



DEVELOPMENT CO-OPERATION TIPS TOOLS INSIGHTS PRACTICES

In practice

BECOMING A DATA-DRIVEN AND LEARNING ORGANISATION

Key messages

Cordaid developed mechanisms to become a data-driven and learning organisation. Embedding learning at various levels within the organisation helps to foster a learning culture and results-based decision making. Learning should be needs based to encourage ownership of topics and foster interactive learning approaches. Learning from results should be matched with adaptive programming and strategy development.

Keywords

[Innovation](#) | [Institutional arrangement](#) | [Learning and knowledge management](#)

Key partner

[Civil society organisation](#)

Challenge

[Cordaid](#) wanted to stimulate project learning, to strengthen expertise across all offices and staff, and to use results for programming and strategic decision making. The organisation realised that it needed to stimulate peer learning and set minimum standards for learning in order to strengthen the quality of results and the expertise of the staff. Cordaid took reorganisation as an opportunity to embed learning from results in a strategy unit at the corporate level.

Approach

Cordaid took three steps towards creating a data-driven organisation:

- It drafted a policy, with guidelines for practical implementation, to stimulate peer learning via **Communities of Practice** (CoP) to strengthen staff expertise and **Communities of Expertise** (CoE) to stimulate innovation. The CoE compete for organisational resources to implement their ideas, with results being shared within and outside the organisation.
- Cordaid included **project learning** in its minimum standards for Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (PMEAL) in order to ensure that all projects critically review their progress and integrate lessons learned into programming.

- Cordaid adjusted its institutional set-up in the form of **a new strategy unit**, where results are analysed and used to inform managers at all levels.

Results

All projects are now committing to integrate learning from results in their project monitoring and decision making. This formerly occurred only if a development co-operation partner requested it or in an ad hoc manner. Partners are now also required to be involved in any reviewing activity to ensure that the results are owned by the entire project team.

CoPs have been in place for a wide range of topics for 2-3 years. Regular meetings of the PMEAL CoP have resulted in better data quality, the development of innovative PMEAL practices (e.g. remote monitoring guidelines) and increased professionalism. Ten CoEs were funded in 2020; they are now producing new tools, publications, innovative ways of working and policies (e.g. a localisation policy).

A Strategy Communication & Innovation unit has been in place since January 2021 and is developing tailor-made dashboards for managers that combine data from different databases. The unit also designed a new multi-annual strategy using an impact assessment from the previous strategy and a learning agenda. The strategy unit links corporate strategies to monitoring, evaluation, learning and communication.

Lessons learnt

Cordaid's experience yielded a number of valuable lessons for creating a data-driven and learning organisation. In particular:

- **Learning should be needs based.** It is important to create ownership for topics and learning approaches.
- **Colleagues like to learn from each other** and adopt good practices.
- **Learning** on project and organisational results **should be matched with adaptive programming** so that lessons can be applied.
- **Communities** (CoP/CoE) **that focus on a specific topic are useful**, combined with shared formulation of Terms of Reference and objectives.
- **Embedding learning at various levels** within the organisation **helps to foster a learning culture** and results-based decision making.
- **Treating learning as a project results in commitment and products** that can be shared within and outside the organisation for upscaling. This applies to learning through CoE as a project with a budget and deliverables, such as an innovation, and products such as tools and proven approaches. The project should have a competitive bidding process.

Further information

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OECD resources

OECD, *Results in development co-operation*, <https://www.oecd.org/dac/results-development>.

OECD, *Guiding Principles on Managing for Sustainable Development Results*, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/managing-for-sustainable-development-results_44a288bc-en.

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