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How Can a Process of Introspection Help Grantmakers Better Support their Partners?

Learnings from the in-person gathering of the Organisational Development Community of Practice in Venice, Italy, held on March 20-21, 2024.

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Overview

The Philea Organisational Development (OD) Community of Practice (CoP) convened its second in-person gathering in Venice, Italy, on 20–21 March 2024. The focus was on exploring the theme "How Can a Process of Introspection Enhance Grantmakers’ Support for Partners?"

Through an experimental Reinventing Organisations workshop, drawing inspiration from Frederic Laloux’s work, participants engaged in collective reflection (See Annex for more information). They explored ways funders can meaningfully enhance the organisational capacity and resilience of their partner organisations and ‘walk the talk’, aligning actions with stated values.

This document presents key reflections and learnings from the workshop, aiming to stimulate a critical introspection on aligning internal dynamics with external actions and fostering collaborative and equitable relationships between funders and grantees.

How Can Funders Walk the Talk?

Fostering trust

- **Trust** is the foundation of effective collaboration and cooperation. Having open discussions about trust and how to build it is crucial for fostering healthy relationships, both internally within the funding organisation and externally with partners.

- **OD from a position of trust** takes time. Developing trust-based relationships requires patience, consistent communication, and demonstrating genuine commitment to partners' growth and success.

- Building trust starts with recognising – and articulating – the inherent power dynamics within organisations and partnerships, as well as actively addressing power imbalances through collaborative and equitable practices.

- It may be difficult to align external actions with internal practices when sharing OD expertise with partners. There can be a disconnect between what is advocated externally and how those principles are applied internally within a funding organisation. Encouraging staff members to speak up about challenging issues within their organisation fosters transparency, trust and a culture of open communication, which are essential for addressing and resolving internal challenges, as well as those arising with grantees, effectively.
How Can a Process of Introspection Help Grantmakers Better Support their Partners?

- OD support goes beyond merely addressing technical or operational aspects; it involves fostering healthy organisational cultures and developing effective leadership. These are processes that take time to evolve and require trust to address effectively.

Tailoring the approach

- **Flexibility in approach** enables responsiveness to unique contexts and organisational needs. Funders should acknowledge partners' strengths, challenges and unique organisational dynamics to tailor support interventions effectively and drive meaningful change. Engaging in a participatory OD support process involves discussing structured OD support, unrestricted funding, or a combination of both, with each partner.

- To facilitate partners' long-term capacity strengthening, funders must establish an enabling environment. This environment should allow partners ample time and resources to shift their focus towards collaboratively designing tailored OD support plans.

- Partners might have never been asked to consider their OD needs and may not know what to prioritise or where to start. They may even decline OD support, or find it challenging to manage flexible, long-term funding due to internal capacity limitations. Nonetheless, funders must offer the support, guidance and flexibility that partners seek to undertake meaningful OD initiatives aligned with their organisational goals and values.

- Instead of imposing predetermined outcomes, framing objectives as tailored learning questions encourages exploration, experimentation, and adaptation. This approach not only enhances trust but also fosters a culture of curiosity, creativity and continuous learning, all of which are essential for organisational development.

Seeking collaboration and innovation

- Establishing a shared understanding of OD among both partners and foundation staff is crucial for ensuring that everyone involved is aligned with the goals, values, and processes of OD initiatives.

- Embracing a culture of experimentation, iteration and continuous learning is essential for adapting OD interventions to meet partners' evolving needs and changing contexts. Through testing different approaches, gathering feedback and learning from both successes and failures, organisations can refine their strategies and develop more effective models for supporting organisational development.
• Collaborating with other funders to streamline inquiries into partners' OD needs and priorities, can prevent duplication of efforts and ease the burden on partners. By coordinating inquiries and aligning resources, funders can minimise the strain on partners, share and mitigate perceived risks and maximise the impact of interventions.

• The convening power of funders is significant and should not be overlooked. Recognizing that others face similar challenges provides reassurance and fosters a sense of solidarity and community. This, in turn, facilitates knowledge sharing, networking and collaboration among funders, ultimately benefiting partners and amplifying the impact of tailored OD initiatives.

Eye on the Horizon

Self-awareness and self-reflection stand as foundational steps in organisational development and are prioritised by the OD Community of Practice. This workshop represents a continuation of the community’s ongoing efforts to enhance synergy and address critical challenges affecting funder-grantee relationships.

Through peer-to-peer exchange and creativity, the OD Community of Practice will continue exploring innovative and meaningful ways to advance support for their grantees' organisational development.
Annex – Reinventing Organisations Workshop

Reinventing Organizations introduces the idea that organisations evolve in tandem with human consciousness. It describes five colour dynamics—red, amber, orange, green, and teal—that represent different stages of organisational development. Each colour represents a distinct paradigm of organisational structure, culture and behaviour:

- **Red organisations** are characterised by a "power-driven" dynamic, operating with a focus on survival instincts, dominance and immediate gratification.
- **Amber organisations** are "rule-driven" and hierarchical, valuing stability, structure and obedience to authority.
- **Orange organisations** are "achievement-driven" and entrepreneurial, emphasising competition, innovation and results.
- **Green organisations** are "people-driven" and focus on human relationships, prioritising collaboration, empathy and consensus-building.
- **Teal organisations** represent a higher level of consciousness and organizational evolution, characterised by self-management, wholeness and a sense of purpose. They strive for holistic approaches, distributed decision-making and alignment with deeper purpose.

In the context of OD, understanding these colour dynamics can guide a funder’s approach. Different organisations may be at different stages of development, requiring tailored support. Without imposing solutions, funders can see where a grantee is on this spectrum in dialogue with them and offer support accordingly. They can assist grantees in transitioning to more evolved stages, like the teal level, marked by self-management, purposeful work and holistic approaches.

**Considerations for integrating colour dynamics into OD support**

- It is important to incorporate various elements of the colour dynamics framework mindfully, rather than solely focusing on a "teal" goal. Organisations should aim for a balanced integration of different approaches, recognising that understanding is nuanced and OD is a process rather than a destination.

- Self-awareness and self-reflection are foundational steps in organisational development. Funders need to first explore and understand their own dynamics before extending concepts to partners. Understanding and improving internal dynamics is essential before applying these concepts externally.

- Individuals within grantee organisations may not always feel comfortable or familiar with all the dynamics presented. Funders should recognise and respect these comfort zones while providing support and guidance.