

## ***Effectiveness Assessment Tool for High-Performance Social Change Organizations: An Overview***

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A high-performance social change organization is one that considers catalyzing relevant changes on the ground as ‘mission critical’ to the agency itself. The Effectiveness Assessment Tool for High Performance Social Change Organizations (EA Tool) analyzes the degree to which an agency has aligned their formal and informal operating environment with change as mission critical in order to identify ways to maximize agency effectiveness.

The Effectiveness Assessment Tool is based on the latest research and literature from a number of fields, supplemented by insights gleaned from significant experience in context analysis and program design, monitoring, evaluation and organizational learning. The fields reviewed to build this tool included: Evaluation Capacity Building (ECB), Organizational Readiness, Institutionalizing Evaluation, Learning Organizations and Organizational Learning, Results Based Management (RBM), Culture of Evaluation, and Organization Change Management.

This tool has been refined over the years through field-testing with non-profit organizations as well as government/donor offices. Through ongoing application, the tool is constantly evolving as the understanding of concepts and processes continuously evolves with experience.

### **Effectiveness Assessment Tool**

The EA Tool assesses an organization’s focus on generating change as it is helped or hindered through three essential domains. The domains are: (1) Analysis, Design, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Capacity; (2) Performance Accountability Systems; and (3) Organizational Culture. Each domain encompasses knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors at the individual staff level as well as the systems, policies, and norms that exist within the organization.



**Figure 1: Effectiveness Assessment Domains**

As represented in Figure 1, the EA Tool also seeks to understand how the domains relate to each other and if they align to support a change as mission-critical orientation. A description of each domain follows.

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1. *Analysis, Design, Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (ADMEL) Capacity:* Includes policies, systems, staff attitudes, and the technical knowledge and skills to develop strategic interventions, track their progress, assess the results, and feed that information back in a timely and useful manner to the right people. Knowledge management, which is intrinsically linked to learning processes, is embedded within this domain while also being enhanced by the organizational culture domain and reinforced by the accountability systems domain.
2. *Performance Accountability Systems:* Includes strategic and managerial processes and oversight that provide the incentives and consequences for action within an organization. These systems range from strategic planning to basic managerial good practice.
3. *Organizational Culture:* The attitudes, beliefs, and values (personal and cultural) of an organization that shape the way staff interact with each other and with stakeholders outside of the organization.

As depicted above in Figure 1, the overlapping area of the three domains depicts where they align and therefore support each other. The more overlap, the better, as overlap signifies that the operating environment has coherence around the central principle of change as mission critical. Although many variables push the three domains together or pull them apart pending the organization history, type, and mission, central to all agencies is the critical nature of **leadership will**.

Each domain needs to be oriented towards effectiveness in order to enable an operating environment focused on creating change. To this end, each domain is divided into specific areas of inquiry that inform the stakeholders involved as to how the domain currently supports or hinders effectiveness. The complete list of areas of inquiry is provided below.

## **Domain 1: ADMEL Capacity**

### *1.1 ADMEL Knowledge and Staff Ownership*

- 1.1a Conceptual clarity exists on each element (A-D-M-E-L) *and* their relationship.
- 1.1b Belief that quality ADMEL enhances programming.
- 1.1c Quality design is perceived as a critical programming function – not a fundraising, bureaucratic, or theoretical exercise.
- 1.1d Monitoring is seen as an important management tool for adaptation.
- 1.1e Evaluation is owned internally as a key learning and accountability tool.

### *1.2 Design Ability*

- 1.2a Design is based on appropriate, quality analysis.
- 1.2b The distinction between changes catalyzed by the program and activities carried out during the program is made with the appropriate emphasis on each.
- 1.2c Goals are representations of relevant change that act as the cornerstone of programming.
- 1.2d Goals and objectives are *clear* descriptions of the intended change.
- 1.2e Theories of change are explicitly unpacked and documented.

- 1.2f Assumptions – causal and contextual – are regularly articulated.
- 1.2g Adequate operational attention (e.g. time, finances, appropriate staff, process, policy) is given to design.

### 1.3 *Monitoring Ability*

- 1.3a Quality monitoring is done on: progress towards results, implementation, and context.
- 1.3b Monitoring information is *explicitly* linked to management decisions.
- 1.3c Perspectives external to the agency are sourced as part of data collection.
- 1.3d All key components are appropriately represented in monitoring plans.
- 1.3e Indicators are SMART (Specific, Measureable, Accurate, Relevant, Time-bound).
- 1.3f Adequate operational attention is given to monitoring.

### 1.4 *Evaluation Ability*

- 1.4a Evaluations add value at all levels in the organization and staff attitudes on evaluation reflect this fact.
- 1.4b Evaluation is an integrated step in the project/program (or funding) cycle.
- 1.4c Pertinent evaluation knowledge and skills exist within appropriate staff positions.
- 1.4d Adequate operational attention is given to evaluation.

### 1.5 *Understanding Success*

- 1.5a There are standards or quality practices used as internal benchmarks.
- 1.5b A clear articulation of what defines success exists at each level and it is frequently revisited, challenged, and refined.

## **Domain 2: Performance Accountability Systems**

### 2.1 *Evaluative Thinking in Decision Making*

- 2.1a Managers have information on how well the organization is doing pertinent to their level.
- 2.1b Data is valued as a key part of decision-making.
- 2.1c Data and beliefs are routinely differentiated and the implications of each understood.

### 2.2 *Management Capacity and Commitment*

- 2.2a Management at all levels places appropriate emphasis on change and senior leadership in particular shows commitment to evaluative thinking.
- 2.2b Staff at all levels are held accountable for their decisions and work in the organization.
- 2.2c Staff have a sense of trust in their senior leadership.
- 2.2d Structures exist to enable an appropriate balance of upward, internal, and downward accountability relationships.
- 2.2e Program staff have autonomy and the capacity to act (make decisions) on results information.
- 2.2f Appropriate transparency exists regarding key decisions.

### 2.3 *Acknowledging Behaviors that Support Effectiveness*

- 2.3a Management consistently signals that results on the ground are a key to success within the organization.
- 2.3b Learning why something did not work is *celebrated* as part of doing effective work.
- 2.3c Sharing critical or strategic learning with others is rewarded.

- 2.3d Staff are motivated to do the best work possible and these motivations are encouraged by management.

### Domain 3: Organizational Culture

#### 3.1 Norm of Continuous Improvement

- 3.1a Asking ‘How could we do this better?’ is a habit in the organization.
- 3.1b Environment fosters continuous improvement and reflective practice.
- 3.1c Organization balances self-discipline with flexibility in programming.

#### 3.2 Ability to Capitalize on Program Failure

- 3.2a Tension between expectation of staff excellence and reality of possible failure is acknowledged.
- 3.2b Appropriate response to failure is consistently applied.

#### 3.3 Resources Available for Reflection

- 3.3a Space for reflection/evaluative thinking is made in terms of time, processes, and budget.
- 3.3b Engaging in reflective activity is seen as an important task within the organization.

### Outside The Tool

It should be noted that the EA Tool *does not include efficiency and substantive expertise*. This approach to effectiveness – namely, whether the organization is achieving what it set out to – does not include **efficiency** considerations. Efficiency encompasses the cost and time associated with the operational actions necessary for internal administrative processes, such as finance, procurement, communication, information technology, and, in the case of donors, contracting procedures. These basic operational processes need to be in place and functioning proficiently if an organization is going to be able to effect the greatest possible change on the ground.

This tool operates under the assumption that these internal processes are functioning appropriately; if this is not the case, then a separate assessment should be conducted to address the causes of inefficiency at the administrative level. However, while efficiency considerations are outside of the scope of this review, it is recognized that there is certainly a point where inefficiency can undermine effectiveness.

Further, the EA Tool does not assess the level of **substantive expertise** such as youth at risk, religious freedom, civilian security, or peacebuilding. Similar to efficiency, the relationship

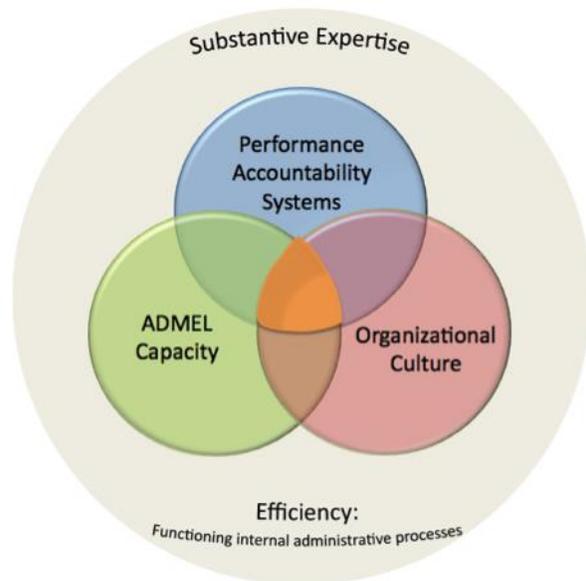


Figure 2: Relationship of Substantive Expertise and Efficiency to the Domains

between substantive expertise and effectiveness is recognized; however, it is viewed as a prerequisite and therefore outside of this assessment process.

### **In Sum**

The potential of this assessment tool is due to its holistic orientation. To enhance a social change organization's ability to catalyze or support important changes, a singular focus on any one domain in the organization will be misplaced. In order to make change mission central, whereby it is imbued in all decisions and actions, agencies must look at the intersection between their organizational culture, performance accountability systems, and ADMEL capacities. It is in their intersection that synergies come to play and agencies are able to transform their efforts to consistently perform at their highest standard.

### **Recommended Reading**

Covey, Stephen M. *The Speed of Trust*. New York, NY: Free Press, 2006.

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Preskill, Hallie S. and Rosalie T. Torres. *Evaluative Inquiry for Learning in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1999.

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Volkov, B. B. & Jean A. King. "A Checklist for Building Organizational Evaluation Capacity." 2007.

Wales, Janet. "Advancing Evaluation Practices in Philanthropy." *Stanford Social Innovation Review*. Special Supplement to the Summer 2012 Edition, (2012).

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