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A house for knowledge: using metaphors to guide knowledge sharing and learning in development organisations

Bernike Pasveer*

Knowledge Travels, The Netherlands

This article is based on the author's two-year period of designing and facilitating a knowledge sharing and learning process at the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC). This process was aimed at providing more effective internal sharing and learning. Based on this experience, an approach has been developed for making more visible the intangibles surrounding knowledge and learning within organisations. This approach is based on the metaphor of a 'house of knowledge.' Following the introduction, the metaphor of the 'house of knowledge' is described, together with the different components of the approach involving rooms and corridors. Next, the two main phases of work within RNTC are reviewed, namely the diagnostic scan and the transformation process. The example of the RNTC process is then used to reach some general conclusions on issues of importance to knowledge sharing and learning for other development organisations.

Introduction

Since the 1990s it is widely asserted that development cooperation is a 'knowledge industry.' It is (or should be):

> based both on a good understanding of the particular socio-economic reality that 'the development' is intended to change and, just as importantly, on an appreciation of the perceptions of local populations as to their options in that reality (Powell 2006, online version, p. 2).

Inspired by the global financial crisis, along with an ever louder call to show that taxpayers' money is well spent on development cooperation, and confronted with indications that the development sector has barely invested in its own dealings with knowledge, development organisations are coming to invest more in their own knowledge processes. Multi-year plans of development organisations point to various kinds of investments in 'knowledge sharing and learning' (KS & L) both internally and with partners in developing countries. Getting one's knowledge and the 'management' thereof right, and learning how to learn from one's activities so as to increase the effectiveness of development interventions, has become *bon ton*, and rightly so. The twin activities or processes of knowledge sharing and reflexive learning, although quite commonly linked, overlap only partially: necessarily knowledge sharing can take place without learning, and one can learn without sharing knowledge. Combining the two requires that organisations are or set out to become capable of reflecting on their habits and cultures, or anything else which appears to stand in the way

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*Email: bernikepasveer@gmail.com

of productive KS & L. However, intangibles like organisational culture are often difficult to visualise, address and change.

This article is based on my experience at the Radio Netherlands Training Centre (RNTC), centre of excellence in media, education and development, based in Hilversum, The Netherlands. At the RNTC, I designed and facilitated a KS & L process. This process was aimed at providing more effective internal sharing and learning, as well as aiming to promote the organisation's role as a knowledge-centre within its network of partners and organisations. Based on this experience, I have developed *an approach for making more visible the intangibles surrounding knowledge and learning within organisations*. The approach uses and exploits a metaphor as a heuristic to render visible, diagnose, imagine and inspire.

The next part of this article introduces the metaphor of the 'house of knowledge' and the different components of the approach that I have developed. In the third section, I describe the two main phases of my work within RNTC, namely the diagnostic scan and the transformation process. The fourth section, 'A house for knowledge: generic,' uses the example of the process at RNTC to articulate the possible generic relevance of the house of knowledge approach to other development organisations. Finally, I formulate some general conclusions and I comment on the results of the specific process within RNTC.

Metaphors and the approach

The approach to KS & L developed here is based on the image and metaphor of a house of knowledge. Metaphors can be powerful ways to address the intangibles of organisational KS & L in two ways: they may render visible structures, flows and undertows that affect how KS & L are done and may change; but they also frame these practices and their future in specific ways. In using the metaphor of the house, it has for example to be acknowledged that a house suggests walls, a singular place, a limited number of doors and windows that open up onto the world. In this way, metaphors are not just diagnostic, they are also performative and normative, suggesting particular forms and 'forbidding' others (Kwa 1985, p. 9). They must therefore be chosen so as to simultaneously fit and challenge specific organisations. How the metaphor of a house did this for RNTC will become clear below. Here it is important to stress that the specific metaphor was also chosen because it affords me to address three elements crucial to organisational KS & L.

The first is that knowledge is always already contextualised within organisational and material structures – therewith contradicting the metaphor of knowledge-as-light. For example, in the World Development Report, Knowledge for Development (1999), the World Bank declared:

> Knowledge is like light. Weightless and intangible, it can easily travel the world, enlightening the lives of people everywhere. Yet billions of people still live in the darkness of poverty.

The metaphor of a building – in this case a house – is far stronger than that of light (with its intrinsic ability to travel far and fast and unconstrained) when addressing the realities and materialities of what encourages and limits knowledge sharing and learning in an organisational context.[1]

Second, the metaphor of a house affords a specific way of depicting and negotiating flows of knowledge in the organisation without losing sight of the 'general picture' (that is, the house, or whatever other metaphoric structure seems fit). As a house consists of rooms

but also of corridors and passages, the metaphor encourages one to look at how knowledge can (or cannot) travel inside the house and into its environment (and vice versa).

Third, as a house is a place to live in, a home, the metaphor also allows one to reflect on the atmosphere, that is, the culture of an organisation which, I conjecture, is crucial when it comes to KS & L. The atmosphere of the house (what it smells like, how it is designed and decorated, etc.) is about issues that might otherwise remain invisible or, worse, part of potentially counter-productive undertows.

Upon its basic structure proper as a house (foundation, walls, roof) the house for knowledge thus consists of three elements:

(1) The rooms *(work spaces)* relate to the three basic knowledge-related processes of the organisation.
(2) Corridors and doors *(travel space)* relate to the way knowledge 'travels' within and outside the organisation.
(3) Decoration, colours, temperature (*atmosphere)* relate to the culture of the organisation and how it encourages and limits the travel-ability of knowledge in, to and from the organisation.

The *work spaces* relate to primary processes of an organisation:

- a *space for practice* where all that is related to primary processes takes place;
- a *space for reflection* where all that needs to be communicated, discussed, negotiated and decided within the organisation takes place. This is also the room where guests may come to tell stories, and where the reflexive work of the organisation takes place; and
- a *space for documentation* where all that is written, communicated, recycled, etc. is being documented.

The *travel spaces* allow or disallow knowledge (both factual and reflexive) to travel between the work spaces and to and from the outside world. Travel spaces comprise:

- doors to the outside *(out-doors)* that open up the house to knowledge flows with the outside world of partner organisations, stakeholders and donors;
- internal doors *(in-doors)* that afford knowledge to go in and out of the house's workspaces; and
- *passages* that allow knowledge (both on matters of content as well as on reflexive matters) to travel within the organisation and, if desired, also to the outside world.

The *atmosphere* encourages or inhibits (or both) knowledge to travel between spaces, and it encourages or discourages the organisation to reflexively learn from its habits and to improve them. Atmosphere comprises:

- habits and routines;
- formal and informal ways of dealing with each other;
- assumptions and experiences about what can and cannot be articulated or discussed; and
- the possibilities (or the lack thereof) to articulate and reflect upon such aspects of the organisation's culture.

When an organisation wants to change how it deals with knowledge, it makes sense to investigate first what its current house looks like: what goes on in the work spaces? Who is in charge of documenting, of discussing, of the planning and implementation of activities? What kinds of knowledge are documented and discussed, and how is knowledge dealt with in setting up and carrying out activities? Whose knowledges are taken into account? Knowledge of specific persons or structures in the organisation? Knowledge of staff only or are there ways in which external partners are involved?

And what goes on in the corridors and passages between the rooms? How does knowledge go places? Do new activities use formal and informal evaluations of 'old' activities? Is expertise exchanged between people with different competencies? How does knowledge travel informally as people talk to each other during lunch? Are there asymmetries? And how does it travel formally and who is in charge of that process?

And what about the atmosphere, the organisation's culture? How and when do people exchange knowledge? How much room is there to reflect, to discuss critical issues, to experiment with new practices, to articulate difficulties, to celebrate successes? Are there elements in the atmosphere that systematically encourage or discourage reflexive KS & L? Can they be articulated and reflexively employed or repaired?

In this way, investigating what the house of knowledge looks like can produce a baseline against which to project and assess desired change. It is also an interesting and illuminating activity in itself because it requires active and reflexive input of staff and perhaps outsiders, partners and users too. Drawing the house and its rooms, its corridors and its atmosphere moreover has diagnostic value as it may make clear what is happening within the organisation.

A house for knowledge: the case of RNTC

Background

The KS & L process of RNTC in which I was involved took shape over a period of two years. RNTC approached me in 2006 as it aspired to make better use of the knowledge it had documented, which was embodied in its staff, and which came from its interactions with partners abroad. It was decided to opt for an outsider with specific knowledge-related expertise rather than to assign the responsibility for the knowledge and learning process to someone internally. This is often the case with knowledge management consultants but in my case, because I was with the organisation for two years from August 2008–August 2010, I was at the same time both an insider and an outsider. Unlike a short-term consultancy, this long-term commitment indicates not only that RNTC was serious about trying to improve its performance as a knowledge and learning organisation, but also that it was willing to experiment with forms and methods to realize this ambition.

Phase 1: the diagnostic scan

My first activity was to make a 'diagnostic scan' of RNTC that would reveal existing formal and informal ways of KS & L and identify improvements. The scan was made on the basis of open/semi-structured interviews with all employees (including management) as well as with a number of informed outsiders, and study of the organisation's archives. It was the basis of a report which further informed the KS & L process (Pasveer 2009).

The most outstanding conclusion of this scan was that the organisation was quite good at 'single-loop learning,' including correcting mistakes, sharing existing knowledge and

making small changes on the basis of what has worked in the past. In order to progress towards a level of reflexive or 'double-loop learning,' it was established that a number of specific issues would need to be tackled, all related to the (partly historically evolved) culture of the organisation. For the distinction between single and double loop learning, see Argyris and Schön (1978).

Historically RNTC's practice has evolved from two lines of activities, two pillars or roles that are still largely funded through different channels, which still require quite different individual and organisational capacities and competences, and which employ slightly different ideological and practical approaches to 'development.' In the first and oldest pillar, RNTC is:

> a training centre for radio and television officers from developing countries to enjoy further education in the field of radio and television.[2]

In the training centre, 'development' takes place through *training* of individual professionals from developing countries at the RNTC offices in Hilversum. In the second pillar, RNTC undertakes development *projects* in collaboration with Southern partner organisations. These two pillars or roles are articulated as 'Development of Media' and 'Media for Development': 'RNTC's mission is to strengthen the capacity of people and organisations to work with the media for development. It aims to contribute to the development of media and to the use of media for development, by enabling people and organisations to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes' (RNTC 2009, p. 5).

The scan showed that although the two pillars have increasingly merged over time in the organisation, they still operate to some extent as two cultures. One of the recommendations of the scan was to find ways to use the organisation's hybrid nature, namely the two pillars, more to its advantage by, for example, doing new work which would involve staff working in both areas.

A second element that stood out as relevant to the process was that some of the organisation's excellence in single-loop learning mechanisms and norms appeared to stand in the way of changes towards more reflexive modes of learning. This element operated in four ways. First, formal structures for internal consultation did not provide sufficient space for discussion and reflection on basic goals, values, formats and strategies. Second, potential disagreements were often dealt with in defensive ways by all concerned. Third, the organisation seemed good at correcting mistakes and improving existing patterns and procedures, but less good in accommodating creativity, experiments and open endings. Fourth, the organisation's informal culture was very rich and pleasant and therefore also a promising element for KS & L. Informally it was relatively easy for employees to learn from one another and to acquire relevant knowledge and know-how on specific issues. The report recommended using this rich informal world as a basis for more productive formal ways of KS & L.

Phase 2: Consultation and action

The diagnostic scan was discussed with most individual respondents and adapted according to their comments, and then used as the basis for designing a series of workshops and lunch meetings. At the first workshop, members of staff were asked to formulate their desires as to RNTC's KS & L agenda. Here, the recommendations of the scan were corroborated. Three working groups were formed that each undertook one part of the knowledge work

that was considered to be crucial for the organisation, implicitly or explicitly addressing the recommendations of the scan.

After the first workshop, the working groups formed there worked on the issues that they had identified, while a number of other workshops and lunch meetings were held in which the groups reported on their work and discussed links between their activities as well as reflecting on RNTC's aim of becoming a 'learning organisation.' Almost all staff participated in one of the three groups. The series of activities ended with a joint event to construct RNTC's priorities for KS & L using the house of knowledge metaphor. The findings from this process are listed below.

Work spaces

1. Space for practice.   In RNTC, the space for practice was used to develop, implement, monitor and evaluate concrete activities of the organisation. At times, people would work alone on discrete tasks, but often the space would be filled with more people who would talk, write, negotiate and undertake practical tasks. This space had many *out-doors* as in most stages of work (planning, implementation, evaluation) outsiders (trainees, trainers, partners) were involved, informed or consulted, either on location (in Hilversum or elsewhere) or with the use of electronic media. The space was only marginally divided along the lines of formal and informal contacts: people frequently consulted each other en passant and outside of scheduled collaborations. Interestingly however, and as noted in the diagnostic scan, the space was somehow divided along the lines of the organisation's two historically evolved pillars with their individual cultures. Contacts between the two pillars were consultative rather than collaborative, and consultations were not symmetrical, as the project coordinators consulted the course-trainers more than the other way around. The organisation articulated a broadly shared desire for more collaborative learning so as to use the inherent hybrid nature more to the advantage of the organisation's work and mission.

It thus seemed that the organisation's habits of organizing work and proceeding in practice were still affected by its history but also that staff realized the need to move on and use its hybridity to improve, felt the urge to do so, and as we will see, realized possibilities of going about this.

As part of the KS & L process, a group was formed in which programme staff and support staff from both 'cultures' participated. The group was to plan and implement a new 'flagship' programme on educative media for the organisation, and to learn experimentally to employ the hybrid nature of the group and the diverse knowledges its members embodied.

2. Space for reflection.   The space for reflection within RNTC involved formal meetings with programme staff and support staff: lunch meetings at which project staff or guests would make presentations; and quite a lot of informal exchange of experiences and opinions. Three things are worth mentioning here:

(1) There was an identified lack of space for deep reflection and constructive disagreement on goals, values, strategies and internal affairs. Rather, the formal meetings of programme staff were dominated by looking at progress of the organisation's activities as visualised in a spreadsheet.

(2) There was quite a difference between the rich informal exchange on issues dealing with 'issues' on the one hand, and the apparent absence of possibilities to articulate such disagreements and problems in formal meetings, on the other.

(3) Before my arrival there had been a couple of lunch meetings but as there was no formal 'owner' of this activity in the organisation, and as staff reported no great enthusiasm to attend when a topic would be too distanced from their own professional interests, it was not clear whether there would be such meetings at all. Also, no documentation of any of the previous meetings could be found.

It seemed therefore that the *atmosphere* concerning the internal whereabouts of the organisation – which is the most important space when it comes to organisational learning as it is in this space where feedback, evaluation and creative disagreements can lead to change – was troubling rather than reinforcing RNTC's capability to reflexively develop its KS & L process.

As part of the KS & L process, a number of activities were undertaken. Thus it was decided to revitalize the lunch meetings as these were considered to be crucial in creating a space for deep reflection and sharing. Next, it was decided to add to the formal meeting-formats one in which management would inform staff about the progress of the organisation, on a regular basis and with an agenda that could consist of items proposed by staff as well as items proposed by management themselves.

Crucial to this whole endeavour was however, that the new or renewed elements of the reflexive space did not acquire a formal or informal 'owner' within the organisation. This colludes with the general difficulty of explicitly and/or officially allocating time of staff to the KS & L process. Yet it is interesting to note that staff themselves did not feel the need to take responsibility for the agenda of the meetings with management, nor for the organisation of lunch meetings. This is interesting because during the process, staff at times would inquire with management how they could account for the time they invested in the KS & L process, and whether it would not be interesting to look at function profiles to see whether these could accommodate KS & L roles and competencies more explicitly.

At the time I left the process in August 2010, one meeting-with-management had taken place but no others had yet been planned. Despite the repeatedly stated and widely shared importance of lunch meetings for KS & L, organizing lunch meetings appeared to be difficult as there was no owner and no ownership, so it remained unclear who would initiate meetings and set the agenda.

3. Space for documentation.   In the space for documentation, different activities took place, most of which were electronically mediated. This concerned the documentation of the primary processes of the organisation: the minutes of the organisation's formal meetings; documents like (multi-)annual plans and reports; and material used for publicity and external communication. When the KS & L process started, documentation was carried out and stored in ways that were fragmented, crucially incomplete *and* over-complete, and not transparent. The ICT database, in short, was not developed according to a (clearly articulated) vision of its potential role in the circulation of knowledge within or outside of the organisation.

Documentation was incomplete in that some key activities and rich sources for sharing and learning remained integrally undocumented, whereas others tended to be overly documented and used within the organisation. There was, for example, no format for reporting nor an obligation to report on missions, so this rich resource of knowledge and experience was left almost entirely unused.

It was also over-complete: the organisation had in place procedures that staff had to go through to document each step of the development and implementation of programmes and projects. These protocols were developed as part of the need to produce appropriate

systems of quality management so as to qualify for a quality certificate that is increasingly considered to be an indispensable element of a development organisation's credibility.

The *atmosphere* was typical in this respect: ICTs have come with a promise to improve life and set free information and knowledge. However, organisations have a hard time setting the 'order' right and mold the possibilites of ICTs to respond to their needs rather than the other way around (providing, of course, that ICTs also change what can be accessed and shared, and how things can be accessed and shared). RNTC staff clearly saw that the system, in some respects, resembled a dump more than an accessible space, and that it needed to be improved according to their needs and requirements.

Thus, as part of the KS & L process, a number of activities were undertaken to improve the quality of the documentation space, such as improved accessibility and decreased fragmentation of the shared internal computer-drive. Yet habits are strong: the desire to know more about staff members' whereabouts and trips and missions was immediately turned upside-down and forced into the format of an available intranet-format which, so it seemed, did not fit the desire and fell flat almost immediately after its installation. At the final workshop it was decided to design a format for reporting on missions and to make filling in this format an obligatory part of any mission.

Travel spaces

1. Out-doors.   Throughout its existence, the house for knowledge of RNTC has actively entertained many *out-doors* that relate it to its partners and users. The organisation also employs a bright and creative communications officer who acts as an intermediary to and from the world. As noticed above, however, the knowledge and experience of these relations are not yet systematically worked back into the organisation, and knowledge is therefore highly 'embodied' in specific persons.

2. In-doors.   On an informal level, the *in-doors* appeared to be a vibrant space of consultations, sharing of experiences and the like. On a formal level, however, the doors between the work spaces were less obviously designed and positioned, and the same is true for the *passages* that would be needed to make relevant knowledge and know-how circulate through the house.

3. Passages.   Quite early in the process, it was recognized that the different work spaces were not only internally fragmented and at times troubled or counterproductive, but that this was even more true for the connections between the spaces: the passages. Thus, as noted above, the passage of electronic information was rendered difficult because of its fragmented, non-transparent nature, and its incompleteness and over-completeness. In addition, the formal elements of the reflexive space were bothered by defensive relations, whereas the informal elements, rich and inspiring in nature, did not structurally travel to the formal space of reflection.

In *atmospheric terms* it was only late in the process that it was reconized *that* KS & L are intimately connected with the culture of the organisation. As the diagnostic scan had noted, this was somewhat formalistic and defensive, and space to constructively disagree was scarce. This may relate to the fact that it seemed easier to re-order the primary processes (the spaces of practice, reflection and documentation) than to reflect upon what encourages or inhibits the travel of knowledge, the design of passages and corridors.

A house for knowledge: generic

Although many of the elements of RNTC's knowledge sharing and learning process are specific, they also have generic qualities. Here I list and analyse them with regard to their relevance for other development organisations. Developing organisational KS & L is not something for which recipes can be made, there can be no one-size-fits-all, and KS & L processes are almost by default relatively open-ended. That being said, there are some conclusions from the RNTC process which can be useful for other organisations.

Connections/passages

This is perhaps the most important, deep and multidimensional element: making connections with the KS & L process, within the organisation, between organisational units and individuals, and between (external) experts and (internal) persons. Key issues include:

- It is about finding a match between the competencies within the organisation and the KS & L trajectory: what do the organisation and its individuals have in store? What are their strengths with regard to KS & L, and what their weaknesses? Besides a 'scan' of the organisation, one might think of making a scan of KS & L relevant individual qualities as well, so as to investigate and actively anticipate the ripples the process will generate. In the present process, no such investigation of endogenous individual capacities and competences was made. There is no need for everyone in the organisation to 'understand' every level of a KS & L process, but there is a need that everyone in the organisation contributes and feels, slowly and quickly, that things are changing for good.
- It is also about the importance of ownership of KS & L processes in an organisation – whether this is in the form of a complete KM-department or in the attribution of specific roles and responsibilities. Without such persons, and without other possibilities of reinforcing new practices and reflection, the extent to which an outside expert can 'move' things is quite limited.
- And it is about the role of management/leadership throughout the process. Management is always needed in the process in order to guide it, to react on its temporary outcomes and directions, and to reflect publicly on the routes taken and routes to take.
- And it is about the intimate connections between KS & L processes and cultural reflexivity: specific (single-, double-, triple-loop) learning processes require specific organisational capabilities, and in any KS & L process, room is needed to critically and constructively look into whether the organisation is optimally geared towards knowledge sharing and learning.
- Last, it is about connections between the self-reflexivity that is indispensable for a productive KS & L process, and the primary processes of the organisation: the attainment of its development goals.

Slow and quick, whole and parts, reflection and action

Any process of organisational change must be organised to deliver quick wins as well as to allow change to be slow, flexible and adaptive. Some, but certainly not all such quick wins can be determined right at the start but, throughout the process, new quick wins need to be articulated and celebrated. Meanwhile of course, relations with slow change need to

remain and be renewed so as not to lose sight of the eventual aims of any KS & L process. This balance is particularly important for development organisations whose default is always to be oriented towards results, output, practical activities and delivering (see Smit 2007). KS & L however – just like development – cannot be done only quickly. Quick wins are needed to keep up the spirit and to show to donors that change is happening; but it is crucial to acknowledge that change does not occur by simply adding up the quick wins. Change – towards a knowledge-attitude being engrained in an organisation's DNA – is bound to be slow, at times invisible, and in order to happen it needs to be flexibly developed and monitored so as to ascertain direction, cohesion, and learning (see also Pasveer, forthcoming).

A rippled structure

It is not necessary, and perhaps it is not even desirable, that everybody in an organisation is engaged in KS & L processes in similar ways. The place on the continuums of slow–quick, whole–parts, reflection–action may depend on the competencies and desires of individuals. Processes of change might be rippled not only in their effects but also in how they could be designed within an organisation. The process at RNTC was 'unrippled' in two ways: first everybody (initially) was involved in the process and no layers were designed so as to accommodate different qualities and competencies; second, there was a (formal) gap between the facilitator of the process and the staff implementing it in practice.

QM and KS & L

It is interesting to consider the extent to which a highly formalized and standardized quality management (QM) might hinder reflexive or double-loop learning. I would claim that standardised approaches may encourage correcting mistakes, sharing existing knowledge and making small changes on the basis of what has worked in the past – all elements of single-loop learning, rather than encouraging deeper questioning and reflection. In that sense, the systems of quality control and certification, intended to increase the learning abilities of organisations, may in fact inhibit reflexive KS & L instead of encouraging it.

Flexibility

Although it will be obvious that KS & L processes cannot be designed at a single point in time, and that there is no one size fits all, it is perhaps less obvious that such processes need to be flexibly designed and adapted throughout. This is no small matter. Deliberate change disrupts routines and habits. Even when everybody is truly convinced of the importance of a KS & L process, it is always easier to work along routines than to experiment without always knowing exactly the quality and relevance of results. The open-endedness of any KS & L process requires flexible monitoring – no process can be designed and then be left alone as roles, responsibilities, competencies and capacities will move and change. Such changes must be accommodated throughout the process.

Self-reflexivity

Perhaps the most difficult as well as the most important element of KS & L is the ability to learn to reflect and self-reflect, as an organisation, on the process that takes shape, and on the factors that encourage and hamper knowledge sharing and learning – and to use these to flexibly and creatively impact on the design of the process itself. Self-reflection may

be difficult for a number of reasons. The first is that self-reflection requires an open and courageous attitude towards oneself and the ability to critically question and be questioned. Self-reflection is also difficult because it can easily make the impression that energy is focused inwards rather than on the important activities for which the organisation is funded and that it considers to be of prime importance. It is easy to lose sight of the ultimate goal of a KS & L process and, with losing sight, to lose focus and inspiration. This is why multiple connections, flexibility, ripples and quick wins are important.

Vision

It is of crucial importance that the vision, the reason, the rationale, the goals of any KS & L process are articulated (time and again) by an organisation's leaders, as well as to clearly connect these to the organisation's (moving) mission. When management aspires the process to be an experiment in order to also develop its 'knowledge-agenda,' this should be made clear; the openness of the process would then need to be accommodated, and management as well as staff would need to actively participate in the process and its various reflections. It is just as important to know to what extent staff are inspired by this vision, this imaginary target.

Recommendations

Based on these generic conclusions, I would provide the following advice for those initiating KS & L processes:

(1) Find an inspiring metaphor to think and act with, and use it flexibly.
(2) Form collectives for KS & L work that consist of a variety of expertise both within and outside the organisation.
(3) Plan quick wins in slow processes, celebrate them and make sure that all parts of the organisation experience these as such, from time to time.
(4) No matter how tight budgets are, make sure that there are official internal 'owners' of the KS & L process right from the start, who can move (between) the ripples of the process.
(5) Take care to afford flexibility and self-reflection in the process.
(6) Be aware of important connections – ones that need to be made, and ones that exist and that need to be taken into account.
(7) Be visible and visionary as leaders/managers, and check from time to time whether everybody is still with you and whether you are still with everybody.
(8) Work with collectives of external experts and internal owners. Experiment with the duration and intensity of the external expert's involvement – the sector's default of flying consultants in for a day or two is one amongst many options.

Afterthoughts on knowledge: bricks and light

Making knowledge travel on any scale and in any context is never an easy thing to do. But knowledge will never be like light – unrestrained and free from the social and material technologies it needs to travel. And it takes a lot of work and time and reflexive energy to make it travel light: one must articulate its chains and try to find ways to chain it differently. In this paper I have argued that metaphors may help to do both (articulate and fabricate

change): they may help to articulate in what ways an organisation's knowledge-landscape is structured and acted out, and they may help to change these structures and practices.

The structures and practices and atmospheres that frame the whereabouts of knowledge do not come only from within an organisation. In a sector that persistently struggles with the ambition to contribute to slow and often hard to substantiate or quantify change/development 'on the ground,' and the plight of accounting to donors for the money spent in ways that assume change/development to be quick, visible and measurable, it is no easy matter to change the ways of knowledge and learning, and there is a profound risk of losing sight of how KS & L are/ought to be related to attaining one's development goals more effectively.

The experiment that RNTC had the courage to stage – of housing an outsider and allowing her to become (partly) part of the everyday life of the organisation – was both courageous and enlightening. It was courageous because there are no organisations where all is light and heavenly, and an ethnographer will certainly come across troubles and problems. This, in fact and of course, happened. But more importantly, this methodological experiment with co-presence (Beaulieu 2010) and what it brought about has been enlightening to us all about the intimate relation of an organisation's whereabouts – its *atmosphere* – and its abilities to refurbish its house of knowledge. The experiment also raises the question of how to engage knowledge-experts in the development of KS & L trajectories. It is tempting, particularly for small organisations, to fly consultants in for a day or two, but it might be more useful to embark on more structural engagements.

Making knowledge travel is thus not about 'freeing knowledge' from its earthly constraints. It is rather about the work of reflexively (re)working (with) these constraints (the bricks, the walls, the doors and passages, the atmosphere). For they are constitutive, always already, of how and to where knowledge can travel to.

Notes

1. About the myth of knowledge and information as being able to circulate like light, free from rather than constituted by the (social and material) technologies and contexts, see Duguid (1996). The field of Science and Technology Studies studies and conceptualizes how knowledge (and technology) needs to be understood and described as materially and culturally connected rather than free, neutral and unconstrained. See for example Bijker & Law (1992), Latour (1999), Hackett *et al*. (2005) and Mueller Rockstroh (2005).
2. '. . .een opleidingscentrum teneinde daarmede vooral radio- en televisiemedewerkers uit de Ontwikkelingslanden de gelegenheid te scheppen een verdere opleiding op het gebied van radio en televisie te genieten' (archiefstuk 7, 1968).

Notes on contributor

Bernike Pasveer runs Knowledge Travels (www.knowledgetravels.nl) from which she offers expertise about the roles of knowledge in development, methodologies for capitalizing on contextualised experiences, and for system(at)ic learning of people, organisations and institutions. She is also an

Assistant Professor at the Department of Technology, Science & Society of FASoS/UM. She holds a PhD in the Sociology of Science & Technology from the University of Amsterdam (1992), and was a post-doctoral researcher at the Centre de Sociologie de l'Innovation in Paris (1993, 1994). In 2006 she started a two-year secondment from the UM at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs where she worked at the division of knowledge and research and was in charge of the further development and implementation of the Ministry's research programme. In 2008 another two-year secondment followed in two different development organisations: at Radio Netherlands Training Center (RNTC) and at the European Center for Development Policy Management (ECDPM). In both centres she worked on projects, programmes and consultancies focused on the roles of knowledge in development policy-making and practice. In her work at both places the issue of travelling knowledge – developed in and derived from her background in STS – was key and fit well with an increasing focus on the importance of knowledge and learning in development policy-making.

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