

## KoGe-Blog # 6: On the way to becoming a learning organization - the example of The Salvation Army



The Community of Cooperation (KoGe) wishes to actively promote the development of a learning culture within its network and its partner organisations. This goal was defined by the partner organisations themselves when developing their joint programme 2017-2020. I talked to Sarah Makanjera about how The Salvation Army set out on this path and asked her to what extent her organisation was supported and inspired by the KoGe.

**Madeleine Bolliger (coordinator of the KoGe):** *I observe that the Swiss Salvation Army and especially the International Development team, is increasingly developing into a learning organization. Is this a conscious decision?*

**Sarah Makanjera (The Salvation Army TSA):** The key word for me is partnership! The conscious decision we made was to open up more to our partners. Without equal partnerships, there can be no real joint learning. The basis for partnerships on an equal footing, is trust.

*Partnership is also a topic of our KoGe Working Group on Capacity Development.*

That's right. We were very pleased that the Working Group decided to include the topic of partnership in its programme. We are currently developing partnership goals with our partners, the achievement of which we will monitor. One could almost say: at the moment we are a little bit the KoGe's laboratory on the subject of partnership.

*What does your path towards becoming a learning organization look like?*

For me, a milestone was that we launched the so-called Partners Meeting! We always go to the South and look at the work there. We wanted to turn this around. We wanted all partners to come to us for once. Our goal was to improve participation, also at the level of decision-making. We wanted the partners to get to know our work context better and also to be encouraged to give us feedback. In 2015, thanks to KoGe

funds, we were able to organize a first structured meeting with the goal of developing a joint Theory of Change for our new program. This was the first time that our partners had such direct influence on our program.

*At your Partners Meeting 2017, storytelling was put in the center, which I find interesting. I read that you invited all territories to send in three stories before the workshop. That sounds like a very exciting process!*

That's true! At last year's Partners Meeting in September 2017, we organized a joint training session on the Most Significant Change Approach (MSC). The method had been introduced to us by the KoGe Working Group on Capacity Development. We were immediately interested. Initially, we introduced MSC without training. But soon we realized that the method was new to all of us and that we needed training. MSC is a great example of what collaborative learning means to us, or when it is particularly successful: namely when we - North and South together - build up new knowledge *jointly*! At the Partners Meeting 2017, our Southern partners noticed: MSC is also new to the Swiss team. For once we all sat in the same training and learned together.

*What does a learning organization look like for you?*

Our goal is to enable our partners to network and to help and support each other in their work. My vision is that project staff from the South can exchange ideas in a simple way. We may be an international organisation, but we do have a hierarchical structure. This means that networking and exchange do not happen "automatically" but must be consciously promoted. I am convinced: hierarchy does not mean that networking at eye level is not possible! South-South networking is particularly important, especially between projects. For example, we want to increasingly promote direct communication between project managers in the South. There will be more Communities of Practice at Salvation Army in the future, that's what we are working towards. We also want partners in the South with special expertise to coach other partners. That would be something else for once, wouldn't it?

*This is exciting. By the way, it reflects exactly what we do at the KoGe: network, learn from each other and exchange ideas together!*

Exactly! Networking is important at all levels. A recent example: at meetings in Sweden and Switzerland, a delegation from Kenya experienced how we have common coffee breaks here in Europe. At the Salvation Army in Bern, for example, we all sit at the same table as a team during the break and exchange ideas. There was no break in Kenya, everyone had coffee alone. Now they have deliberately introduced a joint coffee break once a week. They decided: networking within our team is important to us!

I thank Sarah for the interview!

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