not regarded as complete/up-to-date/fit for purpose (for ensuring a strategic approach to KM).	We have an effective knowledge management strategy/framework which is aligned to wider organisational aims and objectives.	We have an effective knowledge management strategy/framework which is aligned to wider organisational aims and objectives. All staff act on the strategy. The strategy is reviewed, monitored and updated on a regular basis.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
3. Awareness and capacity	Our staff lack basic awareness of knowledge management concepts/methods/tools. There is no-one for staff to turn to for support on knowledge management.	Some staff have some awareness of KM concepts/ methods/ tools. There are no formal mechanisms for building staff capacity, though some staff (undesignated knowledge champions) offer colleagues support in applying knowledge management practices to their work on an informal/ad-hoc basis.	Our staff have some awareness of KM concepts/ methods/ tools and sometimes apply them to their work. There have been some formal attempts to improve KM capacity (e.g. through training) though these are one-off/un-sustained.	Our staff have a good understanding of KM concepts / methods / tools and apply them to their work. Designated staff (knowledge champions) are tasked with building staff capacity, using e.g. training, mentoring, sharing best practices.	All our staff have a good understanding of KM concepts /methods /tools and apply them to their work. Designated staff (knowledge champions) proactively build staff capacity, with this remit formally captured in their objectives. Our leaders drive KM activities and model good knowledge management behaviours.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
4. Systems and technology	Our systems and technologies used to manage organisational knowledge are not fit for purpose or are unused. There is inadequate guidance on the use of our knowledge systems. Storage and sharing of documented knowledge takes place on an ad-hoc basis across systems such as Personal and Shared drives, email, document management systems.	Our systems and technologies used to manage organisational knowledge are not fit for purpose or are underused. We have identified some of the problems in our knowledge systems but there is no clear workplan/dedicated resources for improvement.	We have a good understanding of the gaps/deficiencies in our KM systems and have put in place a clear plan/dedicated resources for improvement. We do not have clear guidance on the use of our systems. There is good user uptake of our systems.	We have a good understanding of the gaps in our systems and have a clear work plan/dedicated resources for improvement. We have developed guidance on the use of our knowledge systems. There is good uptake of our systems. Users have been engaged in the design of our systems. Everyone knows how to access training and support.	Our knowledge systems meet the needs of our users. All our staff use our knowledge systems; receive sufficient training, support and follow guidance. We monitor our systems and address gaps. We are able to quickly and easily find the knowledge we need to carry out our work.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
5. Institutional memory	We do not have any processes or tools in place to adequately capture and share knowledge prior to staff changing roles or leaving. When staff leave their knowledge leaves with them which has led to institutional amnesia. We have no plans to address this issue.	We are aware of the problem of institutional memory and ad-hoc attempts are made to capture and share knowledge prior to staff changing roles or leaving. We haven't yet produced organisation wide guidance or processes. We are vulnerable to knowledge loss when staff leave.	We encourage staff to engage in informal knowledge sharing activities prior to staff changing roles or leaving. We have documented guidance for this, however we don't have a systematic procedure for ensuring this guidance is followed. We have problems capturing outgoing knowledge and are vulnerable to knowledge loss when staff leave.	We have put in place a formal knowledge transfer process for all instances of staff changing roles or leaving. This process aims to capture outgoing knowledge. Findings are documented and key lessons are made accessible wherever possible.	We have put in place a formal knowledge transfer process for all instances of staff changing roles or leaving. This process aims to capture outgoing knowledge. Findings are documented and key lessons are made accessible wherever possible. We review the lessons learned from outgoing staff and seek to apply learning to inform future activities.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
6. Prioritising learning from outside the organisation (pulling knowledge into the organisation)	We do not prioritise or incentivise learning from outside the organisation.	We acknowledge the importance of learning from outside the organisation but this does not happen in a strategic way. Some staff members are incentivised to seek out knowledge and learning relevant to their work.	Our staff are encouraged to seek out knowledge and learning relevant to their work. Learning from others is reflected within individual objectives. Gaps in organisational knowledge are identified and acted upon.	Our staff actively seek out relevant external knowledge and learning and have specific goals for sourcing and capturing knowledge. Learning from others is documented, saved, and used to inform ongoing work.	Learning from others is an integral part of our organisation. Learning brought into our organisation is systematically shared with colleagues. We have developed a learning culture and allocate, time recognition and resources to learning. We reward and promote innovation and best practices in learning.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
7. Internal knowledge sharing (organisation-wide Knowledge Sharing)	Knowledge resides in silos with little knowledge sharing across our organisation. We have little culture of sharing.	We encourage cross-organisational knowledge sharing though practices are patchy/inconsistent/lack integration. Some of our staff share knowledge though this is mainly via personal networks and relationships.	We have simple methods for sharing knowledge across our organisation. We have developed incentives and have defined spaces to encourage and reward sharing. Not all staff share knowledge.	We have defined methods for sharing knowledge across our organisation We have developed incentives and have defined spaces to encourage sharing. We have a culture of knowledge sharing	We have fit for purpose systems for sharing knowledge across our organisation. We have developed incentives and have defined spaces to encourage and reward sharing. Our staff have clear responsibilities for knowledge sharing in individual objectives. Internal knowledge is accessible across the organisation. We have a culture of knowledge sharing in which all our staff actively contribute to sharing and documenting knowledge.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
8. Reflection: Learning and reflecting upon successes and failures	We do not prioritise reflection to critically review and improve practice, strategy or objectives.	We use reflection in an ad-hoc and unstructured way to critically review and improve key practices, strategies or objectives	We take time for reflection and have developed clear guidance on minimum expectations for ensuring space for reflection is prioritised, and to encourage personal accountability for learning.	Planned and structured reflection processes routinely take place for key areas of work. Reflection focuses upon changes that can be made to improve practice. We have created safe spaces to learn from failures.	Planned and structured reflection processes routinely take place for key areas of work. Lessons from reflection are used to shape and improve future practice. We acknowledge and learn from our failures Our leaders model a reflection culture. Reflection is integral to how the organisation works.

Knowledge Management Area	Level 1 Novice	Level 2 Learner	Level 3 Intermediate	Level 4 Advanced	Level 5 Expert
9. Measuring and assessing the impact of Knowledge Management	We have no processes or systems in place for monitoring actions to improve knowledge management.	We have some measures in place for knowledge management, but these are not consistent. We lack robust outcome/impact indicators for our knowledge management activities.	We have a clear measurement framework for knowledge management. We have some outcome/impact indicators. These indicators could be more robust, and we'd like to test and update them more regularly. We recognise the need to allocate sufficient resources to tackle problems found. Senior leaders are aware of the measurement framework.	We have good processes in place and have developed indicators for the majority of Knowledge Management activities. Many of these indicators are relevant and robust. We recognise the need to do more to ensure they are up to date, and remain relevant. Measurements are routinely reported to senior leaders.	We have strong processes in place and have developed robust measurements for almost all Knowledge Management activities. We assess Knowledge Management as part of organisational wide monitoring and evaluation cycles. Where shortcomings are found recommendations are made to senior leaders and these are acted upon with sufficient resources.

Annex 1: Benchmarking score table

Indicator Area	Score /5	Comments	Potential Actions/Next Steps (optional)
1. Roles and responsibilities for Knowledge Management			
2. Knowledge Management strategy			
3. Awareness and Capacity			
4. Systems and technology			
5. Institutional memory			
6. Prioritising learning from others			
7. Internal Knowledge Sharing			
8. Reflection: Learning and reflecting upon successes and failures			
9. Measuring and assessing the impact of Knowledge Management			
Total:	**/45**		

Annex 2: Benchmarking questionnaire

Question:	**Response:**
Name of organisation (and unit within organisation where applicable):	
Name and job title of organisation contact:	
Who participated in the benchmarking assessment from your organisation? (No. of employees, areas/departments, levels of seniority?)	
How big is your organisation? Number of employees? Annual turnover?	
What resources did you allocate to completing the benchmarking assessment? – Number of employees, person hours, other resource inputs?	
Where you have completed multiple assessments using KM-CAST please give the number of assessments completed and describe any methods of aggregation.	
Do you have any feedback on the benchmarking tool? How can it be improved, what worked, what didn't work? (If there are any indicators that you would prefer to see re-phrased, please suggest alternative wording).	
Do you have any advice for others completing this process?	
Would you be willing to offer support to another peer organisation to share knowledge and assist in their benchmarking?	

Glossary of terms

INSTITUTIONAL MEMORY: a collective set of facts, concepts, experiences and know-how held by a group of people within an organisation

KNOWLEDGE MANGEMENT: the processes, tools and culture required to enable people to capture, manage, synthesise, share and re-apply knowledge to create and innovate and effective organisation.

KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT CHAMPIONS: 'activists' or facilitators, for example - providing local support for KM initiatives and channelling information from localised teams to and from central KM functions.

KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS: any kind of IT system that stores and retrieves knowledge, improves collaboration, locates knowledge sources, mines repositories for hidden knowledge, captures and uses knowledge, or in some other way enhances the KM process.

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER PROCESSES: the methodical replication of the expertise, wisdom, and tacit knowledge of critical professionals into the heads and hands of their co-workers. It is more than just on-the-job training. It is the planned movement of the right skills and information at the right time to keep a workforce prepared, productive, innovative, and competitive.

LEARNING: the acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught.

LEARNING ORGANISATION: An organisation which builds and improves its own practice, consciously and continually devising and developing the means to draw learning from its own and others' experience.

ORGANISATION: an organised group of people with a particular purpose.

REFLECTION: using critical thinking to examine presented information, question its validity, and draw conclusions based on the resulting ideas. It requires us to think more deeply about experiences and unpack what happened, why and what this means for future actions.

SILOS: a mind-set present when certain departments or sectors do not share information with others in the same department or sector. This type of mentality can be planned or accidental. It normally reduces efficiency in the overall operation.

STRATEGY: a plan of action designed to achieve a long-term or overall aim.

TECHNOLOGY for KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: for example – software to allow collaborative working, work flows and notifications around document approvals, document management and storage, e-learning, project planning etc.

Appendix 5 Organisational Learning & Knowledge Management Diagnostic Tool – appraising The Foundation's products, processes and cultural components

Done well
Planned - or done but needs to be improved
Not done
Tried and not successful

Key components of an Organisational Learning system	People/skills/culture/leadership	Resources, KM products & technology	Structures, systems & processes
Creating a culture that supports organisational learning	Coaching program	People skills directory	Make Your Ideas Matter
	Capacity building & networking through EOs, PLUs, CoPs, training (EBPT)…		Yammer
	L&D study support		Dual organisation model
	Secondment		Activity-based working
	Job swapping		
	Dual organisatio model		
Gathering internal experience	Mentoring on technical skills	Programs Handbook	FredNet
	CoPs	Case studies	Communities of Practice
	FHF-wide conference / learning forum	Rough Guides	Program Learning Updates
		Evaluation summaries	Program Learning Channel
		Best practice repository for eye health	PRISM
		Sector-wide clearing house of effective practices in eye health	Sharefile (document repository)

		Evidence briefs	TRIM
		Internal newsletters	Eye Openers
			Webinars
			All Hands meetings
Accessing external learning	Research journal club	Evidence briefs	Program Learning Channel
	Attendance at conferences	Information sheets	Yammer
	Buddy system for employees who are studying at FHF	Newsletters from other organisations	Eye Openers
	Secondment		Access to external conferences & webinars
	Actionable Conversations		
	Consulting culture		
Communication systems	Capacity building on Blue Jeans	How-to guides to Blue Jeans and other ICT systems	Blue Jeans
	Training on Outlook		Outlook
			Office 365
			Mural
Mechanisms for drawing conclusions	Failing forward (through pre-mortems)	Evaluation reports	Peer review
	Admitting failure	Formative & implementation research	Project pre-mortems
		Fail reports	PRISM
			Fail fests
			End-of-evaluation workshops
Developing an organisational memory	KM champions / mapping bridges	Handover notes	Exit interviews
	Inductions		Orientation workshop
	Promoting people already in the organisation		Induction process

			Sharefile (document repository)
Integrating learning into programming strategy and policy	Better meetings e.g. open/standup division meetings		Make Your Ideas Matter
			Peer review
			FredLearn
Applying the learning	Innovation Collaboration Competition	New PIPs	Annual/quarterly/regional learning reviews
		Variations to PIPs	

Appendix 6 Survey participants’ perceptions of challenges to documenting and applying lessons learnt at The Fred Hollows Foundation (n=119)

Question 18: What are the challenges you face in your own work that make it difficult to document and apply learning?	
Themes	**Key quotes by survey respondents**
Insufficient documentation and/or sharing of lessons learnt	Access to knowledge previously applied to execute a project Access to prior lessons; lack of organisational culture to document lessons learnt and refer to prior lessons learnt. Lack of proper documentation of evidence of successful and unsuccessful project outcomes by partners at implementation level. It is not easy to find a record of programme evaluations which document learning on each of our projects. Country offices have a lot of knowledge, but FHF programmes have little documented learning
No incentives/encouragement to learn, especially from management	Not the obligation to apply the lessons from the past Lack of clear mechanisms to do so and lack of interest/encouragement to do so from management When we document, no one reads it. Its just another document saved somewhere.
Not clear if and how knowledge and learning is used (especially from research)	Evidence gained is not always used for future programmatic decision making. There is a missed link between our research/evidence producing efforts and program development/ implementation, especially between countries/ across areas I also think there are ways to improve connection between research and programs - so that research commissioned by the foundation actually feeds into /informs programs, as appropriate. Lack of confidence FHF incorporates lessons learned into programming, strategy and operations.
Silos	Size and complexity of organization leading to a tendency to work in silos Even within HQs, departments are not good at communicating with each other. Sometimes we learn key things/events ad hoc, out of informal conversations rather than systematic

Question 18: What are the challenges you face in your own work that make it difficult to document and apply learning?	
Themes	**Key quotes by survey respondents**
Lack of time / workload / competing priorities	The foundation is busy organization, and there are lots of activities, and competing priorities, applying the lessons learnt is enjoyable and more fulfilling The organization is always under constant pressure to tick boxes and confirm work done. Limited time for managers and officers to think improvement of their projects Not having sufficient time to document/apply the learning due to work schedule No time to document the lesson learnt and to discuss within team The overload responsibility (Country Office) makes the staff must spend 100% of his/her time to clear the work and s/he does not have time to think about how to document and apply his/her learning.
Inadequate / too many / unclear electronic systems for filing and sharing documents	Use of existing resources could be maximised eg. FredNet Absence of clarity on which of the many different documentation locations, local, share file, frednet, fredlearn.. A lack of shared electronic document storage across offices - we need one system for storing documents, so we can easily access program documents, evaluation reports etc. And one that can be accessed remotely! No place to store the documents for access There are not appropriate systems in place to share evidence/ lessons learnt within the organisation or programs Lack of a centralised, well organised and easily accessible repository for all documentation of FHF's work Knowledge is not easily accessible given our fractured information management systems.
Unclear / inappropriate / absence of systematic processes for storing and sharing knowledge	There was no clear guideline or there was no good Systems in place Lack of a streamlined documentation and knowledge sharing mechanism for wider sharing across the organization. Main challenge is documentation of project information/docs which are sitting in peoples machines and very hard to access, the share-file doesn't seem to be working Systematic processes for knowledge generation / synthesis are rarely applied because the organisational systems and processes are not 'tuned-in' to this sort of approach. Some of the issues with 'systems' include lack of electronic systems for document management and sharing, as well as organisational systems that require people to share and disseminate learnings from programs. Lack of supporting templates that make documenting easier.

Question 18: What are the challenges you face in your own work that make it difficult to document and apply learning?	
Themes	**Key quotes by survey respondents**
Lack of linkages between people to learn from each other (including within regions)	Stronger relationships across organisation to provide better understanding and exposure of each others work. Consolidating and sharing the information among country offices in the region.
Insufficient opportunities to learn and network outside the organisation	We could learnt more form other organisations working in the field/country: our country teams need to improve their networking skills and at HQs we need to have more interaction with other organisations Lack of empowerment to better network externally to gather information to assist learning, and lack of internal processes and interest to share learnings
Technology not appropriate (including slow internet)	Internet is slow when preparing the reports Internet access
Admitting failure is not encouraged	The Management and staffs do not regard M&E as a vital component. Rather it is seen as inspection or fault finder The organisation is not always 'open' to hearing about what didn't work & this means key learnings can easily get swept away with 'good news stories' being prioritised instead.
Information overload	Overload of information which leads to anxiety at times that you are not keeping up with the latest research or strategies. With the amount of information circulating dealing with a multitude of topics you could spend most your time reading.
Specificity of eye health knowledge makes it difficult to acquire	It takes a lot of time to get knowledge on eye care

Appendix 7 Survey participants' perceptions of resources needed to better document and apply lessons learnt at FHF (n=119)

Question 19: What resources would you need to support you better in documenting and applying lessons learnt?	
Themes	**Key quotes by survey respondents**
Dedicated time, space (e.g. learning forums) and budget for learning	Time allocation to allow reading and digestion of learnings Mandatory allocation of time to document lessons learnt Making it a requirement as part of everyone's jobs More frequent dissemination of program updates – it would be great to hear more from in-country teams directly Budget for face to face meetings Lessons learnt should be shared frequently e.g. have one hour 'Learning hour' every Friday morning for a team member to share something to the rest of the country team a forum for program staff to share/exchanges good practices and lessons learnt SPACE to read, reflect and learn, and there has to be PROCEDURES for facilitating this that are RESOURCED (either through setting aside time, space outside the office and/or meetings) FHF country manager's forum
Systems	A central resources platform with different thematic sections can be accessed and updated by all staff. Seamless application to share information, not share-file A system that captures all information about the project and skills & time for documentation Good practices/important knowledge on eye care should be documented in one place (online). I think PRISM (PPMS) may be a good solution for this A place to keep all learning document and lessons learnt of the Foundation which each staff can access in A Project management system that allows for a single point of information collection and management
Material and technology	Camera for each programme Camera/Smart phones

Question 19: What resources would you need to support you better in documenting and applying lessons learnt?	
Themes	**Key quotes by survey respondents**
Processes and guidelines	Learnings should be shared & compiled centrally (FredNet?) Have guidance on filing systems Access to evaluations based on topic/theme/location Lessons learned should be incorporated in closeout procedures of every grant Guide on effective documenting and mechanism for applying lessons learnt A process for internal assimilation and documentation of learning mid and end of term for each programme Organisational processes & systems that prioritise this approach - reorienting the existing time available for documentation towards meaningful reporting
Cultural shift	A culture of sharing knowledge to empower others in the organization Support from management Culture of continuous improvement More flexible, open and tolerant environment A cultural change for the org, particularly managers, to value organisational learning A management culture that shares information rather than withholds it. Build a team culture with open and frequent communication, and delegation
Expertise and manpower	Expertise of organisational learning is needed to support country team to learn more about it Fulfilling the required man power with the required knowledge & skills M&E should have sufficient staff and look beyond reporting Staff/manpower A person in charge of learning (in country office is preferred) who can provide required learning document, organise learning activities and also monitor and evaluate learning progress/results A full-time person responsible for the collection, organisation and dissemination of reports, reviews etc Writer or editor of documentation
Training	Training on best practices for documentation of learnings Need to train and build capacity of country teams and partner organisations to improve the system of tracking lesson learnt from the existing project Report writing skill development trainings