

LESSONS HARVESTING: LEARNING FROM P2P ENGAGEMENTS

Discussion Paper for a Monitoring, Evaluation
and Learning Framework



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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- ABC-F** • Actor-based Change Framework
- ACSH** • Astana Civil Service Hub
- BNEW** • Bhutan Network for Empowering Women
- CABRI** • Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative
 - CEG** • Centre for Economic Governance
 - DAC** • Development Assistance Committee (OECD)
 - EIP** • Effective Institutions Platform
 - GPI** • Government Partnerships International
- LOGIN** • Local Governance Initiative and Network
- KILA** • Kerala Institute of Local Administration
- M&E** • Monitoring and evaluation
- MEL** • Monitoring, evaluation and learning
- MuB** • Municipality of Ulaanbataar
- OECD** • Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
 - P2P** • Peer-to-peer
 - P4D** • Partnerships for Development
 - PFM** • Public financial management
 - TA** • Technical assistance
- THP** • The Hunger Project
- ToA** • Theory of action
- ToC** • Theory of change
- UK** • United Kingdom
- UToC** • Useful theory of change

FOREWORD

This discussion note outlines some initial observations and lessons for identifying good approaches and practices towards monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) on peer-to-peer learning for institutional change to be further refined and tested by the Effective Institutions Platform (EIP), in collaboration with interested EIP members.

It draws on consultations with and documentation submitted by members of the EIP Advisory Group (AG) with direct experience in facilitating and supporting peer-to-peer (P2P) learning in practice. The initial plan was to conduct a number of Outcome Harvesting¹ workshops jointly with EIP members in country and in person during the first half of 2020 to inquire into what ideal results from peer-to-peer learning look like in practice in different contexts and with different types of setup and support. However, given travel restrictions in the context of COVID-19, focus was instead shifted to harvesting already documented lessons and experiences from AG members through a series of online interactions and a more extensive document review.

The purpose was to get a better sense of *the way in which institutional change and learning are currently understood and recorded as an outcome of P2P approaches* and where there are blind spots. These observations can inform how to approach the development of MEL frameworks for institutional learning, drawing on existing practices (with a clear emphasis on the “L” for learning). To this end, AG members were asked both to share their good practices and successful cases (many of which were already written up or in other ways documented) and to engage in critical reflection on the challenges of demonstrating impacts, particularly at the *institutional* level.

Contributing organisations were the Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH), Kazakhstan; the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI), South Africa; Local Governance Initiative and Network (LOGIN), a regional network whose Secretariat is based in India; the Centre for Economic Governance (CEG), Kenya; and Government Partnerships International (GPI), based in the United Kingdom.

A full list of contributors and the documentation shared by each organisation is presented in Annex 1.

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1. Additional information on this methodology and approach to documenting results is available at <https://outcomeharvesting.net>.

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SUMMARY OF KEY LESSONS

1. Monitor **core capabilities** at different levels of operation and how they interlink, applying a “systems filter” to monitoring, evaluation and learning.



Applying a systems lens to monitoring and learning involves not only looking for the end results of a peer-to-peer (P2P) engagement but also tracking how learning continuously gets used and tested against organisational core capabilities (i.e. tracing any contributions to changed behaviours or work practices). This means going beyond the individual learner to explore how learning is being applied in his or her operating environment (at organisational and/or sector levels) and documenting how actors at different levels positively reinforce learning or prevent learning from being used. Diffusion of learning is multi-levelled and multi-directional, and a systems perspective tries to capture this. All interrelated actors have a role to play. How they interact and how relationships evolve over time determine the effectiveness of the P2P approach for institutional strengthening.

2. Decide **who tracks what** and **who periodically compiles** information for collective learning across different actors.



One partner (typically the facilitator) can play a central role in gathering and synthesising monitoring information from across the partnership. However, it is important to involve others in the actual information gathering to fully understand the effects of P2P exchanges on different core capabilities and to reinforce a sense of joint purpose. Distributing the monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) function and making it part of the ongoing facilitation can transform it from a bureaucratic add-on, or primarily donor-driven, to a central methodology as part of navigating the ongoing P2P learning exchange.

3. Partner **roles and constellations** differ depending on the type and purpose of the P2P engagement and may shift along the way, meaning that reassessing roles and functions periodically could be part of the MEL framework.



P2P learning builds on the central idea that more than just one party have knowledge to share and that external expertise can infuse new ideas, act as a catalyst for new ways of working and/or help unleash existing local expertise so that it is more fully utilised. Monitoring and learning of P2P initiatives therefore need to capture how learning happens and how it is being used according to how partners interact. This means, first, monitoring the full engagement, from matching and creating the foundations for collaboration through to results and, second, regularly taking stock of roles and partner constellations as they may shift and take on new meaning along the way. All contributing partners need to explicitly invest in the MEL function.

4. Trust among peers who share experiences regularly, over time, complements cognitive learning with **affective (emotional) learning**, potentially leading to a higher degree of internalisation and ownership.



One of the advantages of P2P learning as a complement to ongoing reform or institutional change is that it taps into both cognitive and affective learning. The need to adapt to the local context is also more implicit than just rolling out best practice when comparing and contrasting to the way others solved a similar problem elsewhere. The process of comparing, contrasting and testing new ideas, if documented, can contribute to the overall process of learning and contextualisation. If such insights are regularly shared among participating peers, MEL processes can help solidify the trust and sense of mutuality in their joint problem solving. Moreover, several examples show how the emotional bond and emerging sense of solidarity between participating peers made new information more easily acceptable.

5. Pinpoint **mechanisms for institutionalisation** of new skills and practices and continuously assess assumptions around institutionalised patterns of behaviour.



Facilitated learning self-assessments can look at how P2P engagements have contributed to changed organisational practice. For instance, have old habits or ways of doing things been *replaced* after a process of unlearning or *adapted* and merged with new skills or insights? Have new ideas been *adopted* to fill a previously perceived void or gap? And to what extent did these changes collectively

drive the overall change process forward? Another consideration is whether changed institutional practice relates only to one discrete problem and the key individuals involved in addressing it or whether changed practices strengthen core capabilities of the institution at a more systemic level (beyond the bounded problem being addressed). Assumptions regarding organisational and/or systemic resilience need to be continuously tested, particularly as to whether new patterns of knowing and doing are being maintained or whether there is a relapse into previous working habits.

6. Monitor the health of the peer-to-peer partnership and what it produces.



Dual tracking of the health and effectiveness of the partnership, on one hand, and the effectiveness of P2P learning as a modality to fuel change, on the other, provides a more nuanced picture than using final impacts as a proxy for the partnership's success or failure. Such tracking can also more carefully assess the level of mutuality of learning between partners and draw attention to any perceived power inequalities that may impede learning. Even when a specific peer engagement is seemingly "healthy", it cannot be assumed to produce relevant outcomes. Conversely, P2P engagements that are very transactional and unidirectional may fall into the category of expert-driven technical assistance and yet have little effect on core capabilities in the institution's way of operating.

7. Regularly assess and redraw the navigational map of how to achieve change together.



Theories of change (how change happens) and theory of action (who does what to make it happen) are just theories. Combined with observed realities on the ground through MEL processes, however, they can serve as a shared navigation tool for partners that keep long-term aspirations in mind while monitoring what seems most relevant along the winding path of getting there. Examples illustrate that regularly assessing and jointly redrawing both theories of change and theories of action have helped level expectations among partners (and their funders) while aligning the strategic vision for the partnership.

How is MEL used in different types of peer-to-peer engagements?

Two questions arose frequently during the preparation of this note: how is peer-to-peer learning defined and who are considered to be “peers”? The answers, clearly, are highly context-dependent, and the EIP *Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning*,² leaves the definitions fairly open. However, the guide specifies that for the purpose of institutional strengthening, peer-based learning (also referred to as practitioner-based learning) refers to “individuals exchanging knowledge and experience with each other and diffusing this learning back to their organisations to ensure impact – at scale – on reform initiatives”.

This note focuses explicitly on how such peer-based learning between practitioners can be tracked – via MEL – in relation to its *contribution to strengthened institutional capabilities and increased organisational effectiveness*. MEL, in this context, refers to approaches, practices and tools that are used to gather insights on how peer-to-peer (P2P) learning helps advance institutional ambitions and goals (in relation to a particular problem or broader reform effort). This note also unpacks the “diffusion” mechanism referred to in the 2016 P2P guide – that is, from connected individuals directly involved in P2P engagements to systemic changes inside their institutions – and discusses how MEL practices can help actors *navigate the institutionalisation* of new insights.

What one can expect to learn from monitoring and evaluation, and what it takes to capture such learning, differ depending on the type of P2P arrangement and on P2P actors’ levels of investment in MEL. Differences between three broad types of P2P arrangements are outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1

How different P2P arrangements and MEL investment can impact learning

	Peer-based knowledge platforms (knowledge hubs, online platforms etc.) with face-to-face elements	Peer engagement on a particular topic or problem among a specific group of practitioners	Careful matching between institutions, often one on one, with a facilitating intermediary
Types of practitioners	Multiple and usually driven by an issue and/or interest appealing to a particular peer group (e.g. civil servants, development co-operation partners etc.)	Smaller and more carefully selected groups of homogenous peers (e.g. individual practitioners) seeking to solve or contribute to a specific problem or who operate in similar settings	Carefully selected and matched institutions that fill specific functions in the P2P engagement, with greater up-front effort by an intermediary to find the right fit
Types of problem and problem identification	Topics of broad appeal and current importance identified via surveys or similar feedback mechanisms from knowledge hub and/or platform users, members, and one-on-one discussions. The central “hub” services these broadly shared knowledge needs	Focus can be on specific problems emerging within a broader set of reform issues among peers in similar operating contexts, for example public financial management (PFM) and local revenue management	The purpose and goal of the matching are typically carefully considered up front based on an expressed demand and identified resource institutions to respond to that demand

...

2. Andrews, M., Manning, N., A Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning, EIP, 2016.




Peer-based knowledge platforms (knowledge hubs, online platforms etc.) with face-to-face elements

Peer engagement on a particular topic or problem among a specific group of practitioners

Careful matching between institutions, often one on one, with a facilitating intermediary

Types of engagement	Voluntary and typically based on specific topics or cases including identified or suggested best practice examples; technical solutions highlighted	Facilitated and iterative to put into practice lessons from problem solving and to share insights with others. Lessons include obstacles in implementation and how they were overcome	High degree of interaction between matched institutions, both with and outside of formal facilitation by a third party; highly trust-based with a sense of mutuality to make the matching productive; implementation typically focuses on a clear and regularly adjusted roadmap and/or theory of change
Triggers for engagement	Case studies, identification of best practices and documentation repositories combined with structured learning events (workshops, webinars, study tours)	Policy dialogue on what is politically feasible in combination with regular workshoping on what is technically optimal in a particular reform area in a given context	A sense of shared purpose in relation to a particular process of change or skills transfer to respond to an articulated demand
Types of MEL approaches	Surveys to identify most relevant topics for cases and for forming broad-based interest groups and/or P2P alliances; satisfaction surveys to assess the performance of the central “hub” service provider	Stories of change can be regularly “harvested” from participants to track progress of a particular cohort in addressing a shared problem	Theory of change (plotting out how change is expected to happen at both individual and institutional levels), combined with actors-based mapping and behaviour-based monitoring to see who needs to be involved for P2P learning to be institutionalised
Use of MEL to navigate and inform institutionalisation of new insights	The “peer platform” model largely leaves internal diffusion up to learners (assuming they will use their own funds and/or means to diffuse learning inside their institutions and track any related effects). Anecdotal evidence of institutional changes from successful cases may be available and used to illustrate the value addition of the platform	The problem-focused “peer group” model – if investment is made in the MEL function – can systematically collect “change stories” and seek to link these to new skills and processes at an institutional level. The challenge is to get beyond individual experiences of peer group members to broader organisational and systemic changes	The “one-to-one matching” model relies heavily on institutions engaging on multiple levels to have a both healthy and productive peer partnership that is institutionally owned on both sides of the P2P partnership. MEL is used as an active tool to help navigate and create a common understanding among partners on what they can achieve together. MEL tools are also used to help negotiate ways forward, adapting the theory of change and levelling expectations as the partnership evolves



	 Peer-based knowledge platforms (knowledge hubs, online platforms etc.) with face-to-face elements	Peer engagement on a particular topic or problem among a specific group of practitioners	Careful matching between institutions, often one on one, with a facilitating intermediary
Use of MEL to navigate and inform institutionalisation of new insights	Investment priority, including for MEL tracking, is typically on knowledge production and dissemination (via surveys, cases, webinars or meetings) for the peer platform facilitator, with less focus on uptake of learning among participating institutions. Service satisfaction surveys among members inform the hub's focus and service offerings	Generally low investment in specific MEL tools as some problem-focused engagements are short-term with little time for iterative tracking; the emergence of new ideas is documented but funds are typically not allocated to the use and uptake and/or cumulative effects of putting new ideas into practice in peer group members' home institutions	High degree of MEL investment and specific focus on the capacity of all partners (both learning and resource institutions) to be part of such MEL through self-assessments and interpreting findings to guide the future course of the partnership; since these partnerships are typically long-term, it is possible to track change trajectories over time and to feed such information back to partners to come up with a shared vision for their continued collaboration.
Practical examples included in this note	Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH)	Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI), Centre for Economic Governance (CEG)	Government Partnerships International (GPI), Local Governance Initiative and Network (LOGIN) Asia

Lessons for discussion and further exploration

LESSON 1

Monitor core capabilities at different levels of operation and how they interlink, applying a “systems filter” to monitoring, evaluation and learning

The “5 Core Capabilities” framework³ outlined in the EIP MEL inception report⁴ was used as a backdrop to the review of documentation from EIP Advisory Group members. A checklist was developed with the aim of linking MEL practice to different levels of learning (individual, institutional, system and/or sector) and capabilities (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

A “systems filter” checklist for capturing core capabilities at different levels

P2P Learning Core Capabilities Framework



Source: Author’s own elaboration adapted from 5 Core Capabilities framework, Baser, Morgan, ECDPM, 2008.

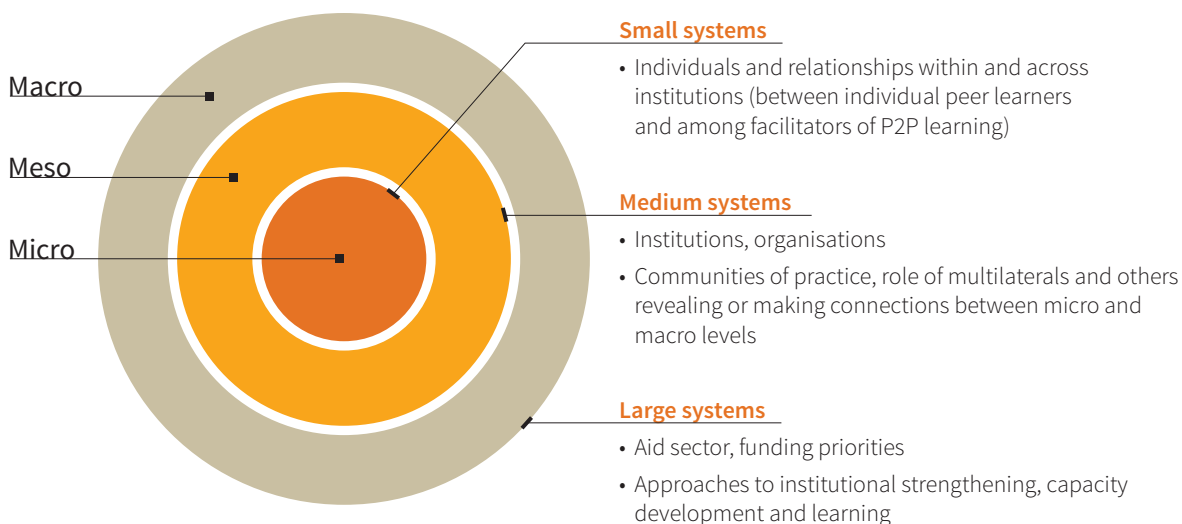
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3. Tailored from Baser, H., Morgan, P., Capacity, Change and Performance: Study Report, European Centre for Development Policy Management Discussion Paper No. 59B, for OECD DAC, April 2008, Maastricht, Netherlands.
 4. Ørnamark, C., Monitoring & Evaluating Peer-to-Peer Learning for Institutional Change, Inception Report for the Effective Institutions Platform (EIP), November 2019.

The EIP *Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning*⁵ suggests that the human networks and skills created by P2P learning engagements need to be “shared forward” into peers’ own organisations and operational networks in order for change to happen at scale. At the same time, the guide points out that “there is limited evidence that this kind of diffusion happens very often”. Investment in MEL of P2P learning could try to fill this evidence gap by tracking how changed behaviours (in terms of *ways of doing or relating*) at different levels reinforce sustained change. Specifically, this could involve both unpacking how learning transfers from the individual learner through to the organisation and possibly to sector levels (from micro via meso levels to the macro level), as illustrated in Figure 2, and how learning is multi-directional rather than linear.

In terms of *what* to monitor, systemic approaches to MEL would mean shifting from a focus primarily on outputs (products or services produced) to a focus on capabilities strengthened or built. This, in turn, may require a new understanding among both donors and recipients of P2P funds of how results and activities will be accounted for as well as a more distributed approach to how evidence is collected.

FIGURE 2

Diffusion models from small (micro) to large (macro): How intermediaries can link the models for multi-directional and institutional, meso-level change



Source: Author’s own elaboration

A challenge observed by several of the contributing organisations is that different actors are involved at different levels of change, making more systemic outcomes difficult to track. Typically, each peer organisation (along with the facilitator) has its own planned activities to carry out with its own lines of accountability for delivering and reporting on activities undertaken. These may include a small budget for monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and sometimes reflection and learning. Yet, based on several AG members’ experience, value that is collectively created at a more systemic level is harder to document (including changed and internalised practice within organisations).

For some AG members, what was documented and reported on was more heavily influenced by donor reporting requirements than for others. It was seen as important to bring your funders along on the learning journey for that very reason and to continuously assess and re-assess expected outcomes. This was noted to be of particular importance for contributing AG members who are intermediary organisations for P2P processes doing the matching, co-ordination, MEL and brokering of P2P processes. These organisations are typically tasked with linking a variety of actors, enabling diffusion from the micro to meso (institutional) levels.

5. Andrews M., Manning, N., A Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning, EIP, 2016.

What is currently being reported on the effects of P2P learning?

Discussions with AG members during the validation process for this note led to some interesting reflections around how to balance the accountability function of MEL (typically what donors require in terms of reporting) and how to use MEL meaningfully to guide operations. Often, “accounting for how money was spent” (activities undertaken, services produced) became a proxy for reporting on more complex and unpredictable processes of change at the institutional level. Reporting often included the following:

Outputs (i.e. services delivered; activities undertaken such as trainings, workshops, study visits) over outcomes: Reporting included the number of workshops, trainings, people trained and other outputs-level accounting. While logging such activities is clearly necessary to establish causal pathways towards longer-term effects (and illustrate the scope of activities and/or how funds were spent), they do not provide sufficient information on their own. The effects of P2P learning from these activities, unless monitored, were being assumed.

Emphasis on technical assistance (TA) combined with a problem-solving approach: Reporting on TA-style interventions focused strongly on the identification of and solutions provided for specific problems, or problem areas, that often were technical in nature. This was done in different forms of twinning models (matching a primary “learner” with another clearly defined “capacity support provider”). The problem orientation is also at the core of problem-driven iterative analysis (PDIA) interventions where there is investment up front in problem identification and definition. However, unlike TA interventions, PDIA also places emphasis on the institutional capabilities of engaging in problem solving (unlike expert-driven TA).

Solutions shared: For P2P initiatives with a stronger focus on networking, knowledge brokering and matching of peers in a community of practice, the documentation and sharing of successful cases or lessons are typically emphasised in the M&E over tracking longer-term institutional change. On its own, “solutions sharing” does not necessarily illustrate how these lessons are put into practice or how they are adopted by others.

Behaviours changed: These can be at the individual level from those directly involved in a P2P exchange or at team or institutional level where new work processes or practices have been introduced (linking behaviour change to institutional capabilities). Attitude change, if tracked and reported, can be indicative of a preparatory stage for engaging in behavioural change (increased understanding or acceptance of a new way of working) or as a way to maintain the use of new skills or habits.

A mix of the above: Most reporting contained different elements of all of these categories, which may all be needed to differing degrees. But getting that mix and balance right, while creating causal pathways to illustrate longer-term institutional strengthening, was a shared challenge.

LESSON 2

Decide who tracks what and who compiles the information for collective learning

To get beyond activity-based, outputs-oriented reporting, it is deemed important to have a clear division of roles as regards *who tracks what* and who compiles such tracking to see the *combined effects of the partnership*.⁶ This means involving both resource organisations and learning organisations (and individuals) in self-assessments and tracking their own use of learning as part of the P2P engagement. Tools like simple journal entries or habit trackers can be used (see Annex 2 for an example), with someone in charge of systematically gathering and synthesising stories of change to feed back into the partnership. While the main M&E (and reporting) function typically is included in the facilitator role, distributing the function of data gathering and making it part of the learning journey proved to be effective.

6. Activity-based, inputs-oriented reporting typically includes, for example, the number of workshops held and the number of participants satisfied with training. Though these say something about how money was spent, they say little about outcomes.

Government Partnerships International (GPI), based in the United Kingdom (UK), works in this way.⁷ It takes on the overall M&E function as a complement to its matching and facilitation role, while providing partners with easy tools and support to do real-time monitoring. One such simple tool is a one-page Results Evidence Sheet on which partners are asked to write their observations on changes in attitudes and behaviours resulting from engagements in the P2P learning on a continuous basis and include a brief explanation of why these may be significant. These types of tracking tools also use a systemic lens, going from individual-level changes to those at meso (organisational) and macro levels. They also distinguish between the internal and external context. Figure 3 shows an extract from a guidance note.

FIGURE 3

Example of instructions to partners for filling out a GPI Results Evidence Sheet (using a hypothetical example)

	Small (e.g. access/individual)	Medium (e.g. organisational)	Large (e.g. system)
Internal	Getting a meeting with an influential player	Minister instigates new procedures of processes	Senior leaders state commitment to reform
	Individual's language changes positively	New Minister block process change	Ministers block policy reform ideas
	Individual's behaviour changes negatively	Problem solving techniques are observed	Senior leaders implement new process for Government reforms
	Regular meetings with minister start	Emails demonstrating resistance to new procedures	Minister state approval of UK support/invite us for more support
External	Respected journalist writes article against NSGI objectives	Protests against reform processes break out	Natural disaster causes damage/ slows progress
	Aid blogger supports reform ideas	Demonstrators in favour of GPI propositions	Government collapse

Source: Niki Wood, GPI.

Since partners usually have low internal capacity to track the effects of P2P engagements themselves, GPI then synthesises inputs from partners and distributes findings as a means for continued relationship building and dialogue. In other words, in addition to fulfilling accountability requirements, *the MEL function becomes part of the ongoing facilitation of the partnership, rather than an add-on to it.*

The whole partnership is assessed, with the both the UK government counterparts and the recipient required to engage in monitoring and learning that is facilitated by GPI. However, institutional-level impact and results are only being tracked for the recipient of capacity support from a UK peer institution. A more bidirectional (mutual) learning was not foreseen in the Partnerships for Development (P4D) programme design,⁸ where these tools have been applied.⁹ However, unanticipated learning (per anecdotal examples and some recent qualitative evidence) was noted to have occurred also among the UK partners.¹⁰

7. This is based on documentation developed by and interviews conducted with Niki Wood, GPI (November 2019 and May 2020). For a more general introduction to GPI, see https://www.effectiveinstitutions.org/media/P2P_learning_and_partnerships_in_civil_service_reform_.pdf.

8. The UK Department for International Development (DFID) funded the programme. On 2 September 2020, DFID merged with the Commonwealth & Development Office to create the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.

9. As described on the United Kingdom Development Tracker website, "Partnerships for Development (formerly known as GREAT for Partnership) will multiply the UK's development impact by boosting partnerships between UK's institutions and their counterparts in the developing world. It will leverage the skills and expertise from a range of UK institutions and supply them initially to DFID partner countries, based on tailored demand. It will initially prioritise the Extractives, Financial Accountability and Anti-Corruption sectors." See <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-1-205191>.

10. This is based on an interview with Niki Wood, GPI, May 2020.

Other organisations acted more as a catalyst between similarly mandated institutions. An example is the Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI). According to a recent evaluation,¹¹ it has acted as a catalyst between ministries of finance in Africa while largely leaving it up to partners to conduct their own monitoring of how new insights were used and implemented after attending CABRI events and P2P trainings. Anecdotal evidence gathered as part of the evaluation process clearly illustrates the value added for individual participants, though it was more difficult to demonstrate effects on institutional strengthening. This is not to say that such strengthening did not occur, but simply that the institutionalisation of lessons was not systematically tracked and documented.

Lessons were also noted around the difficulties of diffusing technical skills and reform lessons in an environment governed by political and policy priorities. These lessons pointed to the need to work at both a political level through CABRI-facilitated policy dialogues and, in parallel, with more technical problem solving around clearly defined reform objectives, creating incentives for institutional change both from “above” and from peers at a technical level. A more systemic way of mapping and tracking results may give a more nuanced picture of the interplay between policy and technical efforts to pursue reform – something that CABRI is now implementing by following groups of peers over a longer period of time while applying PDIA.¹²

The Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH), based in Kazakhstan, is an international multilateral platform that plays a facilitating role across three main pillars of P2P activity: capacity building and peer-to-peer learning, partnerships and networking, and research and knowledge management. ACSH has launched P2P learning alliances of practitioners on specific themes of broad interest for government civil servants (e.g. public service delivery, e-government and innovations in governance).

FIGURE 4

Astana Civil Service Hub: P2P learning alliances

P2P Alliance on One-Stop-Shop Public Service Delivery	P2P Alliance on e-Government development	P2P Alliance on Transformation and Innovations in Governance
Launched in May 2016	Launched in June 2018	Launched in June 2019
Countries involved: Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan	Countries involved: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan	Countries involved: Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Ukraine, as well as international experts from AAPA and Oslo Governance Centre, UNDP
Outcomes: The Astana hub has been twice elected as a member of the EIP Advisory Group (2017 and 2019) to provide advice to the EIP Co-Chairs and the Secretariat on strategic direction.	Outcomes: Three workshops were conducted and one case study was published. It is also planned to issue two case studies and conduct activities on the P2P principle.	Expected outcomes: Study tours, workshops are going to be organized.

Source: ACSH brochure entitled “Astana Civil Service Hub – Partnership for Civil Service Excellence”, which outlines the Hub’s P2P learning alliances as one of the services it provides alongside knowledge sharing and networking among civil servants.

As the P2P facilitator, it provides regular follow-up and interaction with participants, including feedback surveys on trainings and workshops. ACSH is also involved in the preparation and compilation of reports and case studies of good practice with lessons that can be shared and inspire other Hub-participating countries and partners – for example, on the public service delivery models of Georgia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan as well as “smart” government (in the case of Azerbaijan). A more extensive list is provided in Annex 1.

11. Khulisa Management Service, Independent Evaluation Report of CABRI, February 2018.

12. Harvard University, Center for International Development, Building State Capability, A Toolkit for PDIA, [https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/PDIAtoolkit#:~:text=Problem%20Driven%20Iterative%20Adaptation%20\(PDIA,adapt%20and%20then%20act%20again.](https://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/PDIAtoolkit#:~:text=Problem%20Driven%20Iterative%20Adaptation%20(PDIA,adapt%20and%20then%20act%20again.)

ACSH regularly tracks performance against its mandate and its members' expectations, using surveys to establish the most popular themes for participating country governments, the most popular training modalities and the types of activities that are in demand for civil servants' own personal professional development.

Currently, however, ACSH does not have a mandate to systematically track how facilitated knowledge exchange is being used by peers in their own institutions. Given the hierarchical operating context for many civil servants in the Central Asian region, ACSH pointed out that monitoring procedures in the form of reports can be seen as adding red tape to the learning processes – something ACSH is careful to avoid. Making monitoring more learning-oriented (rather than control-oriented) may be a way to overcome this, as illustrated by examples from GPI.

Figure 4, an excerpt from the ACSH introductory brochure, describes what has been achieved (i.e. output results), yet illustrates the challenge linked to outcome-level results reporting within the participating country governments.

LESSON 3

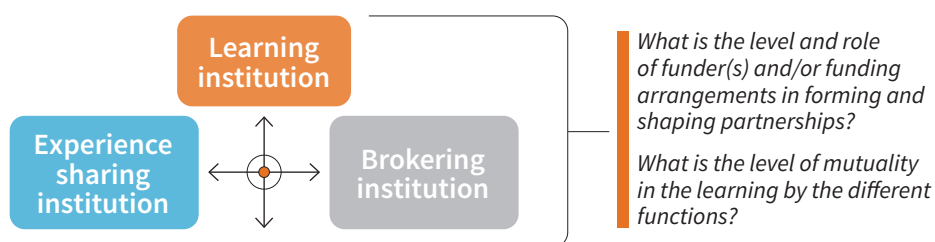
As partner roles and constellations differ and may shift along the way, reassessing roles and functions continuously could be part of the MEL framework

In a case documented by LOGIN Asia, LOGIN brokered a partnership between the Bhutan Network for Empowering Women (BNEW) and The Hunger Project (THP) India that was geared to encouraging the participation of women in politics and electoral processes in Bhutan. LOGIN played a facilitation role and supported ongoing knowledge brokering, co-ordination and reporting.

The relationship between the partners was defined as one *primary learning institution* (BNEW) and one organisation that was the primary *experience sharing institution* (THP India) with one *brokering institution* (LOGIN). The funder also played an active role in this partnership.¹³ As illustrated in Figure 5, a common P2P partnership constellation often has one primary learning institution; one (or several) experience sharing and/or resource institutions; and one brokering institution. Mutuality in learning is not being tracked but is seen as an extra benefit if it happens to occur spontaneously.

FIGURE 5

Common constellation of P2P partnerships



Source: Author's own elaboration.

This setup seems to be quite common across the partnerships reviewed. However, LOGIN noted that there is a difference between working in this type of smaller, targeted partnership for peer learning (that is, between two organisations that operate in different contexts but address or seek to address similar challenges) and facilitating multi-stakeholder learning in more diverse networks, for instance between civil society and local government around commonly defined social accountability issues. One difference is that it is easier to follow the institutional changes taking place in greater depth in a carefully matched, one-on-one partnership where parties are both committed (and funded) to invest in a process of learning. A networked approach, on the other hand, relies more on the catalytic effects of bringing together people who usually do not have a chance to have exchanges.

13. Representatives of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation participated in some of the early study visits between India and Bhutan.

A common understanding up front about the type of P2P engagement that is being initiated will determine what kinds of results can be expected and how to invest in capturing and using these results as part of the evolving learning process. Defining up front how different actors are expected to contribute to the peer learning process, while articulating their stakes (incentives and/or risks) in engaging in the initiative, can help clarify expectations. This can also help mitigate power imbalances in the partnership (e.g. how much is truly demand-driven and/or how secure and unconditional the funding is). However, it is important to take stock and reassess these partnership functions along the way. For instance, GPI noted that some partnerships that started out as a largely transactional collaboration (between one provider and one recipient of capacity development support) led to more mutuality in the learning once trust had been built between partners.

An example related by LOGIN also exemplifies how problem identification and role division between partners may change once engagement is initiated.

“LOGIN has facilitated a peer partnership between Municipality of Ulaanbaatar (MuB), Mongolia and Kerala Institute of Local Administration (KILA), a local government training institution in Kerala state of India. The limited demand of MuB was to receive support from KILA to develop a training strategy/framework. A team from MUB visited KILA and had prolonged exchanges with KILA faculty and state officials to understand the ‘what’, ‘how’ and ‘why’ of the work. The MUB team gradually gained the realization that just a training strategy would not be enough with the accompanying preparedness on many other fronts for it to be implementable, scalable and sustained – a fact that they had been advised upon many times before. LOGIN’s assessment is that the emotional connect during the learning enabled these takeaways.”¹⁴

In the BNEW-THP India partnership case from LOGIN, focus was almost exclusively on BNEW’s learning journey and what it wanted to achieve as the primary learning institution or “recipient” of support. However, a lesson is that an initial partnership baseline assessment should include the roles of the facilitating and/or brokering institution and the funders, as both are very much part of the ecosystem; funders often participate in a more passive role, but sustained funding and funding priorities matter. Including these roles would clarify how actors evolve and influence each other over time.

Moreover, LOGIN noted that while it often invests a substantial amount of time and resources to find the “right fit” of peers, these initial efforts to match and broker relationships often go largely undocumented and/or unnoticed in the results reporting since monitoring tends to start after such preparations. This risks not capturing important lessons on how to set up and facilitate effective P2P engagements. LOGIN reported that in the Bhutanese case, for instance, it explored three different scenarios in terms of possible peer institutions before settling on matching the BNEW request for support with The Hunger Project India. As LOGIN noted, such preparation “is an important investment that facilitating institutions like LOGIN undertake, but the process is often tacit and not captured in MEL frameworks”.¹⁵

Typically, LOGIN’s value creation approach to M&E focuses more on the primary learning partner¹⁶ than on the role and function of resource and/or co-ordination and brokering organisations. This means that the results produced by the primary learning institution often become a proxy for how well the entire P2P partnership worked and how well the different functions were performed (whether brokering, providing insights, engaging in mutual learning, or being the “demander” or recipient of inputs).

Similarly, the Centre for Economic Governance¹⁷ (CEG) in Kenya noted that as a non-state actor, its role is perceived to be that of a neutral facilitator – not of a “big brother or a competing peer” – when bringing together national and subnational-level government officials, representatives of civil society, and think tanks to facilitate learning for enhanced mobilisation and administration of counties’ own source revenue.

14. Extract from a Note prepared by LOGIN as an input to the EIP MEL Framework in April 2020 (by Preeta Lall, Yacoub Zachariah and Anusha Lall).

15. This point was made in a LOGIN Note as an input to the EIP Framework in April 2020.

16. Many of the cases reviewed still seem to focus on one primary recipient of support rather than on more bidirectional partnerships built on mutual learning. However, all agreed that unanticipated learning also frequently took place within the institution providing technical or peer support. This is usually not systematically tracked.

17. See <https://cegkenya.org/>.

At the time, county governments had a steep learning curve in relation to enhancing their fiscal management, and they were looking to harmonise county revenue streams while promoting principles of efficiency, accountability, transparency, predictability and equity linked to effective service delivery.¹⁸

It was key for CEG to maintain its neutrality as a non-state facilitator. Being local and knowing the local conditions, what to look for and how to facilitate such exchanges proved to be important and enhanced the level of mutual trust and openness.

The P2P approach it adopted was a networked approach wherein multiple partners facing similar challenges were brought together with one facilitator (CEG) to move the process along. Those working at a more technical level, together with their managers from five county treasuries, participated in the peer learning alliance. This multi-level learning and exchange allowed easier buy-in and quick follow-up as it helped speed up the decision-making process for trying new ideas or approaches that had already been tested and validated elsewhere.

CEG also noted that working relations improved in various departments involved in revenue mobilisation and administration that had a chance to discuss across departmental silos and share lessons in the “safe space” that the P2P facilitation provided.¹⁹ Yet limited funding and a project period spanning only six months,²⁰ CEG noted, constrained a more systemic approach for capturing results, particularly at the institutional level. Instead, the M&E approach adopted was through sharing (and documenting) stories of change that participants brought up as part of their knowledge sharing. Had this type of “story harvesting” been done systematically each time officials were visited or brought together, CEG noted, it could have offered the potential for tracking institutionalisation over a longer period of time.

For ACSH, monitoring starts with an initial survey among participating countries to determine the main theme and goals of a new learning alliance before its launch. The Hub subsequently takes on a knowledge brokering and co-ordination role. With learning being largely trust-based among participating civil servants, the focus of ACSH is on providing participants a safe space for learning rather than on how such learning is put into practice in participants’ home institutions.

The collective challenge across each of these experiences has been tracking institutional gains and practices while still being sensitive to the organisational culture and context among learning participants. Emergent and unanticipated learning, such as that observed by CEG when participating country treasuries officials were put in the same room to share ideas, can be harvested and reported as part of the ongoing learning journey rather than being seen as a “control” function.

LESSON 4

Capture the added value of combining cognitive and affective learning

All EIP Advisory Group members who were consulted for this discussion note spoke of the centrality of *trust and trust building over time* in their P2P engagements, alluding as well to the affective aspects of engaging in P2P learning. Both CEG and CABRI referred to the fact that when advice came from a peer in a similar situation (e.g. another African ministry of finance or another county treasury in Kenya), there was quicker adoption of new ways of doing things or a greater willingness to try new ways of working. This was also observed by ACSH. In other words, the emotional bond or sense of solidarity made new information more easily acceptable.

18. Wanjiru, R., Peer to Peer Learning for Enhancing Own Source Revenue Mobilization and Administration, Centre for Economic Governance, Kenya.

19. The officials who were targeted and participated in the P2P learning were County Executive Committee members for finance (equivalent to ministers of finance for counties); chief officers for finance and economic planning (equivalent to principal secretaries for counties); and directors of revenue and other county officials responsible for performance contracting.

20. The process was supported by a small grant via EIP of USD 20 000 over six months to the facilitating agent (only), but it benefited from the political goodwill of and collaboration with relevant government agencies that co-financed their own participation. Yet with funding only provided to the facilitator, it was difficult (and time was too short) to come up with a more comprehensive MEL framework tracking institutionalisation.

Other examples showed how MEL – when done in a participatory way through a combination of self-assessments, partnership health check-ins and mediated dialogue between peers – was used as a way to help build or consolidate trust between different institutions from different operating contexts. Examples include GPI’s work with UK institutions engaged in capacity building overseas.

As illustrated in the example from LOGIN, P2P learning has the potential to effectively combine cognitive and affective (emotional) learning through relationship building and trust among partnering peers. This effect is strengthened if partnerships are supported over a longer time period accompanied by several iterations of learning by doing followed by reflection and (mutual) learning, and if partners develop a sense of mutual solidarity. This latter element also came across strongly in the CABRI evaluation, which found that its identity as an African-led and owned initiative, wherein peers struggled with similar sets of problems, was important for a sense of community building among CABRI partners.

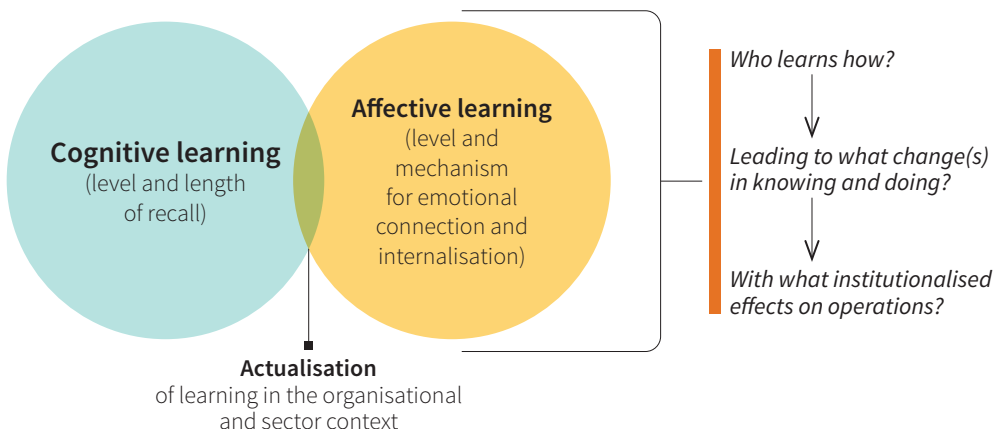
The impact story from South Africa that was captured in the evaluation further noted, in the participant feedback, that “CABRI’s approach of capacity building in African countries is not a lecture, but a diagnostic and a participatory process”. As such, there seems to have been a higher degree of mutuality in the learning and exchange. However, this is not something that was systematically tracked. The catalytic effect was also captured in the Ghana case study of the evaluation, in which partners expressed surprise that “learning came from places I wasn’t thinking of, like Burkina Faso” and that a validation process could identify areas where neighbours could learn from each other.

One critique, which points to the capability of balancing coherence with diversity, was that while P2P learning was facilitated among like-minded officials in different ministries of finance, less emphasis was put on relationship building within the officials’ own governments, for example with relevant line ministries and other domestic actors that may have had a different stake in the public financial management issue at hand. A lesson here is that while emotional connection and trust building can nurture learning when “being among like-minded”, this “emotional bubble” can easily burst when it hits the reality of its own operating environment. GPI has tried to address this by regularly assessing both the health of the P2P partnership – one of five indicators relates to trust building between partners – as well as how it manages to advance against joint objectives.

Regarding the actualisation and transfer of learning from the individual to the institutional level, it would be interesting to look more closely at both the *cognitive system* through recall (of new skills or ideas) as well as the *emotional system of learning* (“affective learning”) – i.e. how learners feel while they are learning, which may affect the level of internalisation (Figure 6).²¹

FIGURE 6

Types of learning and internalisation



Source: Author’s own elaboration.

21. Miller, M. “Teaching & Learning in Affective Domain: From Emerging Perspectives on Learning, Teaching and Technology”, University of Georgia, 2015.

Given that P2P learning largely depends on positive reinforcement or a sense of support from peers, examples from EIP members illustrate how the emotional system of learning may be important for shaping attitudes and for internalising new behaviour. In terms of the cognitive aspects of learning, a working hypothesis is also that learning within one's own context (rather than relying on a recall of things taught during an off-site training course) make *recall and retrieval* of new information easier.

ASCH particularly underscored the need to build up a relationship of trust between the facilitating Hub and peers in the network, emphasising that these relationships pay off over time. One of the mechanisms that ASCH uses is to regularly seek feedback among participating countries via needs assessment surveys that are synthesised in baseline reports on priority areas for knowledge exchange and learning. Case studies are then compiled and typically discussed in face-to-face workshops. A Virtual Alliance was launched after the COVID-19 outbreak and has also shown a high degree of reciprocity of peers on line. More than 15 cases on how to combat the pandemic were being shared within the first few months via the Alliance. Also, given that trustful relationships had already been established in the network, Azerbaijan shared, pro bono, a case about its digital system to minimise the spread of the virus with the Kazakhstan government.

LESSON 5

Pinpoint mechanisms for institutionalisation of new skills and practices and continuously assess assumptions around institutionalised patterns of behaviour

Another aspect of how learning translates into changed institutional practices (adding to institutional resilience beyond solving a discrete problem) would be to try to map out the concrete mechanisms for such institutionalisation.

This could be done by participating organisations as part of regular learning self-assessments, with facilitation tailored to each institution's operating context and taking into account the internal organisational culture of engaging in self-reflection and critique. For instance, GPI noted that based on its experience, participants in institutions and government cultures that are highly compliance-driven may be more fearful of being penalised for raising weaknesses in the current system than those in institutions that are more encouraging of diverse and critical views being expressed.

In the EIP context of seeking to illustrate the different organisational capabilities being strengthened through P2P engagements, a (preferably facilitated) self-assessment could identify key lessons under the relevant categories of capabilities and inquire whether organisational practice has changed in any of the following ways:

- **Replace:** Old habits of doing or framing an issue are replaced with new ones (requiring also explicitly identifying and addressing the “unlearning” of old ways or attitudes).
- **Adapt:** Old habits or framing of an issue are merged with new ones leading to adapted ways of doing or approaching an issue (pinpointing what is different about it).
- **Adopt:** New skills, tools or ideas are brought in with an underlying assumption that they will fill a previous void and be adopted by staff. This may, however, underestimate resistance to change; lack of incentives to adopt new skills or practices; or existing biases in ways of framing or thinking about an issue based on existing cultural and/or social norms or experience from other working environments.²²
- **Address:** A specific problem is being addressed by bringing in new knowledge and expertise from outside via an “expert” source but does not necessarily change internal knowing and doing; (some forms of traditional TA using outside experts could fall into this category).

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22. Examples can be drawn from various efforts to introduce gender mainstreaming and institutionalise ways of working with gender equality across organisations, where previous gender expertise or gender bias may influence the organisational culture and level of internalisation of concepts among staff.

In practice, these categories would likely overlap. However, trying to be more specific about how the P2P engagement aims to institutionalise change into established patterns of behaviour may help identify and regularly test underlying assumptions regarding diffusion and institutionalisation. Internal monitoring and learning efforts can then seek to inquire whether new patterns of knowing and doing are being maintained or whether a relapse into previous working methods has occurred.

The iterative nature of such reflections (e.g. GPI facilitates partnership health self-assessments on a yearly basis) is in itself an important part of advancing the learning, as this may trigger or reinforce new ways of doing or thinking from the previous cycle. This is discussed further in terms of feedback loops in the box below.

Feedback loops in behavioural economics, epidemiology, psychology, etc.

The concept of feedback loops refers to the response mechanisms of an individual, group or larger societal system based on four distinct steps:

- 1) information input or “trigger” (data, a specific experience, a story, learning from someone else, etc.)
- 2) relevance and emotional connection to that information input (merging and filtering new information with previous knowledge and experiences)
- 3) understanding of consequences with concrete options for behavioural response
- 4) action.

The use of informational triggers is linked to a behavioural change or adaptation. Assessing and reflecting over such behavioural responses (at individual or system levels) can lead to repeat behaviour if successful – i.e. either maintaining the adapted behaviour or relapsing into earlier patterns and habits. The “information trigger” at the beginning of every new feedback loop is different from the actual feedback loop itself, which refers to the full response mechanism and how that information was processed and responded to (by the individual, the collective or the system).

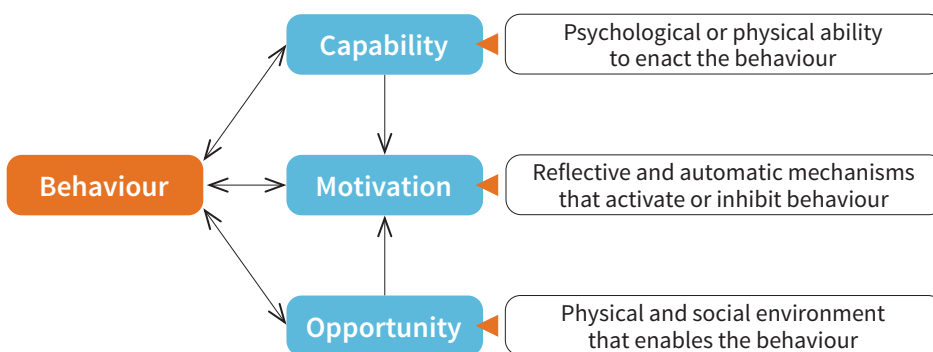
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Source: Ørremark, C. (2016), “Learning Journeys for Adaptive Management – Where does it take us?”. GPSA Briefing Note.

Once partnerships have established a joint and shared purpose, GPI’s monitoring system focuses on how capabilities, motivation and opportunities among partners lead to behavioural change (Figure 7) and on how these affect the overall theory of change for what the partnership seeks to achieve (in terms of actual outcomes).

FIGURE 7

Behavioural change wheel



Source: The model originates in Michie, S., Atkins L., West, R. (2014). The Behaviour Change Wheel: A Guide to Designing Interventions. London: Silverback Publishing, www.behaviourchangewheel.com. Adaptations and further elaborations are by Wood, N., GPI, in the PowerPoint presentation, “Useful Theories of Change: How to articulate the how and the what of your program”.

An actor-based change framework,²³ or ABC-F, is designed with the partners and maps the system of actor groups associated with the agreed problem to be solved.²⁴ It is used to determine whether the right and/or sufficient actors are involved to make that desired change happen and whether the partnership will be able to bring about the required changes. A useful theory of change (UToC) is then drawn up based in the actors-based framework with partner inputs.²⁵ As a consequence, the UToC and ABC-F have a symbiotic relationship so that change in one flows into the other. As the partnership evolves, the ToC and ABC-F are periodically tested and redrawn using an adapted version of strategy testing.²⁶ Strategy testing sessions are facilitated separately as a complement to the more introspective partnership health assessments. This is discussed in more detail below.

ACSH works closely with partners to develop a joint action plan, which is then regularly updated based on reflective discussions. Joint online storage of documentation, provided by ACSH as knowledge management support, also helps monitor how alliance members interact and contribute to creating a common knowledge base for learning.

LESSON 6

Monitor the health of the partnership as well as what it produces

The LOGIN Bhutan-India case (between THP India and BNEW), which was studied and discussed at greater depth with LOGIN, revealed a healthy partnership in which two like-minded organisations managed to share and adapt lessons from one context to another. It began as a technical transfer of skills and tools based on The Hunger Project's longer experience and established mechanisms to reach out to women for their political participation in rural India. However, it transformed into a long-term relationship with more strategic engagement around the establishment of BNEW as a durable, legitimate change agent in Bhutan. Though captured to some extent in LOGIN's more detailed write-up of the case, the monitoring data still focused almost exclusively on what the partnership produced, which is only one of five core capabilities for institutional strengthening in the proposed framework. To a much lesser degree, it captured the evolving nature of the partnership, institutionalisation of learning and the partnership's management over time.

As discussed, GPI regularly engages partners in facilitated self-assessment on the health of the partnership as part of its MEL service provision to partners. Interviews with GPI's Lead MEL revealed different categories of partnerships, including a) those that are healthy and produce relevant outcomes; b) those that are healthy and trusting but do not produce expected outcomes; c) those that are not necessarily healthy (for instance, with low levels of mutuality and trust between partnering peer organisations) but more instrumental in nature that still produce set outcomes; and d) those that are unhealthy in nature and also do not produce expected results (e.g. from having been "forced" from above or mismatched from the outset).²⁷ Regularly engaging partners in self-assessing how the partnership evolves and how it is able to fulfil the learning objectives is one way to support partnership management with an evidence base. This also provides a foundation for breaking off or pivoting a P2P engagement, if deemed necessary.

In one particular example, the GPI-supported UK government partner, after engaging in a repeat self-assessment one and a half years into the partnership, indicated that the partnership had a clear goal and reported being confident of progress. The African government counterpart, on the other hand, rated the clarity of purpose of the P2P engagement as medium low – an appraisal the UK partner was surprised to learn. GPI, being the facilitator, helped the partners dissect why their views were so different, and this process has resulted in a new, shared vision for the partnership moving forward.

23. Koleros, A., Wood, N., (forthcoming). How to Design and use Actor-Based Change Frameworks: a practitioner's manual.

24. Koleros, A., Mayne, J., (2019). Using Actor-Based Theories of Change to Conduct Robust Evaluation in Complex Settings, Canadian Journal of Program Evaluation, <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/cjpe/article/view/52946>; Koleros, A., (2018). The Actor-Based Change Framework: A Pragmatic Approach to Developing Program Theory for Interventions in Complex Systems, American Journal of Evaluation (1-20).

25. Mayne, John. (2018). Developing Useful Theories of Change for Complex Settings.

26. The Asia Foundation initially developed and spearheaded this approach. See <https://asiafoundation.org/publication/strategy-testing-an-innovative-approach-to-monitoring-highly-flexible-aid-programs/>.

27. Information provided by Niki Wood (November 2019 and May 2020) and supported by documentation.

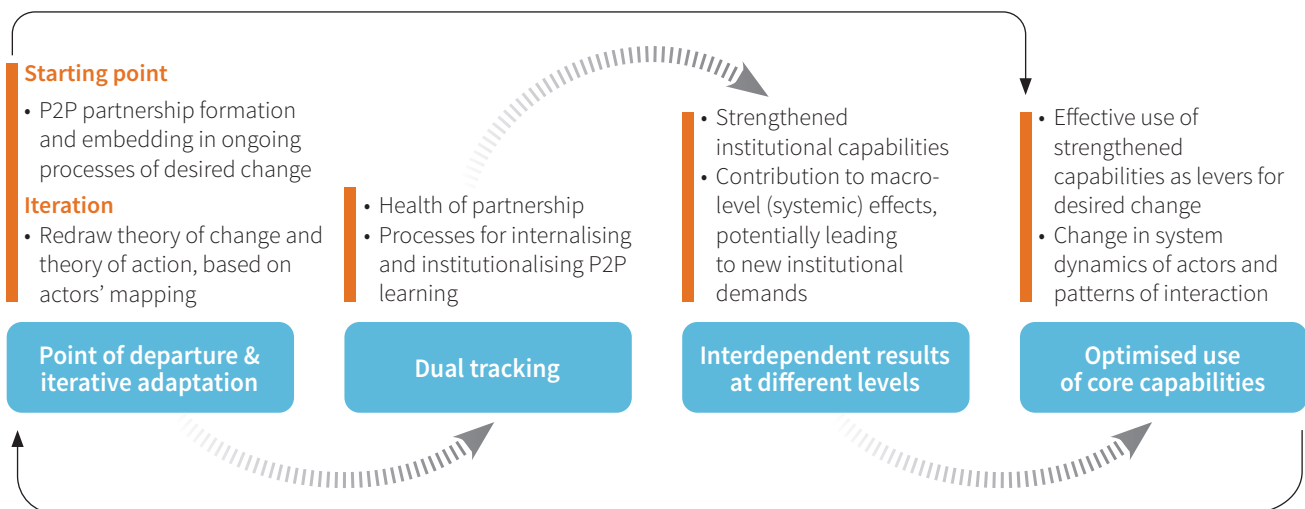
The dual tracking of the health and effectiveness of the partnership, on one hand, and the effectiveness of P2P as a learning modality to fuel change, on the other, gives a more nuanced picture than would emerge from using final impacts of the recipient organisation as a proxy for the partnership's success or failure.

In the featured LOGIN case in Bhutan, the P2P objective was to help establish BNEW as a legitimate, trusted, contextually responsive and effective organisation in Bhutan in terms of promoting women's political participation (and using established tools and outreach strategies used by THP India). This is different from BNEW's ultimate objective – to see an increase in women actually getting elected. The health of the partnership would either enable the P2P objective to be achieved or fail to do so if the “fit” is not right. However, just as we cannot attribute the “number of women elected” to the P2P engagement, neither can we say that the P2P engagement failed if more women ultimately were not elected (as this clearly can be the result of many underlying factors).

The process lessons are schematically outlined in Figure 8 to illustrate the steps that would need to be tracked and mapped out to illustrate credible causal pathways between introduction of a P2P learning engagement and ultimate impact. It would not be correct to use ultimate impact as a proxy for how well the P2P engagement performed. However, P2P engagements that have been invested in and carefully designed *should* be able to track and demonstrate results in the sphere of *indirect influence*, backed up by some anecdotal examples of how organisations effectively use such strengthened capabilities to advance their own objectives. This would provide evidence to demonstrate that P2P learning has strengthened the institutions (as its primary objective) as a shared and collectively owned result of the partnership. The result of the organisation (in the sphere of indirect impact) belongs to that particular institution and is most likely produced alongside and in collaboration with others.

FIGURE 8

Iterative loops for monitoring, evaluation and learning in P2P engagements



Source: Author's own elaboration.

Two lessons, therefore, emerge:

- 1) Clearly distinguish up front the objectives of the learning organisation(s) in relation to its (or their) own strategies and the objectives *specific for the P2P engagement*.
- 2) Engage partners in regularly assessing the *health of the partnership* as a complement to *what the partnership produces*. This can help assess the level of mutuality in the partnership, be used for partnership dialogue, and provide supporting evidence for a more nuanced understanding of links between the nature of the partnership and what it produces in terms of outcomes.

GPI partnership health self-assessments, for example, ask the partnership to provide qualitative answers to questions about how they perceive seven aspects of the relationship: the culture of learning, the utilisation of learning, the strategic direction and clarity of the partnership, the level of trust, the degree of relationship building, the scalability of lessons, and usage of MEL to inform practice and institutionalisation.

Given their bird's eye view, the programme managers or brokers within the UK government institution (or GPI, depending on the partnership constellation and agreed role division) then plot how they perceive the relationship on a scale of one to five for each of the seven aspects. These ratings are plotted on a profile.

In sum, the process includes five distinct steps:

1. The UK counterpart as well as the overseas counterpart complete the self-assessment questionnaire.
2. The UK government institution programme manager or broker assesses the overall partnership on a scale of one to five.
3. The GPI MEL team matches the questionnaire responses to the one-to-five scale descriptions to plot the relationship from the overseas counterpart's point of view, then sees if this matches the view of the broker and/or programme manager.
4. If the perceptions match, they are plotted on a scale from one to five in the seven relationship aspects noted above.
5. If they do not match, GPI's MEL team analyses why, finds a solution ranking and then plots the agreed score after a process of clarification.²⁸

LESSON 7

Regularly assess and redraw the navigational map of how to achieve change together

In the logic of the 5 Core Capabilities framework, which is geared to assessing organisational capacity and performance, an organisation's ability to effectively deliver and produce results in a timely manner is a clearer indication of institutional strength than, for example, meeting certain pre-defined targets and milestones (especially since these may shift with time). Moreover, results achievement is seen as only *one* of several interdependent capabilities.²⁹ Assessing delivery capacity (rather than outputs produced) can nevertheless be hard – especially since different actors in a partnership may be looking for different types of results. Even inside organisations, what constitutes a “meaningful result”, especially from a learning initiative, can mean different things to different people.

The ability to continuously harvest different kinds of results (outcomes), and to use such outcome harvesting efforts as a way to negotiate and navigate a path forward among multiple actors and interests, is in itself a core capability. For external validation, developmental evaluation can be used. In this approach, an external evaluator and/or evaluation team is engaged as a “critical friend” to periodically assess monitoring data from an external perspective so that these data can inform implementation in real time, rather than just at the midpoint or endpoint. The approach has been proven to be most suitable in situations where continuous adaptation and innovation are needed, as it can complement and reinforce other efforts to engage partners in evaluative thinking.³⁰

In the case of MEL of P2P engagements, it could be interesting to further explore how a developmental evaluation approach could help mitigate the risk of “group think” (i.e. the assumption that learning is meaningful just because it is P2P, as the *EIP Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning* says).³¹ Given that most P2P engagements are fairly low cost or connected to larger programmes of reform, the brokering and/or facilitating organisation may also be able to take on this internal evaluation function, as GPI does.

The same *EIP Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning*³² also warns about “magic bullet thinking” – i.e. assuming that all P2P engagements are good and productive and that all lessons are applicable from one context to the next.

28. Information drawn from an Interview with and feedback from Niki Wood, GPI.

29. In their 2008 report for the OECD DAC, *Change, Capacity and Performance*, Baser and Morgan (ECDPM) point to the organisational unit as a living human system that needs a wide range of capabilities to survive, perform and adapt and for which no single capability is sufficient on its own. From a systems perspective, it is not only one such organisational unit that needs to build the necessary capabilities, but a multitude of interlinked actors. Relations between different organisational units also matter for overall performance.

30. See https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/developmental_evaluation.

31. Andrews and Manning, 2016

32. Ibid.

Different Advisory Group members used different tools to stay *problem-focused* and avoid a “cookie cutter” approach that focuses on bringing in external solutions rather than on strengthening unique problem-solving capabilities based on experiential learning exchange. From a capability perspective, building resilient institutions that are able to formulate the problem when it occurs, attract others to help in (joint) problem solving and/or fund such exploratory processes is (in the longer term) more important than having an isolated problem “fixed” by outside experts in the short term.

This is also where having a theory of change to refer to – one accompanied by a theory or theories of action that describe “who does what, how” – can be a useful navigation tool to ensure that isolated problem solving feeds into longer-term institutional change.

CABRI, being a genuinely African-led and rooted initiative, incorporates this way of thinking across its operations. CABRI’s experience also shows that building improved *problem-solving capability* (the ability to articulate, locally own and find peers to exchange with on a problem) may be more important for building institutional resilience than simply fixing the problem using TA expertise. However, creating problem-solving capability also means understanding and engaging with existing power dimensions to create space for implementation.

The CABRI evaluation pointed to some weaknesses in this regard, as coming up with solutions among like-minded institutions may be easier than “selling” them in-house, particularly when working in a more hierarchical setting of public administration. CABRI’s efforts to pilot PDIA in some ministries of finance therefore put a lot of emphasis on clearly identifying the authorising environment and, where opportunities exist, to shift issues or work practices at a more systemic level. The *EIP Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning* also refers to this and stresses the importance of not just applying standard solutions to institutionally embedded delivery challenges, warning that doing so could mean “hitting [the] formal target but missing the politically smart point”.³³

Like CEG in Kenya, CABRI used the P2P methodology as a means to collect individual change stories and testimonials from those individuals from across African ministries of finance who participated in CABRI events (thematic workshops, policy dialogues, etc.) and trainings. What could be further tested, however, is how to do such harvesting of change stories in a more systematic manner, linking this to an overarching ToC (as in the case GPI) so that individual change stories get matched to broader institutional processes of reform. That may also allow CABRI to help partners leverage different aspects of the tools available via P2P learning at different times – sometimes demonstrating technical skills while at other times pointing to ways of doing things differently in neighbouring countries to open up space for internal communication and innovation.

LOGIN has developed a detailed Results Framework that, at its core, seeks to document and assess *value creation*.³⁴ It spans from assessing the immediate value of participating in learning activities through to the potential, applied, realised and transformative value that may be experienced following LOGIN learning exchanges in their institutional contexts.

As such, the framework traces assumed transfer of learning from the individual through to institutional outcomes and across the broader system of interaction through a realised and transformative lens. In addition to collecting a great deal of baseline and quantitative information for its own planning and to stay accountable to its donors, LOGIN is using “*value creation stories*” to continuously harvest outcomes from participants in LOGIN learning activities. These value creation stories explore some of the less quantifiable outputs as well as different stakeholders’ perceptions of change.

In the LOGIN-facilitated P2P engagement between THP India and BNEW, the main objective was well defined up front, namely to take the THP India campaign – the Strengthening Women’s Empowerment through the Electoral Process (SWEEP) approach – along with its approach to training of trainers, leadership workshops and its media preparedness module and help BNEW adapt and use these in Bhutan. Emphasis was (importantly) put on local adaptation and joint problem solving with THP India rather than finding a pre-fixed solution.

33. bid.

34. The analytical approach draws on the Value Creation Framework introduced by Beverly and Etienne Wenger-Trayner. See <https://wenger-trayner.com/resources/publications/evaluation-framework/>.

Outcome harvesting (within the defined boundaries of the partnership) should not be confused, however, with writing success stories, which is geared more towards fundraising but with a lower level of learning and reflection involved.

As noted, GPI has put in place an elaborate M&E system in which concrete outcomes are regularly assessed against nested, commonly agreed useful theories of change as well as actor and influence systems maps to indicate *who is responsible for what* in relation to the ToC in order to make change happen; this can also be referred to as theory of action. The ABC-Fs designed by GPI and that underpin the theories of change illustrate the assumed causal pathways for change and how different partners are expected to contribute to driving such change forward.

Also, a structured process to identify and continuously track expected behavioural changes – rather than just monitoring the execution of activities – provides a good foundation for tracing contributions to changes at the institutional levels. In doing so, it would be important (as exemplified among AG members) to have the management and/or leadership “sign off” on key expectations of the P2P engagement up front to create space for learning that can feed into work processes and organisational strategies. Agreeing on the key changes in behaviour (outcome challenges) up front is often the result of a facilitated process tailored to the specific objective of the P2P engagement.

Conclusions

The purpose of this discussion note is to take stock of some of the lessons derived from EIP members that are actively involved in supporting or facilitating P2P learning on the ground and from the viewpoint of how to track and link such learning to institutional reform.

These lessons, summarised in the first section of this note, can be seen as suggested design principles for MEL of P2P learning engagements. They are meant to help support a collective reflection via EIP on how to conduct monitoring, learning and evaluation of peer-to-peer learning initiatives so that this modality of support can be effectively linked and used to bring about institutional reform. So far, MEL has looked mostly at monitoring and learning (not evaluation), with the aim of strengthening the conceptual understanding of the link between P2P learning and institutional strengthening. Evidence gathered in such monitoring and learning processes can then more meaningfully be validated by external evaluators.

This report will be used for continued discussion and reflection among EIP members on how to document and validate the unique added value of P2P as an approach to institutional capacity strengthening.

■ ANNEXES

Annex 1: **List of contributing Advisory Group members and literature reviewed**

1. **Local Governance Initiative and Network (LOGIN) Asia, India**

Contributors:

- Preeti Lall
- Anusha Lall
- Yacoub Zachariah

Documentation:

- Summary Sheet for LOGIN MEL documents, submitted for EIP MEL assignment, February 2020
- “Seeding Change: Enabling local governments and key influencers across Asia to learn, share & collaborate on strengthening governance”, LOGIN Asia, 2019
- Joining Hands to Empower Women in Politics: Strategic Twinning of Peers (informational poster), LOGIN Asia
- LOGIN Results Document – Working Draft, March 2018
- LOGIN Note on the Results Framework, June 2019
- BNEW-THP Value Creation Story: *Peer Engagement towards Capacitating Women in Politics at the Local Level in Bhutan*, April 2019
- Peer partnership: Political empowerment of women Bhutan-India (poster with summary of partnership and results), 2017
- THP-BNEW Baseline Training Report, 2017
- THP-BNEW, “Women, Elections & Media Workshop for Journalists on Gender-sensitive Reporting”, November 2017, Bhutan
- Final presentation at the EIP Annual Meeting, OECD, Paris, April 2019 – LOGIN P2P learning alliances (featuring the India-Bhutan case)
- BNEW-THP, “Women’s Leadership Workshop for Elected Women in Local Government – Process Documentation”, June 2017
- Final presentation at the EIP Annual Meeting, OECD, Paris, April 2019 – Tracking Network Results; the LOGIN M&E framework
- 5th LOGIN General Assembly Meeting Report, December 2017, Thailand
- Peer Partnerships incorporated in LOGIN M&E and Reporting – Screenshots of M&E Dashboard, April 2020

2. **Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI), South Africa**

Contributor:

- Neil Cole

Documentation:

- Khulisa Management Services, CABRI External Evaluation, Final Evaluation Report, February 2018

3. **Centre for Economic Governance (CEG), Kenya**

Contributor:

- Rose Wanjiru, CEG

Documentation:

- Wanjiru, R., “Peer to Peer Learning for Enhancing Own Source Revenue Mobilization and Administration”, Centre for Economic Governance, Kenya
- Enhancing County Own Source Revenue through Performance Contracting. Report from Forum for County Officials, Nairobi, February 2018

4. Astana Civil Service Hub (ACSH), Kazakhstan**Contributors:**

- Diana Sharipova, ACSH
- Togzhan Akhmetzhanova, ACSH

Documentation:

- Astana Civil Service Hub’s Experience in Applying P2P Learning (P2P Alliances), March 2020
- Astana Civil Service Hub: Partnership for Civil Service Excellence (brochure)
- First Needs Assessment Results Report (2013)
- Second Needs Assessment Results Report (2015)
- Third Needs Assessment Results Report (2018)
- Case study “Smart Government: Case of Azerbaijan”
- Case study “One-Stop-Shop, Public Service Delivery Model: the case of Azerbaijan”
- Case study “One-Stop-Shop, Public Service Delivery Model: the case of Kazakhstan”
- Case study “One-Stop-Shop, Public Service Delivery Model: the case of Georgia”

5. Government Partnerships International (GPI), United Kingdom**Contributor:**

- Niki Wood, GPI

Documentation:

- P4D Template for Results Evidence Sheet
- P4D Key Events Tracker (lighter version of Results Evidence Sheet)
- P4D Capacity Ranking Sheet
- P4D Story of Change Assessment Framework
- P4D Mentoring Recording Template
- P4D Workshop Feedback Questionnaire Template
- P4D Capacity Self-Assessment Template/Form – for both “provider” and “counterpart” in partnership
- P4D Sentinel Tracking sheets and examples
- “Problems, causes & consequences: What is your team driving towards?” – Participatory training exercise, GPI
- *Useful Theories of Change: How to meaningfully articulate the how and the what of your programme?* PowerPoint presentation, Wood, N., GPI
- Story of Change Format & Guidance, Wood N., GPI
- GPI Contribution Courts – Guidance. Wood, N., GPI
- GPI: Being a Programme Theory Socrates – facilitation and inquiry guidance, Wood, N., GPI
- P4D Strategy Testing – Summary Document. Wood, N., GPI, February 2020
- P4D Partners Support: Back to Office Report, February 2020 (Dushanbe), Wood, N., GPI

Annex 2: Example of capabilities tracking sheet for self-assessment

The box below presents a hypothetical example of a potential baseline questionnaire for tracking capabilities and changed organisational behaviour when linked to the different core capabilities (to be tailored to a real-life example). The example was created by the EIP MEL Consultant. Other targeted areas of capability strengthening across main stakeholder groups would require the construction of similar tracking sheets. Such sheets, completed at the outset, could provide a baseline and, alongside sheets filled in subsequently, a way of assessing the level of institutionalisation and/or changed behaviour among different stakeholder groups.

Core Capability to Commit & Engage in learning efforts: Management & staff expectations

Context guiding question: What capabilities do you expect to see in relation to **adapting to context** in order to incorporate P2P lessons in your institutional response to Problem X?

Example:

– I would like to see staff ...

Assessment of current level:

High Quite high Medium Low Non-existent

Justification:

– I would like to see management ...

Assessment of current level:

High Quite high Medium Low Non-existent

Justification:

Work processes guiding question: What kind of **work processes** would you need to change or reinforce to create trust and space in the partnership to advance on Problem X?

Example:

– I would like to see staff ...

Assessment of current level:

High Quite high Medium Low Non-existent

Justification:

– I would like to see management ...

Assessment of current level:

High Quite high Medium Low Non-existent

Justification:

Norms & incentives guiding question: What kinds of shifts in **norms and incentives** do you expect in relation to applying P2P lessons?

Example:

– I would like to see staff ...

Assessment of current level:

High Quite high Medium Low Non-existent

Justification:

– I would like to see management ...

Assessment of current level:

High Quite high Medium Low Non-existent

Justification:

LESSONS HARVESTING: LEARNING FROM P2P ENGAGEMENTS

Discussion Paper for a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework

The Effective Institutions Platform (EIP) is an alliance of over 60 countries and organisations that support country-led and evidence-based policy dialogue, knowledge sharing and peer learning on public sector management and institutional reform. The EIP supports its members in their development of accountable, inclusive and transparent public sector institutions capable of delivering responsive policies, effective resource management, and sustainable public services for poverty reduction and inclusive growth. The EIP Secretariat is hosted by the Development-Cooperation-Directorate of the OECD.