PLANNING FOR ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY: MANAGING LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

AN ACTION RESEARCH INITIATIVE

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INTRODUCTION

Context, Rationale and Hypothesis

Management Sciences for Health (MSH) and its Family Planning Management Development project (FPMD) have provided management assistance to dozens of health and family planning organizations in developing countries over the years. MSH's activities have encompassed every area of management and organizational development, yet it has not encountered any systematic discussion of the process of planning for and managing leadership transitions within organizations. MSH has, however, discovered interest among NGO directors, staff, board members, and donors to better understand this process with a view of improving the way organizations (including their boards) handle such transitions customarily.

Our rationale for pursuing this initiative is fourfold:

1. *It contributes to FPMD and USAID goals.* Good leadership is a key to sustainability. Good leadership is what allows management improvements and innovations to stick. How the leadership transition process is handled has an impact on all management areas. If an organization is not able to maintain good leadership during (or after) a transition, the entire organization will suffer, as will its relationship with key stakeholders (e.g. donors, staff and clients).

2. *It responds to clients' needs.* A familiar scenario is the organization in crisis because there is a leadership change. The disturbance created by this paralyzes the organization to a point where no new initiatives are being undertaken, everything is in limbo and people are having a "wait-and-see" attitude, compounded by a lot of anxiety about the future. Day-to-day management becomes crisis management because there is no incentive nor interest in long-range planning. FPMD has worked with several organizations during such time, when many of the organization's troubles were blamed on the leadership crisis.

3. *It contributes to the body of knowledge about family planning organizations.* As we study the organization and how it manages leadership transitions, we automatically study the culture of that organization. By making this an explicit objective in all the organizations we work with, we hope to be able to draw some conclusions about cultural issues in

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[1]Leadership refers to all senior management positions, and is, in this initiative, not limited to Directors, Executive Directors or Presidents, but includes key program, division, department, area or regional managers.

family planning organizations and the kind of TA we can deliver that is sensitive to these issues.

4. *It dovetails with FPMD initiatives in other areas.* In particular, this initiative will contribute to a better understanding of one particular critical factor affecting organizational sustainability, and as such contribute to the development of tools for institutional sustainability. Our hypothesis is that leadership transitions greatly influence an organization's capacity to operate effectively and efficiently, and that, if such transitions are well planned and managed, the organization is more likely to become sustainable.

There are several assumptions implied in this rationale, which, taken together form the hypothesis we are testing in this initiative:

- Leadership transition management is a problem that can and should be addressed
- Good planning and management of the leadership transition process will have an impact on all management areas, thereby reinforcing efforts towards institutional sustainability
- Leadership transition *can* be an orderly and systematic process
- Boards and Directors of Family Planning organizations believe that an understanding of the leadership transition process is beneficial to them and they are willing to be studied, to be honest and open, and to try out the tools that are developed and made available to them

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Overall Goal

Family Planning NGOs have the skill, knowledge, and tools to plan and manage the leadership transition process in a way that strengthens the resiliency and robustness of the organization

Objectives

1. Develop case studies of three organizations describing the process they used to plan for and manage a leadership transition;
2. Analyze the case studies to arrive at a definition of leadership transition management and critical success factors;
3. Develop and fieldtest tools that can be used by search committees, boards and other key decision makers to improve the leadership transition process;
4. Publish and document these tools;
5. Train local organizations, staff from regional IPPF headquarters, MSH staff, and consultants to provide TA in this area and help client organizations use the tools, thereby creating a broader regional capacity to do this type of work.

Target audience
The leadership transition processes of organizations with which MSH has worked fall into three categories:

1. Organizations where the founder (or a long time director) is firmly in place as director and where a transition is imminent for one of the following reasons:

    - The director is reaching retirement age appropriate or mandatory within the organization or the broader culture.
    - Organizational decision-makers (may or may not include the director) don't believe that the director is able to respond to changes in the environment and the resulting need for new organizational strategies.
    - The director is providing appropriate leadership but is looking ahead to when a new leader will have to be chosen.
    - The director and his or her supporters do not recognize and accept the need for new leadership, but other decision-makers within the organization believe there is a need for change.

2. Organizations where, a year or more after a leadership transition (at any senior level) has occurred, the transition is either considered successful by new leader and most staff members or the new leader or staff or board members have serious concerns about the success of the transition.

3. Organizations where, a year or more after a leadership transition has occurred, there is no consensus regarding its success.

In an effort to see how family planning NGOs fall into these categories, FPMD conducted a survey of IPPF affiliates in 126 countries. Ninety-five FPAs responded to a short questionnaire (Attached as Annex A.). According to the survey, four of these affiliates still have the original director in place and fifteen affiliates still use the services and advice of the original director (founder) in one way or another. Thirty one of the affiliates responding have been in existence for over 25 years.

Activities
The activities that will help us accomplish the objectives and the goal fall into four phases: two of these are *retrospective* and are intended to gain a better understanding of the process of leadership transition and identify the factors associated with its success. During these two phases we will test our hypothesis mentioned above. Phase three and four are the *prospective* phases during which we will transform the learnings into tools, fieldtest them and train others in their use.

Phase one - Retrospective (Boston-based) (March - May 1996)

- Complete testing and design of questionnaire for organizational interviews (AB)
  Ann will conduct a few more interviews and then finalize the questionnaire
- ✓ Revisit affiliate responses (SG/AB)
  Suzanne will take another look at the faxed and phoned responses that came in from various affiliates in September, with help from Ann
- ✓ Complete sub-project document (SV)
  To present to potential co-funders, explain what we plan to do/achieve.
- Get support from USAID/W, IPPF/L (SV and others)
  Think through how to leverage other funding sources to complement core
- Additional literature review (SV/AB)
  Continue internet search, and review a few more (US) books/articles (SV/AB)

Phase two - Retrospective: the field (April - December 1996)

- Identify three Family planning NGOs for the case studies. These should be NGOs:
  - with which FPMD has a longstanding (and trusting) relationship
  - which have undergone one or more leadership transitions in the last 10 years, or which are in the process of a leadership transition
  - which have expressed an interest in better understanding the leadership transition process.
- ▸ Conduct interviews in these organizations, analyze findings and write case studies ***(to accomplish objective #2 - case studies)***
- ▸ Hold one-day worksessions, tagged onto other international meetings to explore the issues of leadership transition with those involved or affected by such transitions (see Attachment B. for how such a one day meeting might be conducted)
- Write report on these worksessions and the findings from the case studies. This document will present a definition of what leadership succession/transition is all about, what factors we have found associated with its success/failure (and what these scenarios might look like) and allow us to present a deeper insight on the dynamics of leadership transition and a proposed "menu" for tools, to be developed in the next phase ***(to accomplish objective #1 - definition, success factors)***

Phase three - Prospective: Tool development (January - September 1997)

- Develop tools
  Depending on the "mandate" given to us from the field, we (in the broadest sense, overseas partners included) will develop the tools people have asked for.
- Identify organizations to pilot tools
  These organizations will hopefully identify themselves during the process. Where possible we hope to have local counterparts/partners to help pilot test the tools ***(to accomplish objective #5 - capacity building)***
- Review experience, revise tools/models ***(to accomplish ojective #3 - tool development)***

Phase four - Dissemination (September 1997 - January 1998)

- Present findings to USAID/W, IPPF/L, other donors
- Present at conferences
- Publications (manual, case studies, electronic publications) ***(to accomplish objective #4 - publications)***

Attachment A.

SUCCESSION MANAGEMENT RESEARCH PROJECT:
QUESTIONNAIRE FOR REGIONAL OFFICERS OF INTERNATIONAL FAMILY PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS

Dear Director,

I am contacting you from *Management Sciences for Health* in Boston, Massachusetts to ask for your assistance in collecting preliminary data for an upcoming study on transitions in leadership in Family Planning Organizations. If you can fill out the following questionnaire and fax your response to (617) 965-2208, before Friday, September 15th, your cooperation would be very helpful and much appreciated. However, I know that you are probably very busy and may be unable to fill out the questionnaire. Therefore, if I do not hear from you by September 15th, I will call during the following week.

Thank you,

Name
Senior Program Assistant/FPMD

Background

Family Planning Management Development(FPMD) is a USAID funded project of Management Sciences for Health. We are contacting all IPPF's regional and local officers asking for your to assistance in our research, a study focussing on the transition to new leadership in Family Planning Organizations.

Questionnaire

Name/Title: _____

Organization/Country: _____

- When was your organization founded?
- Who was the Founder of your organization?
- Who was the original Director?
- Has the original Director retired or is he/she still working for the organization?
- If that person has retired, is he/she still associated with your organziation? In what capacity?

- Who is the current Director?

- When did he/she become Director?

- Did he/she take over from the original Director or were there interim Directors? If there were interim Directors, how many?

- Was the current Director previously affiliated with the organization? If yes, in what capacity?

Thank you for your assistance!

Attachment B.

Looking at leadership transitions as a critical part of organizational sustainability

A proposal for a collaborative exploration of the issues involved

What:	A one-day workshop
Focus	What are the issues and opportunities resulting from key staff transitions, as we are striving for organizational sustainability
Audience:	Board members and top management staff from IPPF-affiliates (audience can range from 25 to several hundred people)
Outcomes:	By the end of the day, we will have the following: 1. Practical and actual key HRM issues in organizational sustainability are identified 2. Areas where assistance is needed are articulated 3. High level of energy of participants to work on these issues 4. A complete report of all the deliberations that went on in subgroups during the day
Process:	**Open Space Technology**

What is Open Space Technology?

It is a process for getting small or large groups to invest themselves in the seeking of solutions, the creation of new opportunities and/or the discussion of common concerns. It is a meeting design which is characterized by absences rather than by special gimmicks: there is no predetermined agenda, there are no months of preparations and preparatory committees and there is no blow-by-blow meeting schedule. There is only a focus question, setting the broad boundaries for the deliberations, a beginning and ending time, a blank wall, break-out spaces and the concern and interest of the participants.

What are some of the principles at work?

The entire meeting is fueled by the energy, interest and enthusiasm from the participants for the overall meeting topic. Participation is voluntary. Nobody is forced to participate. The four operating principles are: (1) Whoever comes is the right people; (2) Whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened; (3) Whenever it starts is the right time; and (4) When it is over it is over. There is also a "governing law", simply stated: the Law of Two Feet: if you find yourself in a situation where you are neither learning nor contributing, use your two feet and go to a place where you can be more productive.

How does it work?

The first half hour of the session is in plenary. Sitting in a semi-circle (or several semi-circles, depending on the size of the audience) facing an empty wall, participants are invited to help create the agenda by stepping up to the front, writing a topic that is related to the focus question on a flipchart and posting it on the wall for all to see. By doing so, these participants agree to convene a group and will see to it that a report on the group's deliberations and proposals will be

typed and printed out before the end of the day. This is how the agenda is created. After all proposals are up on the wall, everyone gets up, reads the various proposals, signs up for one small group or chooses to be a *bumblebee* (flitting from group to group, cross-pollinating in the process). Those who want to be by themselves and ponder important or unimportant questions on their own can choose to do so as well, these are the *butterflies*. The various groups and configurations then find a space and discuss, work, buzz, create, invent, resolve, mobilize or do whatever they think needs to be done to address the focus question of the meeting. One hour or so before the end of the day, each group convener sees to it that a rough report (just the basics, no fancy formatting) is typed up and posted in the common area. All reports have to be typed and posted by the end of the day.