ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT FRAMEWORK

GLOBAL PARTNERS DIGITAL

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

In the human rights and digital policy space, where large corporations and state interests dominate, a strong and effective civil society voice is critical. Without it, it's unlikely we'll see a digital environment based on human rights and democratic values. Yet, as civil society groups, we face multiple challenges that threaten our existence, particularly in the global South. The pool of funding and people available is limited, and civil society often has to fight to assert its relevance and compete for these resources.

These are external challenges which, as civil society, we can't necessarily control. What we can do, however, is make sure that we are in the best possible position to respond to and deal with them. A movement is only as strong as the organisations which drive it. At GPD, we've spent the last ten years testing approaches to organisational development, seeing what works (and what doesn't) both in our own internal context, and applied to our partners in the global South. In this short guide, we share some of the insights we've gained, with the aim of supporting other organisations in the digital policy field in becoming stronger, more sustainable and more strategic.

HOW THE TOOL WORKS

In **Section 1** we look at why it's important to look inwards at the health of an organisation. We also suggest a framework for thinking about organisational development.

In **Section 2** we focus on the key components of a good strategy.

In **Section 3** we look at the organisational assets needed to deliver a strategy.

In **Section 4** we explore the different aspects of organisational sustainability.

In **Section 5** we introduce a self-assessment tool to help you identify your organisation's gaps, and track its progress in bridging them over time.

In **Section 6** we share some helpful links and resources for further reading.

WHO IS THIS GUIDE FOR?

This guide is tailored for use by any human rights and digital policy organisation that is looking to strengthen its capacity and sustainability. You may also find it useful if you're a civil society organisation or business working in a different sector, or a funder interested in the capacity and sustainability of the organisations that you support be adapted according to specific needs.

01

Growing a healthy organisation

As human rights defenders, our dedication to 'the cause' can mean we sometimes neglect the health and development of our own organisations.

This is a mistake. The simple truth is that if an organisation fails it won't be able to achieve its goals. What's more, the relatively limited number of civil society organisations working at the intersection of digital policy and human rights means that the failure of just one can be a significant blow to our movement as a whole.

But just surviving isn't enough. The internet governance and cybersecurity arenas are dominated by some of the biggest companies in the world, as well as governments with competing political agendas.

If we want to participate meaningfully alongside these actors, we need the right expertise and capacity. We need the ability to adapt and respond as rapidly as these policy spaces and ecosystems transform. And we need to show that we are sustainable – that, as organisations, we are resilient, independent, and here to stay. All these qualities depend on the health of our organisations.

What makes an organisation healthy?

In general, a healthy organisation:

1. Knows what it wants to achieve and how (**Strategy**)
2. Has the right assets to get there (**Organisational Assets**)
3. Looks after these assets so that it is sustainable (**Sustainability**)

These three components form the background of our framework for thinking about organisational development (pictured below).

In the following sections, we explain the framework's components in more detail, and give recommendations on how to develop and manage them.

Although this guide is for organisations in the human rights and digital policy field, the organisational development framework is broadly applicable to any organisation in any field. After all, the key features of any well-functioning organisation – be it a charity or a company, a not-for-profit or a for-profit – are very similar.

Your roadmap – distilling what you are trying to achieve, and the steps and resources.

The practical elements which turn your strategy into reality.

Your organisation's ability to not only survive, but to thrive.

02

Strategy

Your organisational strategy underpins your entire organisation.

It is your roadmap – distilling what you are trying to achieve and the steps and resources you need to realise it.

In this section, we set out the components which underpin an effective strategy, and offer some recommendations for developing and implementing it.

What makes a good strategy?

A good strategy is underpinned by:

- **A purpose**. Before you do anything, take a step back and ask, "what is going on?" and "what can we change?". Identify the powers and structures at play in the environment you are operating in. Then, within this picture, pinpoint the critical problems that you want to address. This is your "purpose". Without coherently defining this purpose, you risk creating a strategy that is mere wishful thinking.

- **Goals**. This is where you ask "what does success look like?". Your goals hone in on your purpose, and frame what your organisation – with its unique expertise and resources – wants to achieve. No one organisation can achieve everything, so your goals are where you limit yourself to what you do best. In *Good Strategy/Bad Strategy* Richard Rumelt talks about a goal as a "guiding policy" – or, in other words, "a signpost, marking the direction forward but not defining the details of the trip."

- **Pillars of work**. Here, you turn the hypothetical into reality. Your pillars of work are how you organise your work and activities to achieve your goals and purpose – "the details of the trip". These could be thematic, issue-based, or even project-based. Your pillars of work need to align with your purpose and goals, otherwise your strategy won't be watertight.

Recommendations

Your strategy:

- Should be **resilient to internal and external threats.** Map out potential risks – internal and external – and identify the level of risk: high, medium, or low. Understanding what could go wrong helps you to create a more resilient strategy. If the risks are medium or high, you should directly account for them in your strategy.
- **Needs buy-in**. If you are going to successfully deliver your strategy, your board and staff all need to believe in it.
- Should be **clearly articulated and written in plain language.** Jargon and complex terms should be avoided or at least explained. Remember that your strategy may be read by people who do not work in the same field or on the same issues as you.
- Should be **understood internally by your staff, and externally** by your peers, other institutions and the general public. This means that you need to be able to confidently communicate your strategy to a range of different audiences.
- Should be **visible across all your communications**. Your website, as the first port of call, should include pages which clearly explain who you are, the work that you do, and who you work with. Whenever you plan a new output – whether that's a blog post, podcast, publication, or even just a tweet thread – think about who its intended audience is, how it fits into your goals, and how it expresses your aims and value-add as an organisation.
- Should be **reviewed regularly and updated when appropriate**. This will help to ensure that your strategy is dynamic and responsive to your organisation's changing needs as well the evolving challenges and opportunities in your environment.
- Should be **time-specific**. Fixing on an appropriate time-span requires careful consideration. Too short a time-span and your staff will be constantly preoccupied with strategy development rather than delivering your strategy. Too long and your strategy might lose relevance, particularly in a rapidly changing environment like the digital policy arena.

03

Organisational assets

Your organisational assets are what turn your strategy into reality. They comprise the most practical elements of an organisation, including:

1. Structure
2. Capabilities
3. Systems and processes
4. Networks and relationships

Thinking of these as "assets" emphasises how important each one is. Your organisational assets should be based on and align with the goals and pillars of work in your strategy.

In this section, we'll closely examine these assets, explaining what each is and how to manage it.

1

Structure

Your structure is the framework you use to organise your resources to best deliver your strategy. An organisational structure incorporates both staff and projects. Structures can be tall (vertical) or flat (horizontal). Larger, more complex organisations tend to have taller hierarchies. A tall hierarchy will comprise several management layers with increasing decisionmaking powers and responsibility. A flat structure has fewer management layers and staff typically have more autonomy.

Recommendations

Regardless of whether your structure is tall or flat, it should:

- Be **clearly articulated**, so that it is easy to understand how your organisation works and who makes decisions.
- Reflect all of your organisation's **capabilities** (see below).
- Be **embedded in the day-to-day running of the organisation** so that staff not only understand it, but work naturally and easily within it.
- Include any **external expertise** that you bring in. It is important to understand how this external expertise fits within your organisation.
- Be **accompanied by detailed descriptions** of the roles and responsibilities within it.
- Be **reviewed regularly** to make sure that it remains appropriate, particularly in a fast-changing or growing organisation.
- Be **easy to adapt**. If your strategy changes you may need a new structure to deliver it. However, frequent changes to structure can be disruptive. Instead, it might make sense to have a core structure to deliver your core strategy, which is unlikely to change in the medium term. You can then add 'nodes' to this core structure based on new or changed goals or pillars of work. These can be dissolved, shuffled, or reformed without having a significant impact on your overall structure.

2

Capabilities

A capability is a combination of skills, expertise, and resources around a specific area or issue. See the facing page for a (non-exhaustive) list of the capabilities your organisation might need.

Recommendations

Your organisation should:

- Have a set of **core capabilities** that define what it is good at. These capabilities can exist in any area of your organisation. While they don't all necessarily have to be unique to you, it's important to be aware of what capabilities distinguish you from others operating in your environment.
- Ensure that its capabilities **meet your organisation's different needs** as defined in your strategy.
- **Invest in and nurture these capabilities**, regardless of whether they are strong or weak. While it is hard to put a monetary value on your capabilities, they are a crucial aspect of what you do. Investing in your capabilities will ensure that they become stronger and more stable. This will contribute to your sustainability (see next section).

Strategic planning:
- Deep knowledge of the environment and actors in your field;
- Expertise on developing a strong strategy.

Leadership:
- Knowledge and expertise that is respected in your field;
- Management skills;
- A well-trained talent pool of potential leaders to draw on.

Financial management:
- Skilled finance team;
- Financially savvy leadership;
- Strong finance systems and processes;
- Well-trained staff on finance systems and processes;
- Technologies to support finance systems and processes and increase efficiency.

Project management:
- Strong project management approach;
- Skilled project management team;
- Well-trained project staff on project systems and processes;
- Technologies to support project systems and processes.

Substantive/issue-based:
- Expertise and knowledge on your focus issues;
- Research skills;
- Public speaking and presentation skills;
- Strong reputation in the field on focus issues;
- Strong product portfolio on issues.

Communications:
- Copywriting and proofreading skills;
- Design expertise and tools/software where relevant;
- Understanding of audiences and communications best practice.

Innovation:
- Bank of ideas;
- Time/resources to innovate.

3

Systems and processes

A process is a set of methodical steps or activities to get something done. When a series of related processes are put together, these form a system. We often use technology to run or assist our systems and processes. See overleaf for some of the systems. As a general guide, human rights organisations should have systems and processes for:

- Strategy development and review
- Generating new business
- Governance and accountability
- Decisionmaking
- Human resources management
- Financial management
- Project design, management and learning
- Organisational learning and evaluation
- Internal and external communications
- Generating ideas and innovation

Recommendations

A good process should:

- **Have an owner**. This person should be in charge of building, maintaining and/or improving the system/process and should be accountable for it.
- **Have a motive**. The system/process should help your organisation carry out its work and achieve its goals.
- **Be fit for purpose**. The system/process needs to be the best and most efficient way of doing something. If it falls short, then staff may end up not using it.
- **Be understood by all staff**. This involves a combination of good design and good training and guides.
- **Be designed with the end user in mind**. Overly complex and bureaucratic systems and processes can paralyse an organisation, disempower staff and prevent them from doing their work.
- **Be reviewed and continually improved**. This is how problems and inefficiences are eliminated. Here, feedback from users is crucial.
- **Complement not duplicate other systems/processes**. Duplication is a waste of resources and increases the risk of losing information.

4

Networks and relationships

Who you know can be extremely valuable. Your networks and relationships can:

- **Strengthen your reputation**. Who you associate with gives people an idea of the type of organisation you are.
- **Increase your impact**. Being connected to the "right" people or organisations – whether this is at the national policy level or among the grassroots – can help you to achieve your goals and bring about change more quickly.
- **Open up new opportunities**. Networks and relationships are all potential avenues for new work, partnerships, clients, projects and funding.
- **Lead to collaboration**. Working together with other individuals and organisations can be a more effective way of raising your profile than competing to have your voice heard.
- **Be a source of advice**. You can draw on your relationships in a formal capacity, by inviting people onto boards or working groups, or more informally, by asking for feedback or comments on a piece of work, for example.

Recommendations

You should:

- **Map which actors have power and influence** in your field of work and pinpoint who you need to target in order to deliver your strategy.
- **Develop a core network of relevant stakeholders** to help you achieve your goals.
- **Include a range of stakeholders in your networks** – from civil society and academic institutions, to policymakers and tech leaders.
- When building relationships, **look beyond your current strategy**. Your priorities might change – so think about the long-term prospects contacts can offer.
- Deepen relationships by **collaborating or partnering with other stakeholder groups** within your network. Don't let yourself be put in a silo.
- **Let your staff be actively involved** in building your organisation's networks. This means supporting them in gaining the skills, exposure and authority to be able to network effectively.
- Ensure your organisation's networks and relationships are **owned by the organisation, rather than by individuals** who could leave. This means having a process in place for sharing and handing over relationships internally.

04

Sustainability

Sustainability refers to an organisation's ability not only to survive, but to thrive – to operate effectively, and to grow.

A common misconception is that sustainability is only about finances. In fact, while poor financial performance might be the immediate reason that an organisation folds, the real problem often lies elsewhere in the organisation. This means that we need to think of sustainability as something more holistic, which touches on every area of an organisation's functioning.

To be sustainable, an organisation should:

1. Have a good strategy, and invest in and manage its organisational assets well.
2. Know what risks it faces and be able to mitigate these risks.

Having already discussed strategy and organisational assets, this section will focus mainly on risks.

Understanding risks

Most organisations face both external and internal risks.

External risks
External risks are events, trends, and developments that happen outside an organisation and pose a danger to its sustainability. External risks can be economic, political, social, or natural; e.g., a regime or policy change which makes your organisation's work more difficult.

In the development of your strategy it is crucial to spend time mapping potential risks and planning for them. How you manage these risks will vary depending on their nature and severity. If a risk is seen to be high or medium, your strategy should suggest a means of mitigating it.

Internal risks
Internal risks are any factors within your organisation that pose a danger to your sustainability. These might relate to:

1. **Financial mismanagement**. Financial mismanagement can happen accidentally – whether through incompetence, or by not having proper systems and controls in place. This sometimes happens to smaller organisations, which undergo a period of growth and find themselves suddenly managing a substantial turnover, without the right expertise, systems, and controls to support it.
2. **Loss of leadership and talent**. Organisations are often hugely reliant on individuals and their leadership and talent, which means that a single person leaving can cause significant damage. The human rights and digital policy space – which, as a niche, complex field, draws from a small recruitment pool – can be particularly vulnerable to this problem.
3. **Loss of institutional knowledge.** "Knowledge" is a collective body of information which includes facts, data, lessons, ideas and approaches, systems, processes, networks, and relationships. It is ultimately the people in your organisation who generate knowledge. When a staff member leaves your organisation, they take their knowledge with them. This is especially challenging if knowledge and expertise are the key service that you offer. Your challenge, as an organisation, is therefore to ensure that the knowledge of the people who work for you remains embedded within your organisation and is not lost when they leave.

In the next pages, we'll look at three ways your organisation can mitigate these internal risks.

1

Build your organisation's financial health

Recommendations

- **Ensure you have the right finance capabilities**, with robust controls, systems, and processes in place.
- **Do not rely on the financial knowledge and skills of just one person in your organisation**. Having more than one person with a critical eye is crucial to spotting errors and issues.
- **Regularly check on your organisation's financial status and run projections**. This will help to identify and deal with financial problems before they become crises.
- **Build up a cash reserve** to cushion your organisation through 'slow periods' or cash flow issues.
- **Constantly build new business.** As a human rights organisation, the majority of your income is likely to be in the form of grants from private, state, or multilateral funders. The maximum length of such grants is typically four years, with most spanning one to two years. Renewed funding is never guaranteed, and some funders have a limit on how long they will fund even a trusted partner.
- **Plan your pipeline one to two years in advance**. New business takes years to develop – from relationship-building, to concept, to bid, to grant. A longer-term pipeline means that you are less likely to be left financially short if some projects are delayed in getting off the ground.
- **Cultivate a diverse funder base,** so that the end of a grant period does not mean the end of your organisation. This means not only ensuring that your funding comes from a number of funders, but from different types of funders so that you are able to ride out changes in funding 'fashions', trends, or political priorities.

2

Create a talent and leadership pool

Recommendations

- **Begin a process of succession planning f**or the key positions within your organisation. This is particularly important for an organisation whose reputation is based on the person at the helm.
- **Identify who in your organisation has talent** and the potential to play a key leadership role. You should be looking for talent across all tiers of your organisation. It's important to note here that this is not just about finding talent for those top leadership positions. If a middle manager is promoted, then you will need someone to fill that position too.
- **Develop an internal pipeline** based on this talent.
- **Build the skills and capacity of your talent**. You can either do this by training them in specific areas or by "cross-training" or "stretch assignments", which expose them to different roles within the organisation.
- **Nurture this talent on an ongoing basis**. Managing your pipeline and succession isn't just a one-off exercise.
- **Retain your talent**. If you are investing in the skills and capacity of your staff, you want them to be with you long enough to reach the positions you have planned for them. This means building their job satisfaction and loyalty by offering attractive employment packages and creating an environment in which they will thrive.

3

Capture and manage your institutional knowledge

Recommendations

- **Ensure that you have a clean and well-organised data management system** that is intuitive to use. If you have multiple projects, ensure that they have the same or similar folder structures so that someone working in one project can easily locate information on another.
- Some information is confidential, but the majority is not. **Keep as much as possible of your database open to all staff**.
- When a new product, system, or policy is created, share the news internally. You might do this over email, or showcase it through a short presentation to all staff.
- **Ensure that your organisation's substantive/issue-based expertise is spread across your team.** Try "cross-training" so that staff with knowledge in one area can build up knowledge in another area.
- **Create systems and processes to regularly and systematically gather "lessons learned"** from projects. This might be through surveys and interviews, post-mortem workshops, external evaluations, or after-action reviews.
- **Share these lessons learned**. An effective way of doing this is by identifying who in your organisation could best use this knowledge and including them in the process of gathering lessons and knowledge. This will help ensure that knowledge and lessons learned are used rather than simply filed away.
- **Review "old knowledge" on a regular basis**. Go back to archived knowledge records to make sure that nothing is accidentally forgotten.

05

Organisational self-assessment tool

This organisational self-assessment tool is designed to help you identify the critical gaps in your organisation.

It can also be used as a benchmarking exercise to track your organisation's progress over time, or as a way of proving your organisational capacity and sustainability outlook to funders.

This is a **self-assessment**, which means that the scoring is based on your own opinion of your organisation. You could turn it into a more formal and objective process by bringing more opinions into the fold. This could be done using a group exercise or focus group with select members of your organisation and even external peers. Or you could do a series of individual consultations and aggregate the results.

Using the tool

There are two sections in this self-assessment tool: Strategy and Assets. Both sections are broken down into number of categories with a series of questions under each. Scores for each of these two sections are an average out of 5.

Instructions
Give your organisation a score for each section. The tool uses the following scoring system:

- For Yes/No questions: 0 = No and 5 = Yes.
- For all other questions a 5 point rating system is used, with 1 being the lowest score or worst case, and 5 being the highest score, or best case. n/a (0) indicates that your organisation doesn't have what the question is asking about. Not all questions have an n/a option.

Once you've completed the questions, total scores and averages will be automatically calculated in the form

How can I use the results?

Once you've done the self-assessment, analysing the results is simple. Where your score is high, you are performing well. The areas or questions where you are scoring badly are your "organisational development gaps". These are the areas where you need to focus your attention. If you score badly across all or most sections, don't be overwhelmed. Start with your strategy – the foundation of your organisation – and build your assets from there.

Helpful tip
Even though you may have an intuitive sense of your organisation's performance in each area, it's best to base your answers on tangible evidence. Collect together and draw on your organisations documents: policies, tools, job descriptions, organisational charts, evaluation plans, etc.

For some questions it might be helpful to make lists. For example, when you are answering the section "Networks and relationships", you should make a list of the formal and informal relationships that your organisation has. This will help you to answer the questions in the section more accurately. It will also serve as a database for you to build on and to use when you next come to doing the self-assessment exercise.

Access the self-assessment tool **here**.

06

Useful resources

Further reading

August, *Insights*
http://aug.co/insights/

Australian Government Public Services Commission, *Organisational Capability*,
http://www.apsc.gov.au/about-the-apsc/parliamentary/state-of-the-service/state-of-the-service-2010/chapter-10-organisational-capability

Boston Consulting Group, *Organizational capabilities matter*,
http://www.jma.or.jp/keikakusin/pdf/english_report.pdf

Harvard Business Review, *Capitalising on Capabilities*,
https://hbr.org/2004/06/capitalizing-on-capabilities

Leadership Impact Framework – LIF,
https://survey.euro.confirmit.com/wix/2/p1851065892.aspx

McKinsey Quarterly, *Agility: It rhymes with stability*,
http://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/agility-it-rhymes-with-stability

New Zealand Ministry of Social Development, *Organisational Capability Framework*
https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/investing-in-services-for-outcomes/organisational-capability-framework.html

Feedback

Have some thoughts on how we could improve the Framework? Contact info@gp-digital.org.

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