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Information Management Strategy Formation in Northern Development NGOs

MICHAEL SCHUEBER
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Michael Schueber
IDPM, University of Manchester, UK
Author contact: michaelschueber@gmx.net
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Abstract

For Northern Development NGOs (NNGOs) information is such an important resource that the management of information is of strategic concern. This research explores how Information Management (IM) strategies are formed in NNGOs. The methodological approach taken aims to understand IM strategy formation in NNGOs from a theoretical perspective through the study of three relevant bodies of theory (information management, NGO management, strategy formation), and from an empirical perspective by exploring the reality of IM strategy formation in the Swiss NGO Helvetas

Contemporary theories on information management, -systems, -technologies, and related concepts provide a notion of their complex interrelationships, their strategic importance for organisations and the crucial role of ICTs. Critical analysis of the literature on NGO management and strategy in development cooperation then reveals the strategic significance of IM for NNGOs and results in the identification of seven Strategic Information Management Themes of NNGOs (SIMToNs). The theoretical examination of strategy concepts provides an understanding that IM strategy formation in NNGOs is likely to be the product of planned as well as emergent aspects, and of learning as well as planning at the core and the periphery. These conceptual findings form the framework for guiding the exploration of IM strategy formation in Helvetas, at the core, the Head Office in Zurich and at the periphery, the Country Programme in Nepal.

The research findings, analysis and interpretations explain that IM strategy formation in Helvetas is a process of organisational transformation, which is fuelled by considerations related to the SIMToNs and reflects an interplay of planned and emergent strategies. The analysis sheds light on the cause-effect relationship of IM strategy formation and organisational culture and eventually draws attention to seven Conceptual Tensions that seem to influence IM strategy formation as well as to reflect the status of the organisation. Having revealed the importance and complexity of IM strategy formation processes in Helvetas as a means to becoming a true learning organisation, the research finally introduces a model suggesting it could be developed into a framework for guiding not only Helvetas but possibly also other NNGOs in their unique transformation processes.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

\<h\>	=	Helvetas
\<LTM\>	=	Learning Through Monitoring Concept developed by \<h\> Nepal
\<Name\>	=	Referring to the interview with a \<h\> employee
\<PC\>	=	\<h\> Programme Coordinator at \<h\> HO
\<PD\>	=	\<h\> Programme Director in \<h\> Field Office
\<SG\>	=	\<h\> Secretary General
\<TAG\>	=	\<h\> Technical Advisory Group
\<WGKM\>	=	\<h\>'s Working Group on KM (IM/KM strategy steering team)
CIPSODA	=	Capture-Input-Process-Store-Output-Decision-Action
DC	=	Developing Country
DDC	=	District Development Committee, in Nepal
FO	=	Field Office
GIS	=	Geographical Information System
GRO	=	Grass Roots Organisation
GUI	=	Graphic User Interface
Helvetas	=	Swiss Association for International Co-operation
HO	=	Head Office also called Headquarters
HRM	=	Human Resources Management
IA	=	Information Architecture
IDPM	=	Institute for Development Policy and Management
ICT	=	Information and Communication Technology
IM	=	Information Management
IS	=	Information System
IT	=	Information Technology
KM	=	Knowledge Management
NGO	=	Non Governmental Organisation
NNGO	=	Northern Non Governmental Organisation
OA	=	Office Automation
OL	=	Organisational Learning

RAP   =   DfID funded Rural Access Project in Nepal (supported by Helvetas' local
                       and expatriate experts)

RCPLA   =   Resource Centre for Participative Learning and Action

SAG   =   <TAG>

SDC   =   Swiss Development Corporation (Donor on behalf of the Swiss Govt.)

SIMToNs   =   Strategic Information Management Themes in NNGOs

SISP   =   Strategic Information Systems Planning

SNGO   =   Southern Non Governmental Organisation

SRWSP   =   Self Reliant Drinking Water Support Programme of Helvetas in Nepal

TBSSP   =   Trail Bridge Sub-Sector Project of Helvetas in Nepal

VDC   =   Village Development Committee, in Nepal

WARM-P   =   Water Resources Management Project of Helvetas in Nepal

WWW   =   World Wide Web

Glossary

Capacity Building: A term that refers to a process of organisational development. It gained popularity in the nineteen nineties in the NGO sector and is a direct outcome to the changing nature of the role of NGOs in development cooperation. The increasing role of SNGOs in the implementation of development activities, thus decreasing the direct role of funding organisations, including INGOs, raised the issue of building up the capacity of SNGOs to take up that new responsibility.

Civil society: A term used to include all those organisations and institutions that fill up the gap between the state, the business world, and the household. Parts of civil society are non-profit or third sector organisations.

Culture: A term referring to the visible artefacts and values and beliefs and invisible basic underlying assumptions that make up society or an organisation.

Developed countries: Those countries, also sometimes referred to as the first world, that due to their strong economy, are in a powerful position in relation to those who have not achieved the same economic growth.

Developing countries: Those countries from the south, previously regarded the third world, that have not been able to develop economically to a standard that makes them equal to developed countries. The division between developed and developing countries is not necessarily an economic division, it is to a large extent a political and ideological one.

Empowerment: A term referring to a transformation process in which individuals or groups gain power to exercise decision-making. Many development NGOs have the objective to empower the voiceless, the powerless, those who are at the lower strata of the society.

Expatriate: Mostly an employee of an international organisation, assigned to a post at a subsidiary of the parent organisation outside their own country. In international development cooperation there are many kinds of expatriates but most of them have the objective to support host country organisations of individuals in a process of capacity building.

Field Office (FO): The southern-based part of an NNGO, which coordinates the organisations development activities in the South.

Grass Roots Organisation (GRO): A Non Governmental Organisation based and working in a developing country on community or district level. Mostly very familiar with the reality and needs at the grass roots but often less organised than an SNGO.

Head Office (HO): The northern-based part of an NNGO, which coordinates the organisations activity at least in the North and sometimes also to a considerable extent the development activities in the South.

Human Resources Management (HRM): A strategic approach to the management of the human resources in organisations in the achievement of the organisational objectives.

Non Governmental Organisation (NGO): Organisation involved in development cooperation. This term includes NGOs from developed and developing countries.

Northern Development NGO: An International Non Governmental Organisation involved in development cooperation and having their Head Office a developed country.

Northern NGO (NNGO): see Northern Development NGO.

Organisation Development (OD): A planned approach to organisational change and development.

Power: The ability or official capacity to exercise control or authority. Also, the ability or capacity to perform or act effectively.

Southern NGO (SNGO): A Non Governmental Organisation based and working in a developing country on national level mostly in cooperation with NNGOs.

Technical assistance: Assistance in the form of expatriates as part of development cooperation packages to developing countries.

The North: A term used to refer to developed countries, especially in development studies literature.

The South: A term used in international development to replace the less preferred term Third World, but still referring to developing countries.

The West: A term used to refer to developed countries, especially in organisation and management studies literature.

Third Sector: That sector of society that is neither governmental not business. A term used in development studies literature.

CHAPTER 1:   Introduction

> *"We view information as crucial to the practice of development in so far as we believe that the lack of emphasis which has been given to information in development has led us to repeat errors, reduce the quality of our practice and has permitted us to duplicate efforts".*
>
> *(RCPLA Network in Powell 1999:39)*

1.1 BACKGROUND

This very self critical judgement of the international workshop organised by the Resource Centre for Participative Learning and Action (RCPLA) Network in Bolivia from 1997 highlights the need to review and improve information management in development organisations.

My own experience in international development cooperation[1] confirms this need. I have experienced the importance of Information Management (IM), as well as the difficulties associated with practising it. The problems that I have come across ranged from misunderstandings between beneficiaries and expatriate development workers due to their cultural values; different interpretation of the same piece of information by Field Offices (FOs) and Northern Head Offices (HOs); disparity in prioritisation of matters between FO and project office; to problems with Information Systems (ISs) planning and the operation and maintenance of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

Having experienced information management issues mainly from the perspective of the field, I am interested to explore how the HOs of Northern Non Governmental (Development) Organisations (NNGOs) go about to develop information management strategies, that integrate and satisfy the information requirements of the whole organisation.

NNGOs are playing an increasingly important role in international development cooperation. Since the end of the Cold War, Western (Northern) development aid for the South and East is

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[1] From 1981 till 2000 I worked in various bilateral, multilateral as well as national development projects mainly in Nepal.

being influenced by a 'New Policy Agenda'[2] (Edwards and Hulme 1995; Moore 1993; Robinson 1993). Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) are "…seen as vehicle for 'democratisation' and. ...have become the preferred channel for service-provision in deliberate substitution for the state" (Edwards and Hulme 1995:4). This has caused a shift in development aid funding, away from states to and through NGOs (ibid.). Another important change in international development cooperation is the move away from direct technical assistance by NNGOs towards capacity building of Southern partner organisations and institutional development (Fowler 1997; James 2001; Smillie 1995).

Development always involved people and information, and appropriate information management was always important. However, NNGOs' position in the 'aid chain' has become more complex. The new role of NNGOs as intermediaries between the beneficiary group (or customers), Southern NGOs and possibly multiple (international) donors generates enormous challenges for their information management.

ICT offers unprecedented opportunities as well as new threats and is changing the ways in which information is processed (Avgerou and Walsham 2000; Developing Countries Specialist Group 1990). New ways of information processing demand changes within organisations and also affect customers and partners. Responding to the fast changing environment, marked by globalisation and increasing competition as well as the new opportunities generated by ICTs, NNGOs are getting increasingly concerned with the challenges of information and Knowledge Management (KM) for development (Kawalek and Hammond 2001; Madon 2000; Whiffen 2001).

Recognising the strategic dimension of information management requires consequently the development of respective strategies. Strategic planning of IM is essential to help organisations identifying their information needs (at different levels), their information and knowledge potential, harness the advantages of ICT, and make the most appropriate choices pertaining to the organisational mission, objectives and contextual reality. I believe every organisation has IM strategies, be it in the form of deliberately designed strategies or in the form of a pattern of activities, which forms an emergent strategy. Mostly it is a combination of both.

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[2] The 'New Policy Agenda' is a kind of unofficial, 'virtual' agenda of official aid agencies, which is driven by the beliefs in neo-liberal economics and liberal democratic theory (Moore 1993).

1.2 PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

Writers and practitioners alike (Powell 2001; Whiteside 2001) feel that IM strategy development is a difficult and historically neglected field in NNGOs. Therefore it seems interesting, worthwhile studying, and challenging to try interpreting it. The findings of this research might contribute to the understanding of IM strategy formation practices in NNGOs and perhaps identify key factors influencing it.

Boundaries between IM strategies, IS strategies and ICT strategies seem to be difficult to define (Powell 2001). I prefer not to address each of them separately but rather embrace them all in 'Information Management Strategies', in an attempt to create a holistic picture of the strategy formation effort, which is concerned with everything related to IM in the organisation. Hence, this study aims to answer the question:

How are IM strategies in NNGOs formed and what factors influence the process?

1.3 DEFINITION OF THE KEY TERMS

Most of the special terminology used in this paper is related to the development and the IS sector. In Chapter two many of the information related terms are discussed and clarified. The development related terminology is explained in the Glossary, preceding this Chapter. Acronyms and Abbreviations are listed before the Glossary to provide orientation while reading.

1.4 METHODOLOGY OF THE RESEARCH

Work on this research project started in August 2001 and was completed in December 2002. The research is of qualitative and interpretative nature (Cassell and Symon 1994; Denzin and Lincoln 1998; Denzin and Lincoln 2000; Walsham 1993) and the methodology chosen is case study[3]. Methodology is the approach taken to address the research question and to select appropriate methods. The context for choosing a methodology, a strategy for the research is provided by the

researcher's "theoretical perspective" (Crotty 1998:3). This is influenced by one's epistemology or concept of knowledge creation, which on the other hand is coloured by one's ontology or worldview (ibid.). Thus, what influences the choice of methodology can also be referred to as research paradigm (Lincoln and Guba 2000). Based on my research paradigm my intention is to understand the phenomenon of IM strategy formation in NNGOs within its context and create relevant meaning for myself and possibly for others. Table 1-1 shows how the research is influenced by my research paradigm and how the research itself contributes also to the shaping of my views.

Table 1-1: My research paradigm

Ontology (My personal Worldview)	*Forming my Research Paradigm*	*Influenced by*: - Vocational training as technician and education as mechanical engineer - Professional experience as engineer - Long professional experience in international development cooperation, mainly in Nepal - Exposure to a variety of national cultures - My partner, who is a critical social scientist with development focus
Epistemology (My personal view how knowledge is created)		*Influenced by*: · Vocational and university education as engineer, fostering positivist perspectives · Practice of Vipassana meditation, fostering holistic experiences and respect for all beings · Personal preference for intuition and gut feeling, fostering appreciation of tacit knowledge · Study of IM, fostering multi-perspective exploration · Personal experience/observation that there is no action without reflection and that every action causes reflection
Theoretical Perspective		Can be described as: Interpretivism
Methodology	*Chosen*	Exploratory Case Study
Methods	*Chosen*	· Review of literature · Study of organisational documents of NNGO · Semi structured face to face interviews · Electronic interviews with open ended questions · Analysis and interpretation of findings in order to identify issues of relevance and influence

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[3] Some authors (Crotty 1998) prefer to see 'case study' more as a method while others consider it a methodology (Denzin and Lincoln 2000).

During the last twenty years, my initially rather positivistic and objectivity based engineering perspective was contradicted by my work and life experiences with socio-technical systems especially in different cultural contexts, as well as by my meditation practice. I had to realise that there was no absolute reality, which could be discovered. Reality is personal and subjective, although we never seem to stop looking for orientation and for absolute reference points, in order to interpret our perceptions. Accordingly, every exploration of reality is based on a reference point, which determines the perspective from which we explore and effects what we see.

Hence, for the researcher's own orientation as well as for the credibility of their research it is imperative to not only become aware of one's reference point (ontology) and cognitive filters (epistemology and theoretical perspective) but also to enhance one's orientation and widen one's perspective prior to or while studying reality, which is part of 'exploratory case study' design (Yin 1994). For this purpose I first survey the theoretical context around my research topic by a brief review of contemporary and in my opinion appropriately critical literature in three bodies of theory: (1) Information, IM, IS, ICTs, (2) NGO management and development studies and (3) organisation theory and strategy formation, in the respective Chapters two, three and four. This review identifies key themes and issues, which guide the generation of empirical material.

In my research I focus on one organisation only, the Swiss NNGO Helvetas, for which I worked from 1996 till 1999 in Nepal and shortly in 2000 in Mozambique. Although, in the initial stage of my research, I had been planning to study IM strategy formation in several NNGOs, this could not be realised because I was unable to gain sufficient commitment for cooperation from all approached NNGOs except Helvetas.

My contact with ex-colleagues in Helvetas however gives me access to various parts of the organisation and is a base for trust and transparency, which are important for the exploration of the complex subject matter of IM strategy formation in an international organisation. The methods used by the research are explained in Chapter five.

1.5   LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The reluctance of several approached NNGOs to cooperate in my research restricted me to carry out my study in one organisation (Helvetas) only. The scope also limited my research in Helvetas to parts of the organisation, where I had personal contacts. During the planning stage, I experienced that trust and credibility between participants and researcher facilitates effective communication and hence decided to focus on those contacts only.

For exploring IM strategy formation issues at Helvetas HO, I was able to conduct face-to-face interviews with ex-colleagues in Zurich. For exploring IM strategy formation issues at the field, I had to limit my research to interviews with ex-colleagues in the Helvetas Nepal Country Programme. There again another limitation was that I could only communicate with them by email instead of face-to-face.

Summarising, the key limitations of the research were: study of one NNGO only; study of only one of the many Country Programmes of Helvetas; the limited number of informants interviewed at Helvetas; the bias of my personal work experience with Helvetas and the bias of my experience at the field level.

1.6   STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER AND SYNOPSIS OF THE CHAPTERS

The paper is structured into eight Chapters, most of which are divided into several Sections, containing a number of subsections. Chapters two to four explore the theoretical considerations, which are drawn together in Chapter five into a research framework. Chapter six presents the findings of the case research and Chapter seven attempts to analyse and interpret those. Chapter eight concludes the paper by synthesising the findings and reviewing the process. The last Chapter is followed by the list of references to used resources. Seven appendices are attached for further reference giving additional relevant information.

Here is a short overview of the eight Chapters:

Chapter one is the introduction into the research, giving some background information and describing the purpose, methodology and limitations.

Chapter two discusses the relationships between information, its management and related systems and concepts. The roles of IM, ISs, ICTs and Information Architecture (IA) in organisations are investigated from a theoretical point of view, before addressing concepts of managing information and knowledge strategically. The Chapter finally presents two perspectives of organisational IM, a hierarchical perspective and a dynamic, interactive view, both of which should help to approach the complex theme of IM in NNGOs.

Chapter three explores the importance of information management and information systems in NNGOs. The last twenty years saw major changes in the Northern and Southern environment in which NNGOs operate, and in their roles. These have impacts on their IM. The importance as well as the complexity of IM in NNGOs is elaborated via seven themes: managing multiple-stakeholder-relationships; managing performance and accountability; linking the field and the centre; practising advocacy; marketing the service and acquiring resources; organisational learning and knowledge management; and strategy development and change. The use of ICTs offers new opportunities for IM in NNGOs. But they also pose a risk because they impose a rationality, which often does not take the context especially of the Southern part of NNGOs sufficiently into consideration and may thus create undesired effects. Potential benefits and threats of ICT enabled ISs are addressed, before relating the seven themes to the IM, IS, ICT strategy formation hierarchy.

Chapter four starts with reviewing theories and concepts on decision-making and strategy formation. Then, three perspectives on IM strategy formation are elaborated: the planning perspective, pattern perspective and the core-periphery perspective. Each of them has certain advantages. The core-periphery approach tries to take the strategic needs as well as the current realities of both, the core in the North and the periphery in the South into consideration. The planning approach fosters control and the pattern approach fosters learning, which are both needed, at the core and periphery. The Chapter concludes by introducing the core-periphery-planning-learning framework of IM strategy formation in NNGOs, which considers the seven

strategic IM themes, and a dynamic interaction between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation efforts. Under the influence of the seven IM themes, respective strategies are continuously formed and reformed where the IA plays an aligning role.

Chapter five synthesises the findings of the theoretical research into a research framework. The framework allows identification of a number of themes of relevance, meant to guide the exploration of IM strategy formation in Helvetas. The Chapter also explains the methods used in the study and addresses operational issues of the field research, for which additional material is enclosed as appendices.

Chapter six presents the organisation and describes the IM strategy formation processes in Helvetas in order to prepare the reader for the analysis, which requires respective insight. It also refers to Appendix [6], which contains the latest version of Helvetas' IM/KM strategy.

Chapter seven then analyses and interprets the findings using the research framework derived from Chapter five. The analysis focuses on: Contribution to IM strategy formation; planning and learning; relevance of the seven themes (identified in Chapter three) in the actual strategy formation process; relationship between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation; the role of information architecture; and the effects of IM strategy formation on the organisation. In the course of the analysis a number of conceptual tensions are identified that seem relevant for the IM strategy formation process in Helvetas.

Chapter eight reviews the findings and revisits the research questions before synthesising the findings into a model intended to provide guidance for NNGOs in their transformation. Then some thoughts on possible further research are shared, suggesting to explore how this model could be developed into a structuring and monitoring framework for IM strategy formation in Helvetas as well as in other NNGOs. Then, I take the opportunity to reflect on the process of this research project and conclude with a final remark.

CHAPTER 2:
Information, Information Management and Information Systems in Organisations

In a changing world, for organisations to be effective, "…of the new competencies required, none is more crucial …than the management of information".

(Powell 1999:46)

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Information and its management are important for decision-making processes of any organisation. Feraud describes an organisation as an "…information processor…" (2000:30) which seems very suitable for NNGOs, whose main resource is information. However, before exploring IM in NNGOs in Chapter three it is imperative to discuss what information is and what is understood by IM.

The main purpose of this Chapter is to create awareness of the relationships between information, its management and respective systems and concepts. 'Information Management' is a vague expression and can mean many things, as is the case with 'information' itself. Hence, I will start this Chapter by taking a closer look at the notion of data, information and knowledge (Section 2.2) before investigating from a theoretical point of view the role of IM, ISs, ICTs and IA in organisations (Section 2.3). The concepts of managing information and knowledge strategically are the focus of Section 2.4. The conclusions (Section 2.5) present a two perspectives-view of organisational information management and its related systems followed by a list of issues and additional research questions that emerge from Chapter two. This should prepare the ground for a consistent further discussion on IM in NNGOs (Chapter three) and on the formation of IM strategies in NNGOs (Chapter four).

2.2 DATA, INFORMATION, KNOWLEDGE

There are no generally accepted definitions of 'data', 'information' and 'knowledge' (Liebenau and Backhouse 1990) and they "…aren't easy to separate in practice" (Davenport 1997:9). To analyse aspects of information management the relationships between data, information and knowledge need first to be investigated (Figure 2-1). Data could be described as "…streams of raw facts representing events occurring in organizations or the physical environment before they have been organized and arranged into a form that people can understand and use" (Laudon and Laudon 2000:7). Checkland and Holwell see a partial consensus in the literature "…that data is transformed into information when meaning is attributed to it" (1998:95) and Ackoff regards information as "…data that have been processed into a useful form" (1999:159). Checkland and Holwell identify something else between data and information, which they call "capta" (1998:86). Capta is the portion of data, of raw facts, which we pay attention to and capture before they get (perhaps) processed into information (ibid.).

Information cannot exist independently of the receiving person, who gives it meaning and uses it. Creating information is a human act of attributing meaning to capta in a particular context (Checkland and Holwell 1998). It is important to be aware of that one person's information can be another person's data, for whom it has no meaning (Heeks 2000a). An example could be the technical drawing of a machine part to be manufactured on a lathe machine. Its content is information for the lathe machine operator while it is likely to be data for the general manager of the company.

Facilitated by existing knowledge information gets "…assimilated into a coherent framework of understanding" (Heeks 2000a:2). This process of reflection and learning expands and perhaps restructures existing knowledge in the mind. When new knowledge is tested and enhanced by experience through interaction with the environment, wisdom arises, which can be described quite appropriately as the "oneness of body and mind" (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995:29).

The 'Data to Wisdom Pyramid' (Figure 2-1) depicts the overall relationship between data, capta, information, knowledge and wisdom, in terms of: (1) position on a continuum, (2) volume (large to small), (3) value (lower to higher) and (4) regarding human involvement.
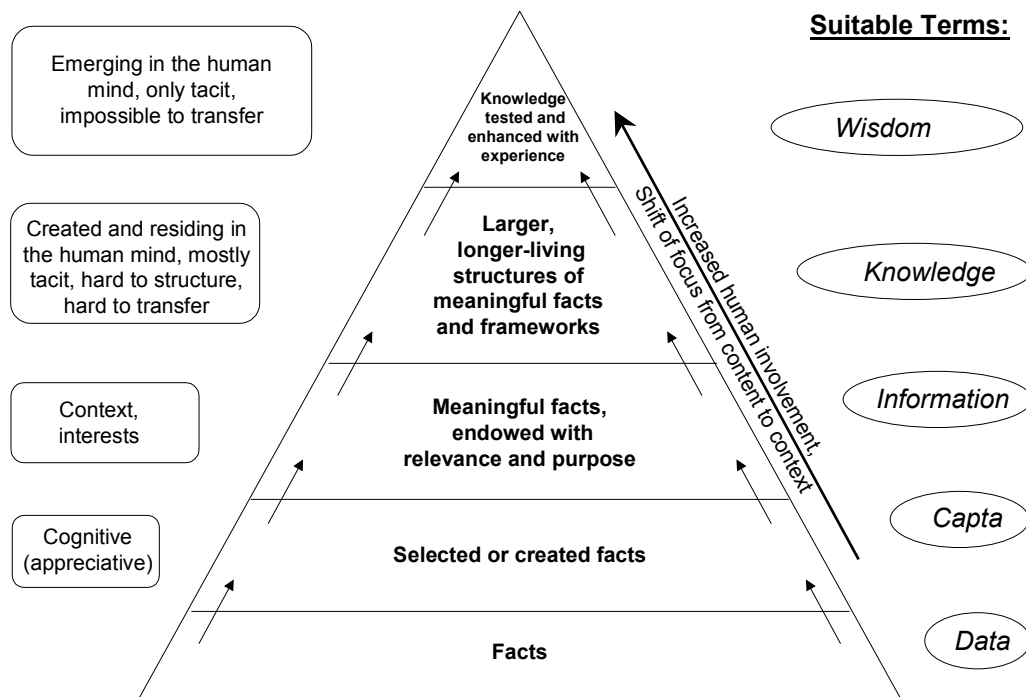
Figure 2-1: Data to Wisdom Pyramid (Schueber 2001b)

Along the transition from data via capta and information to knowledge and wisdom value is added through the human involvement. The increased human involvement makes information, knowledge and wisdom not only more context and person specific but also harder to manage (Davenport 1997) and to transfer. This becomes even more evident in the multicultural environment where NNGOs are operating.

Although it is good to have arrived at some working definitions of data, information and knowledge it is perhaps most important to just be aware of the increased context sensitivity and filtration through human cognition from data to knowledge. This reality greatly affects the use and usefulness of information systems and is important for its management. Information is the term that will be used mostly throughout this work, although it could mean a bit more data or a bit more knowledge.

2.3   INFORMATION MANAGEMENT AND INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Information gets its value by being used and applied in a context. To get so far the information need has first to be identified, the information has to be produced or searched, it has also to be prioritised, selected and distributed to the user in a format and medium that is most suitable for the task. This can be seen as the generic process of information management, the rational purpose of which is to support the organisation's business processes.

The management of information takes place on all levels within an organisation. It can be viewed and studied organisation wide (reflecting the strategic level), departmental or Section wide (reflecting the tactical level) and also on a personal, operational level. In order to better serve the various business processes, IM is drawing support from a variety of information systems. Those are tools for IM with the generic purpose to aid decision-making and subsequent action.
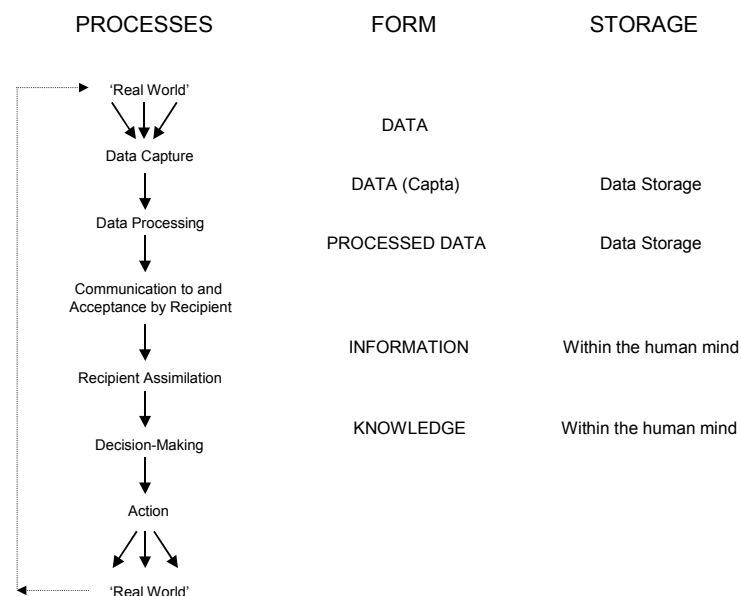
Figure 2-2: The Information Cycle (adapted from Heeks 2000a:8)

The information cycle in Figure 2-2 (adapted from Heeks 2000a:8)[4] depicts the process from data capture to action and implies that any thing being stored along the process is data except when it resides in the human mind, where information and knowledge (and wisdom) emerge.

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[4] Heeks' original model suggests that information is stored in "information storage" (2000a:8). Being convinced that information is stored in the human mind only I have modified the otherwise useful model slightly.

Information systems assist in the processing and storing of data. Heeks' "CIPSODA model" (Heeks 2000a:9) illustrates all the sub-processes of an information system: **c**apture **i**nput, **p**rocessing, **s**toring, retrieving, **o**utputting, followed by the optional **d**ecision making and **a**ction (Figure 2-3). It is easy to see on this model, that information has a cost. Everything before (left of) the output incurs a cost and only the improved quality of decisions and actions can generate benefit, although this too is not guaranteed.
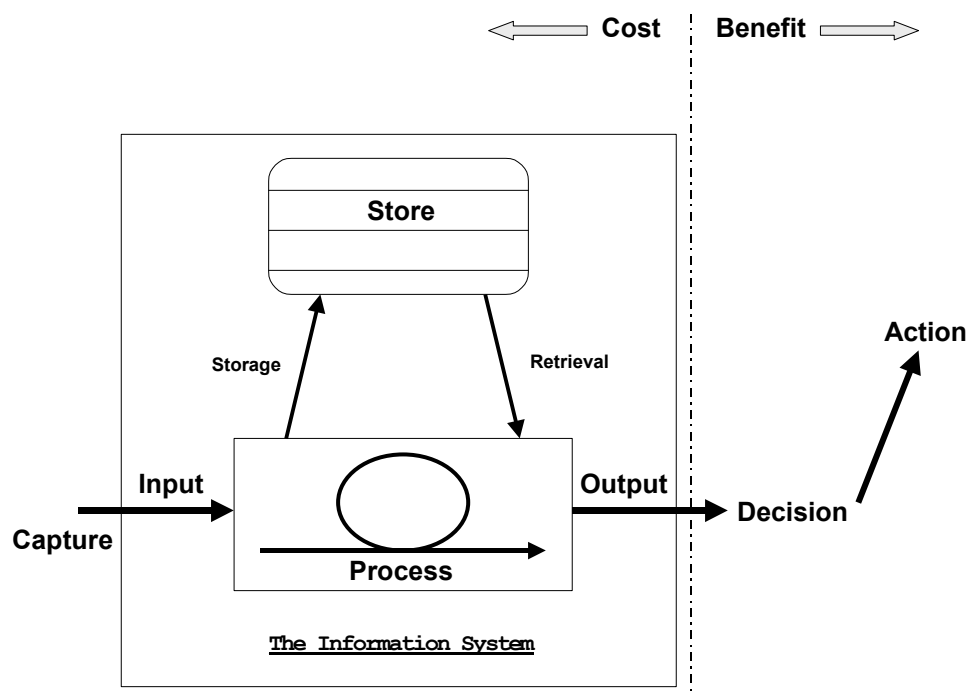
Figure 2-3: Information Systems and Decisions- CIPSODA model (adapted from Heeks 2000a:9)

Since all organisations process information and make decisions they have information systems of some kind, which must not necessarily be computer based (Heeks 1998). Information systems consist in principle of at least the following: people, data (information) and some processing and storing tools, which can be paper and pencil, calculators, computers or a combination of them. Acknowledging the potential and rapid spread of ICT-based ISs and their inherent potential for problems, I am going to focus only on ICT based systems here.

Although based on high technology, those ISs can be considered social systems (Checkland and Holwell 1998; Heeks 2000c; Walsham 1993). People interact with them and are affected by them in various ways. Mostly, systems are built with a particular organisational rationality in mind. Since certain values have been built into the system in the form of assumptions and intentions

about the processing and subsequent decision making processes, the system imposes a rationality upon the users, which often does not (or not anymore) match the users' and organisation's actual reality (Heeks 1999b; 2000b). Whilst built for improving decision making and increasing efficiency, possible large rationality-reality gaps and the systems' rationality imposing nature can also impede some decision-making processes and reduce efficiency. How this might affect IM in NNGOs is addressed in Chapter 3. Computer based ISs offer both potential opportunities and potential threats for organisations. These need to be acknowledged, identified, interpreted (Walsham 1993) and managed.

Information and Communication Technologies

ICTs are the computing and telecommunications technologies, which enable the processing of information and communication, by means of (tangible) hardware and (intangible) software (Heeks 1999b). ICT could be seen as the mere technology that is just powering IS. Yet it is more. The development of ICTs is changing the ways organisations function (Walsham 1993). Already in 1993 Wilson (1993) gave three reasons, for the ever increasing importance of ICTs: (1) cheap and large storage and distribution facilities of data; (2) fast and efficient data exchange; (3) easy re-use of already collected data, and in different formats if necessary. Further reasons are: (4) the enabling of almost worldwide communication via electronic mail and the Internet; (5) facilitating the integration of organisational branches across the globe; (6) improvement in mobile computing; (7) continuous reduction in equipment costs (8) improvements in the user-friendly Graphic User Interface (GUI) which enhances intuitive learning of operations.

Hence, ICT has clearly the potential to improve organisations' efficiency through cheaper, quicker and more processing of information, and organisations' effectiveness through generating better quality of information and possibly producing entirely new information products, like 'call centres' and 'e-learning facilities'. However, ICTs also create a new dependency on a continuously changing technology. Compared to radio, TV and telephone systems, computer based information processing systems need a rather high user input for maintenance, due to their highly interactive nature. In an office environment the most basic software maintenance necessary to keep the system functional comprises of software updating and configuration, data

backup and virus protection management. This demands new skills and commitments from all staff, in order to be able to use and maintain the system effectively. The support for ICT based ISs is costly and found to be often insufficient even in modern Western institutions that heavily rely on those systems (Barr 2001), which suggests that there must be even greater difficulties to sustain effective functioning of ICTs in the context of a DC, which needs to be considered in the IM strategy of NNGOs.

Stepping back and taking an organisational perspective, ICTs can on the one hand be considered part of and powering ISs, whilst on the other hand the technology has also shown to be driving the design and development of ISs. Whatever the driver for the system maybe, the overall aim of the system is to support the business processes. Those business processes are not only depending on the processing of information but also on accessibility and corporate-wide organisation of information, which is a strategic concern.

2.4   MANAGING INFORMATION AND KNOWLEDGE STRATEGICALLY

Information management can be explored from different perspectives, which helps understanding and appreciating its complexity.

Seeing IM as a process has several advantages. It allows the process to be mapped, which facilitates the identification of resources (people involved, discrepancies, problems), aids communication about the process, makes it measurable and emphasises improvement (Davenport 1997). It demands a process owner and manager, which signals the importance of the matter to the organisation and ensures an effort of coordination and improvement (ibid.). Implying that besides having owners, processes also have identified customers fosters customer-orientation and is likely to enhance quality and efficiency (Wilson 1993).

IM can also be regarded as the activity of managing a resource: information. As finances and human resources are being managed in organisations and have whole departments dedicated to this task, so also information could be seen as a key organisational resource (Earl 2000) that needs to be managed strategically and organisation-wide. The objective could be to use the resource more effectively and efficiently. This would suggest striving for increasing the

resource's value (from data to knowledge) while reducing its cost and would ask to make value and cost explicit. When viewing information as a resource, it is treated as an object, which can be acquired (Choo 2000) and is controllable. The perspective that information gets meaning through the people concerned with it and through context, however, emphasises a stronger concern for the social and behavioural processes by which information is created and used. Hence, studying and understanding those social processes is crucial for improving the management of information (ibid.).

IM is taking place simultaneously at various levels in the organisation, using probably a range of information systems. To effectively support the business processes and mission of the organisation these information processes need to be coordinated. This demands a strategic approach to IM and to the organisation of information, the latter of which I consider the Information Architecture.

Information Architecture

Owing to the complexity around function and relevance of information in organisational settings, the term 'Information Architecture' is often used to express and emphasise different things. Some organisations use the term to describe how information is organised on websites (Jig.Net 2002). Laudon and Laudon see IA as the "particular design that information technology takes in a specific organisation to achieve selected goals or functions" (2000:27). The U.S. Department of Energy considers standardised IA as a basis to ensure effective and efficient information exchange and a means to guarantee "interoperability of systems and technology" (U.S. Department of Energy 2002). Powell's (1999) vision of IA emphasises analogy to the architecture of buildings: "Thought out pattern for the whole…, user-led design…, capacity for alteration…, linking the whole with the external environment…, multiple perspectives…, making links with information…, different types of storage…, levels of definition…, balance of security and use…" (ibid:73). All explanations have in common that IA is information about information, thus meta-information, pertaining to a particular organisation.

I see IA as a reflection of how information is organised in organisations, physically and logically. IA describes the way information and ISs and ICTs are related to each other and where

what information resides. The IA could also address the configuration of the systems (stand alone, peer-to-peer network, client-server-network, batch processing, online data processing, distributed data processing, distributed data management) either on a macro level or in great detail, depending on the identified need for orientation and the complexity of the system.

As is the case with many buildings, I suggest the actual IA is the product of planning by authorities as well as of emergent, ad hoc decisions by certain stakeholders. Regarding an NNGO, operating internationally, I would like to compare IA not only with the architecture of a single building but rather that of a whole city, where there are many architects involved simultaneously, as well as town planners, and architectural changes are also made without the consent of architects. This represents more the fluid, dynamic and emerging nature of my vision of IA. It also indicates that members of the organisation are familiar with a certain part of the architecture most relevant to their present needs, but probably not with other parts or the whole (like is the case with the architecture of a city). However, in contrast to building architecture, I believe that in reality the actual IA of many organisations is rarely mapped accurately, although the tangible IA exists, evolves and is very important for the organisation's business processes. Ideally, the IA features an organisation-wide overview, where information resides, what it is about, why it is there, who is responsible for, who has access to it and when it gets updated.

Summarising, it can be said, that (theoretically) IA is created by deliberate planning to support the business processes, and to utilise available IS and ICT optimally. It is meant to provide transparency to members of the organisation about relevant existing information. It also provides a structure for organising future information. Since IA is linked closely to the organisation's IS and ICT infrastructure, they are influencing each other, thus contributing to planned and emergent changes of the IA.

The purpose of the IA is not to create a rigid structure but rather facilitate a clear understanding of how information is being managed in the organisation and be able to make appropriate and timely changes responding to environmental dynamics (Powell 1999).

Knowledge Management and Organisational Learning

Besides information, increasingly peoples' individual knowledge is also regarded as an organisational resource of critical importance. Especially in view of the rapidly changing environment and increased staff turnover there is a concern for a more strategic management of an organisation's intangible assets which Mayo (1998 in Heeks 2001c) estimates at up to 95% of an organisation's value compared to tangible assets. But tacit resources, existing in the minds of employees are difficult, if not impossible to manage.

The lack of clear demarcation between information and knowledge must consequently result in an overlapping of the concepts for managing information and knowledge. And whilst the focus of this study is on IM strategies, it is imperative to touch here also upon those very related concepts regarding KM and Organisational Learning (OL). The boundaries between information and knowledge are blurred (Section 2.2), which is reflected in the debate, whether KM is just good IM or more (Davenport and Marchand 2000). There is no agreed explanation of what knowledge exactly is and different cultures have differing notions of knowledge. Some view it to be mainly dynamic, fluid and tacit while others believe some of it can be made explicit. Alvesson and Kaerreman (2001) contend that the popular understanding of knowledge is "inconsistent, vague, broad, two-faced and unreliable" (ibid:3) and thus they question the whole concept of managing something which is so controversial.

Being concerned with the identification, mapping (Despres and Chauvel 2000), sharing and dissemination of experiences from within as well as outside the organisation through (the media of) information KM must have a significant IM component. Davenport and Marchand suggest that KM has two more distinctive tasks: "…to facilitate the creation of knowledge and to manage the way people share and apply it" (Davenport and Marchand 2000:169). According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) organisational knowledge gets created by human interaction in a process of conversion, through 'socialisation', 'externalisation', 'combination' and 'internalisation' (Figure 2-4).

To

Tacit knowledge   Explicit knowledge

By Dialogue or 'Collective Reflection'

Tacit
knowledge

From

Explicit
knowledge

Field Building or 'Interaction'

Socialization	Externalization
creates:	creates:
Sympathized Knowledge	**Conceptual Knowledge**
Operational Knowledge	**Systemic Knowledge**
is created by:	is created by:
Internalization	**Combination**

Linking Explicit Knowledge or 'Networking'

Learning by Doing

Figure 2-4: Four modes of knowledge conversation (adapted from Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995:62,71,72)

The interplay of these conversions, repeated in a spiral, creates organisational knowledge for which both explicit and tacit knowledge need to be transferred effectively between individuals (ibid.). My personal experiences in inter-cultural communication and my practice in 'Vipassana' Meditation[5] support that proposition. I have experienced that any attempt to transfer knowledge from one person to another, explicit or tacit, yields new, different knowledge in the receiver (and probably also in the sender). Person (a)'s knowledge is contextual and information transmitted to person (b) gets assimilated into (b)'s knowledge by use of (b)'s very individual, contextual previous knowledge thereby consequently resulting in different knowledge (Figure 2-5). This sharing-assimilating process thus synthesises individual knowledge into new individual plus potential organisational knowledge, hereby depending on the transfer of information between individuals.

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[5] Vipassana is an ancient meditation technique and means "insight" (Hart 1987:6). It teaches to look inside and observe one's mind and experience the reality inside (including emotions, hopes and fears) understanding that reality is personal and different for everyone. The meditator experiences that the external reality cannot be separated from the observer, or it is not anymore reality but just a simplified model. Vipassana therefore also helps seeing and appreciating the reality as it is and not as we would like it to be.
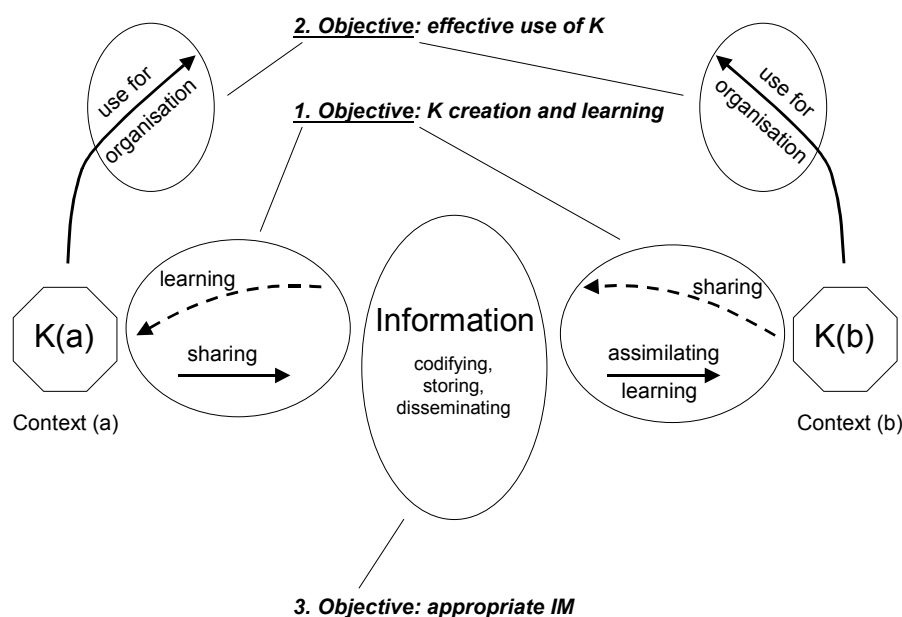
Figure 2-5: Knowledge sharing-assimilation process and the 3 generic objectives of KM

Hence, KM can be seen as a strategic organisational effort to institutionalise (1) knowledge creation and learning, (2) effective use and sharing of knowledge and (3) appropriate IM with the overall aim of improving use of organisational resources, avoiding duplication of errors and driving innovation. This would ask for strategies to facilitate social processes, which contribute to (1) and (2) and for strategies regarding IM.

Since knowledge has so many meanings, KM can mean different things for different organisations. Some may give more attention to the soft, the human and social side, while others might focus on the hard, the information and data aspects. Alvesson and Kaerreman (2001) argue that KM can be interpreted as 'extended libraries' (with focus on information exchange); as 'community' (highlighting the sharing of ideas and human interaction), as 'normative control' (prescriptive and task oriented) and as 'enacted blueprints' (resembling templates for action). Many 'tools' are being promoted for KM (Manchester 2000 in Prusak 2000), in all those categories, making extensive use of developments in ICT, which are playing an enabling role for KM.

To round off the discussion on KM I want to highlight once more the difficulty of 'transferring' knowledge from one person or group to another (Davenport 1997; Powell 1999). Unless the

receiving party sees the value in it and considers it as knowledge nothing has been 'transferred'. This is particularly significant when trying to share knowledge across different cultures and contexts (Powell 1999), which is precisely the aim of NNGOs.

Organisational Learning is yet another concept related to knowledge and learning. Where could be the boundary between KM and OL? Senge et. al. describe OL as the "…continuous testing of experiences, and the transformation of that into knowledge - accessible to the whole organization, and relevant to its core purpose." (1994:49). Thus, obviously both KM and OL aim at creating and utilising knowledge for the fulfilment of the organisational mission as well as for driving innovation and change. I could imagine them occupying a continuum where KM is perhaps more concerned with content (= knowledge) while OL focuses more on process (= learning). Pedler et. al. (1991) see the characteristics of a learning company in the flow of energy between individuals and collective, between vision and action (Figure 2-6). But, what is this symbolic energy? Is it not mainly information, moved around by the interaction of people? This would in theory confirm the significance of IM for both the concepts of KM and OL and ask for strategic efforts to institutionalise this flow of energy.
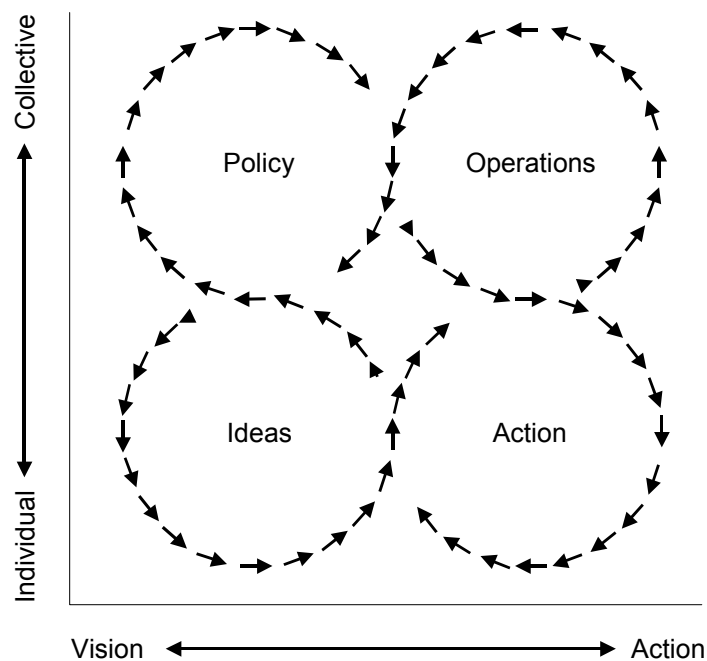
Figure 2-6: The energy flow model of the learning company (Pedler and Boutall 1992:32)

Such efforts might aim at individuals, teams and organisational culture (Schueber 2002b). They might involve approaches like 'Action Learning' (Revans 1980; Weinstein 1999), the 'Five Learning Disciplines' (Senge et al. 1994), 'Self Organised Learning' (Harri-Augstein and Thomas 1991) and 'Action Research' (Altrichter et al. 2002) which all intend to enhance individuals' and groups' capacity to learn. Strategic efforts need to focus also on understanding and improving organisational processes, systems and structures, of which strategic IM is probably the most relevant process linking and affecting every individual and every aspect of an organisation.

2.5   CONCLUSIONS

Information can be considered the life-blood of organisations and its appropriate management is important for the support of an organisation's business processes in order to achieve the organisation's mission. One could see a hierarchical relationship between IM and its related infrastructure and systems (Figure 2-7): IM is of strategic importance for the organisation. IM is supported by ISs and ISs are enabled by ICTs. The organisation of information is reflected in the IA, which links and aligns ICTs, ISs and IM.
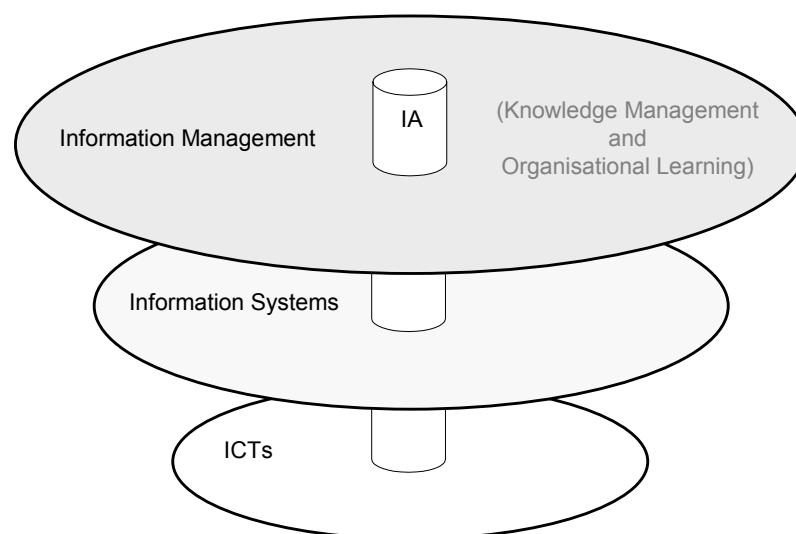
Figure 2-7: Theoretical relationship between IM, IS, ICTs and IA

However, strategic IM as well as KM and OL are also affected by IM at operational level, ISs and ICTs. Thus I see also the kind of circular cause and effect relationship expressed in Figure 2-8.
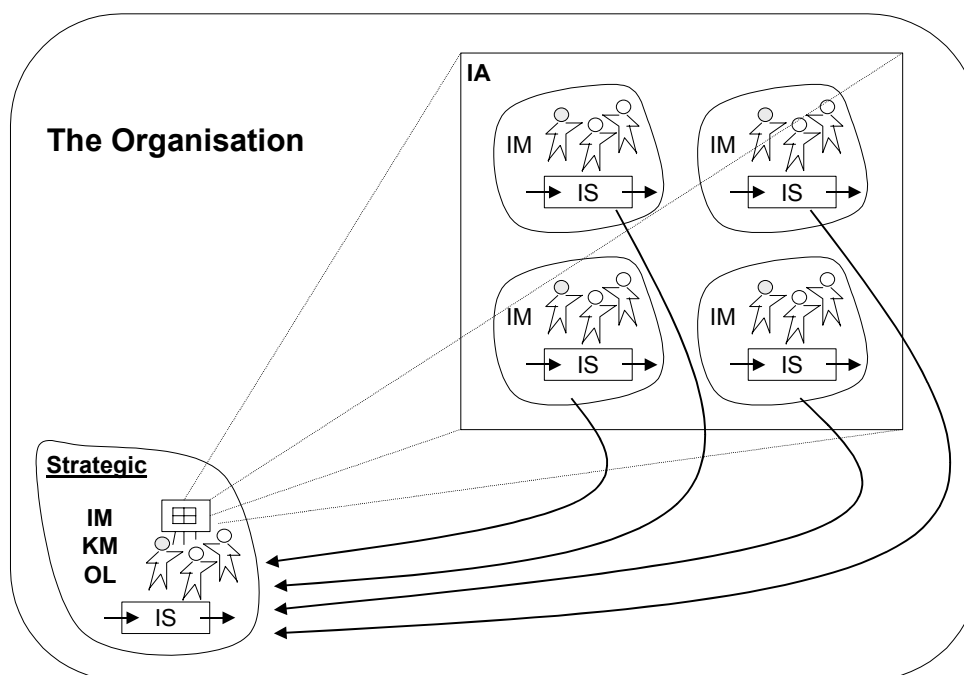
Figure 2-8: Information Management and information related systems

Strategic IM on the organisational level creates (or at least affects) the IA, while at the same time, IM on the personal or departmental level is affected by this IA. ISs (with their ICT components) can be seen as part of the overall IA. They again are shaping IM at operational level as well as at strategic level, because they affect the information that is available for decision-making and thus influence operations and strategies.

Both models represent different perspectives of the same complex reality, which together are meant to help understanding and interpreting IM in organisations. How strategies that shape and influence this complex, interrelated 'whole' are formed will be the concern of the Chapters four to seven, following the exploration of IM in NNGOs. As a result of the analysis in this Chapter the following questions for further research emerge.

Emerging Issues And Research Questions

- To what extent are NNGOs making efforts to create awareness across the organisation on the issues: IM, IA, KM, OL, IS, ICT?

- Who within the NNGO is involved in a respective discussion on IM?

- Do NNGOs take a more technology- or more human-centred approach to their ISs and IM?

- Do NNGOs take a tactical (i.e. departmental) or a strategic approach to ISs?

- To what extent is the IA mapped?

- Who is concerned with the planning of IA?

- Where is the balance of emphasis for NNGOs between management of information, knowledge and learning?

CHAPTER 3:
Information Management and Information Systems: Why are they Important for NNGOs?

For NGOs, "…the 'age of information', [is] an age in which access to and use of information will be every bit as important as concrete actions 'on the ground' in fulfilling organizational objectives. …NGOs, at least those who think analytically about their work, are embedded simultaneously in the worlds of action and understanding."

(Edwards 1994:117)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Information management in NNGOs needs to link the South and the North, the field and the centre in a meaningful creative way. Moreover, it cannot be confined to the organisational boundaries but reaches over and connects beneficiaries, user groups, Grass Root Organisations (GROs), or Southern NGOs (SNGOs) with service providers, donors, partners and other stakeholders. Considering development as more than just the construction of schools or drinking water systems, but the generation of knowledge and awareness in the minds of beneficiaries through the assimilation of (meaningful and contextual) information, which aids empowerment, self-reliance and sustainability, reveals the importance as well as the complexity of IM. Appropriate IM is needed by NNGOs to facilitate development, to assess to what extent development happened, and to learn. In order to analyse IM strategy formation in Helvetas later in Chapter seven, it is necessary to first investigate why IM is so important for NNGOs (Section 3.2).

In the present 'information age', NNGOs cannot be imagined anymore managing information without using some kind of ICT enabled ISs. However, the evidence of IS failures in the business and government sectors suggests that also for NNGOs they are not unproblematic. They are likely to be even more problematic because of NNGOs' interaction with stakeholders in very diverse socio-economic and cultural contexts, inside and outside the organisation. Potential benefits and threats of ICT enabled ISs are addressed in Section 3.3.

3.2   INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN NNGOS

Good IM is important for all organisations, but for NNGOs, it is crucial because information is their main resource. Comparing resource mobilisation of public sector, businesses and NGOs, Fowler (1997) stresses that while the public administration's key resource is taxes and businesses' resource is payment from customers, NGOs' most critical resource is information from and about their various stakeholders.

The ongoing shift in the role of NNGOs from service provision towards partnership, capacity building and facilitation amplifies the importance of IM. On one hand, NNGOs seek detailed knowledge and understanding of the reality they want to change and on the other hand they want to help their beneficiaries to understand the value of certain new information and knowledge for the purpose of the latter's development (Powell 1999).

3.2.1   The changing roles and context of Northern NGOs

NNGOs are engaged in a continuous change process. They need to stay relevant, taking into account the changes in the environments of the North and the South (Edwards and Hulme 1995; Powell 1999). Before NNGOs started with development assistance to Developing Countries (DCs) many of them had already been involved in disaster relief. Until 1990, they were providing mainly technical assistance, education and health care in the South either directly (through field offices, programmes and projects) or through Southern governments (Smillie 1995). Then, information management had an important function for controlling operations. The number of schools, hospitals, or water supply systems built and the funds invested used to be considered the 'performance criteria'.

Since the 1990s NNGOs have been focusing their development efforts, more towards 'capacity building', 'institutional development' and 'partnership' with Southern NGOs and GROs for identifying, planning and implementing development projects (Simbi and Thom 2000). This shift has been energised by the rapid increase of Southern NGOs and the 'New Policy Agenda' in international development cooperation. NNGOs' roles have changed from innovators to facilitators, from implementers to catalysts, capacity builders, supporters and partners in

advocacy (Edwards and Hulme 1996; Lewis and Wallace 2000). The present environment marked by severe competition for the shrinking aid money is putting NNGOs under high pressure (Edwards et al. 1999). Donors, supporters and the Northern public are questioning what has been achieved after so many years of aid input, demanding demonstration of performance on the ground, and greater accountability to the various stakeholders (Edwards and Hulme 1995; Murray and Tassie 1994).

Simbi and Thom (2000) argue that NNGOs are passing or have passed through four generic stages: (1) implementing by themselves; (2) implementing in partnership with SNGOs; (3) adding value to the partner organisations and building capacity and (4) "implementation by proxy" (ibid:213), by way of tendering or subcontracting other organisations. The last stage would demand from NNGOs to assess first the capacity of the potential partners, then manage their partner's performance, once the contract has been agreed (ibid.) and eventually manage accountability.

Changing roles lead to changed approaches and effect NNGO's IM. 'Blueprint approaches' with set targets, very structured planning and high level of control are complemented if not replaced by participative 'process approaches'. The concern for partnership and advocacy fosters a strong emphasis for linking tasks on the micro (field) and macro (wider environment) level and 'networking' with likeminded organisations. The previous attitude of top down service provision is gradually making way for an attitude of wanting to learn from the grassroots, boosting an interest in bottom up information flow and knowledge sharing-assembling. New ways to demonstrate performance and accountability are being explored and negotiated with stakeholders. However, the assessment and management of implementation partners' performance creates a dilemma. It demands business-like dealings and relationships, for creating and evaluating intangible, non-quantitative results, which is very difficult. Another challenge is presented by the highly competitive environment, which asks for new methods in the acquisition of resources.

Edwards (1994:117) identifies four types of information required by NGOs: *Information linking inputs and outputs* for resource management and performance monitoring. *Information about work on the ground* is crucial for accountability as well as learning about the grass root realities. *Information about the impact of wider forces* helps linking micro and macro tasks, facilitates

advocacy and creates awareness of the changing political, economic, social and technical environment to which NGOs have continually to adjust. *Information about new methods and approaches* facilitates innovation, and learning. While Edwards' (1994) information types address some of the new concerns of NGOs, Powell's (1999:87) grouping relates more to the nature of information: *Activity related information* is factual information about a particular activity that took place. *Functional information* is used to control operations and is mostly quantitative. *Management information* is required to understand context, monitor performance and plan, and needs to reflect a many as possible perspectives. *Other information* concerns research, feedback received and learning. Although above categorisations are useful to some extent for explaining NNGOs' information needs, they don't reflect enough the fundamental concerns and complexity of IM in NNGOs, which is explored in the next Section.

3.2.2 Issues and themes underpinning the importance of IM in NNGOs

NNGOs occupy a kind of pivotal position in the aid chain. Figure 3-1 gives an impression of the multitude of relationships and information flows, between NNGOs and their stakeholders inside and outside the organisation. External stakeholders can include among others: beneficiaries or clients at the grassroots, GROs, SNGOs, host governments, trustees, other NNGOs, home governments, supporters, donors, multilaterals, commercial service providers and other partner organisations in various countries. As revealed by Figure 3-1 and suggested by the discussion on the changing roles and context, IM is very important for NNGOs but also very complex to grasp. To facilitate my further analysis, I am going to highlight here those issues and themes that I believe underpin the significance of IM in NNGOs.
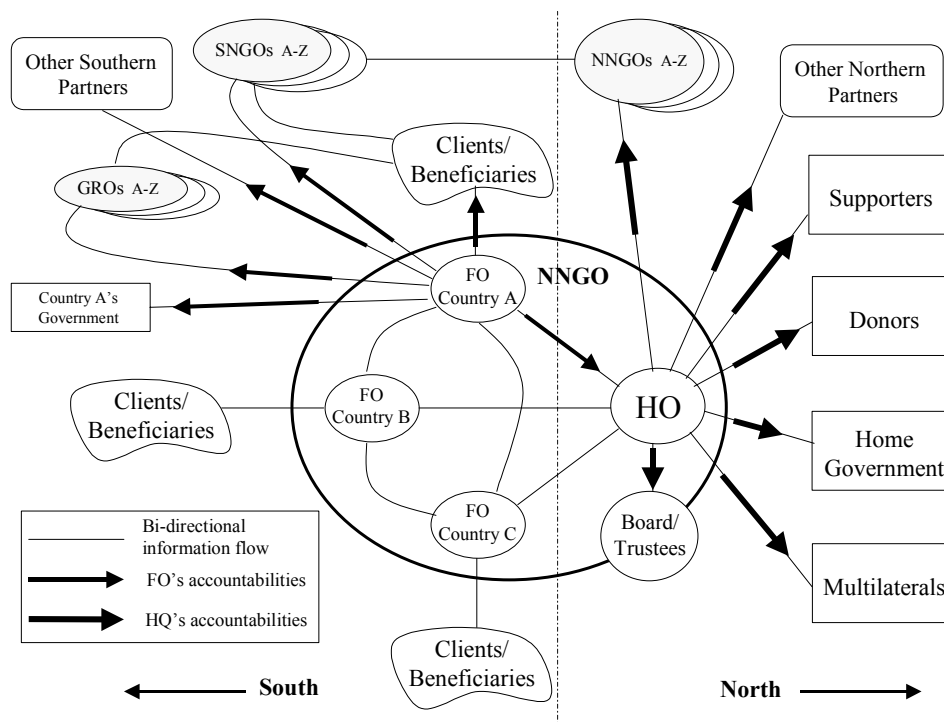
Figure 3-1: NNGOs and their environment (inspired by Suzuki 1998)

Managing multiple-stakeholder-relationships. NNGOs' facilitating role requires them to cooperate effectively with many very different stakeholders (Figure 3-1). Every stakeholder's information requirement and relationship with the NNGO is probably quite different. IM involves communicating and interfacing effectively with all these parties, knowing their information needs, collecting information at one end, analysing and synthesising it and feeding it to the end where it is needed and used. NNGOs need to know their stakeholders very well in order to be able to judge what information is relevant for whom and they must be critical about how to judge relevance. Grassroots people need information that is relevant and comprehensible for them, while donors need quantitative information often in a particular format (Smillie 1995).

It is quite likely that NNGO's IM practice will be affected by conflicting interests, expectations and priorities between stakeholders (Edwards 1994) and between stakeholders and NNGO. This bears the risk of conflict within the NNGO itself, among members or parts of the organisation that deal with those external stakeholders, identify themselves with their needs and feel accountable to them. Hence it appears that IM is strongly affected by relationships among and with external and internal stakeholders and is influencing them and is crucial to manage those relationships.

Managing performance and accountability.   Contrary to the business sector, NNGOs' target group is entirely different from their source of funding (Suzuki 1998), which causes multiple accountabilities (Figure 3-1): downward, towards beneficiaries and partners; upward, towards donors, trustees and host governments (Edwards and Hulme 1995). NGOs used to be weak in evaluating the impact of their work and reporting their performance systematically to their various stakeholders (Edwards 1994; Madon 2000). But they are also faced with the dilemma of having to (1) measure impact, which is very difficult and often emerges only long after the activities have been carried out, and (2) satisfy conflicting stakeholder expectations on what is good performance. Reporting the use of resources to stakeholders requires quantitative information. Reporting about the impact of an action is much more difficult, requiring qualitative, interpretive information. When considering 'changed human behaviour' (Drucker 1990) or empowerment as NNGO's objectives it is difficult to agree on performance standards.

Hodson contends that "…retaining truthfulness and transparency with the donors, while meeting operational priorities of staff and partners overseas, is a fundamental problem." (1992:135). He finds that to deal with this tension NNGOs sometimes use "…ambiguous language and a willingness to look the other way…" (ibid.). Hodson (1992) is of the opinion, decentralised decision-making brings increased difficulty in ensuring accountability to trustees, donors and beneficiaries across the organisation, because it is quite likely that overseas project teams are less concerned about conditions attached to funds than centre-based staff, while field staff is more concerned with accountability towards the beneficiaries. Edwards (1994) argues the other way and sees decentralisation as a possible solution to IM barriers since it reduces the distance between originator and user of information.

The key IM issue that emerges here is finding ways to measure and report intangible results and to develop transparent and non-conflicting performance indicators. This seems only possible by bringing the stakeholders together for discussing and sharing each other's expectations (Edwards and Hulme 1995; Fowler 1995). Here again IM appears to be closely linked with relationships.

Linking the field and the centre (FO and HO).   Many NNGOs are operating FOs in the countries or regions they are supporting (Figure 3-1). The feature of being present simultaneously in the South (FO) and North (HO), gives NNGOs the extraordinary opportunity

to learn about and influence both environments (Madon 2000). Information acquired and interpreted at both ends helps to link activities at the 'micro' (action in the field) and 'macro' (advocacy and lobbying) level (Edwards 1994; Edwards et al. 1999).

Due to differences in objectives, operations, priorities and accountabilities, the information requirement for decision making of the FOs and HO are naturally quite different. The FO is usually focused on the target group and the HO on the funding source and the wider environment (Figure 3-1), which creates a tension as to whether donor conditions or field considerations should determine resource use (Hodson 1992). HOs are accountable to the board and the donors, while the FOs are accountable towards the beneficiaries and the HO, which creates tension. Differences of organisational culture and context between FO and HO add to the tension. This tension must not necessarily be bad as long as it is managed appropriately, argues Suzuki (1998) in his extensive work on the management of conflicts between HO and FOs. He emphasises three tensions, which need to be addressed:

- Tension among organisational activities: Organisation-centred vs. programme-centred.
  Being organisation-centred focuses on organisational development and long-term benefits and could lead to self-perpetuation. Being programme-centred gives priority in attention and funding to the results in the field, sacrificing perhaps organisational maintenance, standards, and staff development (ibid.).

- Tension among staff: Diversity vs. similarity.
  Decentralisation adds diversity and creativity but can result in lack of alignment. Cultural differences between staff at foreign FOs and the home base can foster appreciation and openness for diversity but may require more careful communication and efforts to align values, which affects IM. Increasing similarity through standards, rules and rites can hamper creativity and block cross-cultural learning (ibid.).

- Tension in organisational response: Flexibility vs. consistency.
  Quite likely the kind of work in the field requires a lot of flexibility (more process approach?), while the dealing with donors and supporters at HO level requires consistency (more blueprint approach?). This adds a difficult dimension to the IM interfacing between FO and HO, which has to be tackled and taken care of in the IM/IS strategy.

Suzuki (1998) stresses that the complexity of NNGOs, with diverse staff working in different socio-economic-political-religious contexts is profound and requires an attitude of embracing those differences. The IM and ISs of the NNGO must also be able to embrace that complexity by being sensitive to context and culture and ultimately help link and align the field and the centre. Since information flow is the key element linking the field and the centre, IM practices and strategies have significant effect on the management of those described tensions.

Practising advocacy.   While being engaged in work on the ground (micro level), with and for the poor (either directly or through partner organisations), NNGOs are also aiming to bring about changes in the environment (macro level) that created the condition from which the poor are suffering (Fowler 1997). To facilitate those changes NNGOs practice advocacy.

Any organisation involved in advocacy needs good knowledge of the reality of the people whose lives it wants to change (Edwards et al. 1999). This requires skillful and culturally sensitive interaction with the target group through field workers and facilitators. Their experiences need to be made explicit and communicated to the part in the NNGO whose task it is to lobby and influence decision makers in support of the needs of the grassroots. Channelling the information from the field, analysing and interpreting it for the purpose of decision making at the respective macro level needs appropriate IM and ISs.

Extremely sensitive and careful information management is required for effective advocacy. Since cooperation is needed from those (i.e. regimes), who may partly be responsible for the suffering of the poor, information must be used in such a way that it does not in the end lead to further suppression and suffering for those who are marginalised. This may compromise the transparency of IM and conflict with IM for accountability.

Marketing the service and acquiring resources.   The NNGO is selling something intangible, a plan, a concept. And this service must be attractive enough to secure resources for which several other organisations might also compete.

To create this concept that is expected to transform into a value for the beneficiaries, the right information and knowledge are required. To be able to market it, the NNGO has to view it through the eyes of its stakeholders (Drucker 1990), which requires respective information from and about them. Further, the NNGO needs to have a good record of past performance, a good reputation and credibility. Sometimes, the "…need to profile themselves in order to secure and maintain public support and funding…" (Fowler 1995:144) is conflicting with the need to evaluate and report failures honestly for the purpose of accountability and learning.

This highlights again the difficulty for IM, attempting on the one side to harmonise and balance conflicting stakeholder requirements (show each one the good sides) and on the other side facing, acknowledging and addressing reality (reveal failures) in order to learn from it (Figure 3-1).

Organisational learning and knowledge management. Information can be used for the purpose of control as well as for learning and it also constitutes a kind of 'power' (Powell 1999). NNGOs, which are striving to empower underprivileged people in the South, and to change power structures, need simultaneously to empower their own staff, if they want to be effective (Schueber 2002b). They also have to facilitate making the rich tacit knowledge of their field staff explicit and share it for maximum utilisation, impact and learning (ibid.).

IM plays here an important role in fostering information sharing and learning. The "…traditional values [of NNGOs] of openness, learning, flexibility and closeness to the poor… hold the key to a more effective linkage between information, knowledge and action in the future" (Edwards 1994:123). Efforts are needed on the strategic level as well as on the operational and personal level to cultivate organisational learning and discovery (Senge et al. 1994). Both organisational policies (e.g. providing time for study and information exchange) and individual relationships (e.g. trust, goodwill, efforts) need to reflect the intention for learning and sharing what has been learned. Moreover, there must be a strong commitment for learning from the leadership and the management expressed through their style and actions. IM practice is not only an indicator of organisational culture and empowerment but has the potential to influence organisational culture (Powell 1999).

NNGOs are part of volatile networks and are confronted with high staff turnover, especially at the field level, where programme and project requirements determine staff needs (Powell 1999; Suzuki 1998). To identify, capture and make available the information, experiences and the tacit knowledge of beneficiaries, own staff and that of temporary development partners must be a priority for the organisation. To improve KM and OL the IM strategies need not only pay attention to IM processes and structures but above all to the organisational culture.

Strategy development and change. NNGOs are facing change. Although the reality may evolve differently than was planned, strategic planning is crucial to give the organisation a sense of direction. Strategies are meant to "…convert a plan into results" (Drucker 1990:39). The plan is to get from the present situation to the envisioned new situation, expected to yield the anticipated results.

Information, participation and commitment from staff and stakeholders are needed to explore, interpret and understand the present situation in its complexity and to create the vision of the anticipated future situation. It is easy to see that IM is crucial for strategy development. After all, only that which is known by planners is taken into consideration for their strategies and only when members of the organisation are informed about and aware of ongoing developments will they be able to participate and contribute in a meaningful way.

In summary, I would argue that the themes identified above are most characteristic of the nature of NNGOs and are most appropriate to reveal the significance of IM for NNGOs. Although IM issues are examined here per theme they are in reality intrinsically interwoven and almost inseparable from each other, because IM touches every bit of an organisation. The significance of stakeholder relationships for IM and IM for relationships seems to reappear in each of the themes, in particular the most crucial and overarching relationship in NNGOs: the one between field and centre.

To maintain that relationship across the distance, computerised information and communication systems seem to offer many potential benefits. But they also carry potential for problems. How are ICT enabled ISs supporting NNGOs' IM and what are the possible problems?

3.3   ICT BASED INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN NNGOS

Organisations are undergoing profound changes, which are influenced if not driven by the development of ICT. ICT can help to "…overcome barriers of function, distance and time in order to bring together networks of complementary partners that share a common vision and compatible values." (Coulson-Thomas 1997:3-4 in Heeks 2001a:11). The use of ICTs is also changing the ways NNGOs are working. As already stressed in Chapter two, the technology alone does not help, unless it is part of an information system (Heeks 1999a) or IM concept. The developments in ICT however, enable the creation of new, more capable and different kinds of IM concepts.

3.3.1   Potential benefits of ICT based Information Systems in NNGOs

Besides ICT's generic potential to increase efficiency and effectiveness, I see particular benefits for NNGOs' IM in the crucial seven themes introduced earlier.

Managing multiple-stakeholder-relationships.   The dropping costs for voice, data and fax communication are facilitating more intensive communication than ever. Data exchange through email, internet and intranets gets better, faster, cheaper, more reliable and more accessible also in DCs, which allows different parties all across the globe to communicate with each other. These parties can express and access very different opinions with little or no censorship, which offers unprecedented potential for learning and advocacy (Uimonen 1997). Another benefit is the easy sharing of resources, provided there is good IM. Data for planning purpose (e.g. in an agriculture project), generated by one agency using GIS could be used effectively by another party for a different purpose (e.g. planning of drinking water projects). Searching for and acquiring certain specific information and knowledge, e.g. on the Internet, prevents organisations from having to 'reinvent the wheel'.

Managing performance and accountability.   Project management systems help in project planning, resources management, monitoring and evaluation as well as reporting. They are

getting more flexible in order to allow adjustments to changed conditions, which is fostering more process-oriented approaches (within limitations) (Bond 2001). Intensive communication among stakeholders improves expression of expectations and negotiation of performance standards. Accounting information systems assist consolidation of financial transactions between HO and numerous FOs. Office Automation (OA) supports project administration, documentation management and scheduling.

Linking the field and the centre. Besides the benefits mentioned already, organisation-wide intranets spanning across the globe can connect HO and FOs and create a platform for the flow of operational information as well as sharing new ideas and information. My personal experience is that email-forums encourage a variety of people to express themselves, who would not do so in a meeting or conference because of language problems and lack of confidence. This provides valuable input for decision-making, which would not have been received other wise. According to the former Dutch minister for development cooperation (Herfkens 2000) the development and spread of ICTs contributes to the reduction of expatriate advisors in international development cooperation, because appropriate expert support can be increasingly realised through respective media, e.g. email, www and intranets. This counts also for NNGOs' programmes and projects and not only saves funds but also strengthens local expertise and enhances self-reliance.

Practising advocacy. Since advocacy is based on information and knowledge about the conditions at the grassroots, ICTs can aid advocacy by improving communication and information flows, both internal and between the NNGO and the various stakeholders. Critical and sensitive information can be communicated promptly and rather uncensored all across the globe when necessary to inform and mobilise for support (Uimonen 1997).

Marketing the service and acquiring resources. The 'WWW' helps to find out about availability of possible resources (e.g. funding from Multilaterals, Governments, Charities, etc). Email allows fast enquiry about conditions and response to opportunities. To develop new concepts (development programmes) information from the field is required and needs to be processed and analysed for which respective IS can be very useful (Di Villarosa 1998). OA tools

(word processing, spreadsheet, presentations) can be used to bring new ideas across better to communication partners. Financial transactions and accounting is eased by respective accounting ISs and internet banking.

Organisational learning and knowledge management. ISs help in acquiring and collecting of relevant information through virtual conferences, WWW and email discussion forums (Mansell and Steinmueller 2000). They help in storing the information in the form of data and provide means to search and find them again, when needed. And finally they facilitate sharing and distributing information easily.

Community Telecentres in rural areas of DCs give people in the South the opportunity to share their indigenous knowledge and experience with the rest of the world (Heeks 1999a), which can be accessed by NNGOs as an invaluable resource. ICTs offer staff at FOs and HOs great potential for interactive training and learning about any subject.

Strategy development and change. To develop new strategies, a thorough awareness of local and global developments as well as the status quo of the organisation is required, which can be enhanced by ICT enabled ISs (Heiniger 2001). Intensive staff and stakeholder participation and eventually decision making will be aided by the information and communication systems mentioned before.

Summarising, it looks like continuously developing ICTs can and do benefit NNGOs, particularly in the linking of field and centre, which is of utmost importance. It is however likely that the use of those new systems will also create problems, some of which can be anticipated. Certain problems however, will be completely new and unpredictable, due to the fact that all those systems involve people with personal motives, complex relationships and embedded in different cultures and environments.

3.3.2   Potential problems of ICT based Information Systems in NNGOs

Much has been published on IS problems and failures in business and public sector (Davenport 1997; Galliers et al. 2000; Heeks 1999b; Heeks et al. 1999; Laudon and Laudon 2000; Robson 1997; Willcocks 1997) some of which is also relevant for ISs in NNGOs. The easy, fast and cheap distribution of data causes rapid increase in data flows not only out but also into every organisation, and into everyone's workplace (Madon 2000; Wilson 1993). It causes distraction from relevant information and often reduces efficiency. Mawdsley et. al. found in their research on NNGOs that "at both the Northern HQ level and partner level information overload has become a reality and could well be affecting the quality of partnership relations" (2002:131). To deal with it requires new skills and new strategies.

Besides those rather generic IS problems, NNGOs are likely to be confronted with some more specific problems. They relate mainly to the different contexts in which parts of the NNGO are embedded and the resulting different nature of these socio-technical systems within one and the same organisation.

Problems specific to the context of DCs.   Organisational culture and values are affected by national cultures (Hofstede 1980; Schueber 2002a). A mismatch of cultural values with those values and assumptions built into the IS and designed mostly in the North can contribute to IS failures (Avgerou 1996; Heeks et al. 1999; Malling 2000). IS users may lack skills and show resistance, due to lack of exposure and training facilities. A lack of IS/ICT maintenance skills within the organisation is likely to impede the smooth functioning and can paralyse the system due to minor faults. Especially outside the capital, in provincial towns, a shortage of professional IS/ICT support services could render the system unsustainable (Schueber 2001a). Unreliable electricity supply and poor telecommunications infrastructure ask for expensive protection equipment and hamper reliability of systems (Schueber 2000).

Under-investing in the various 'soft' aspects of ISs (Schueber 2001a) is likely to seriously reduce systems' effectiveness and efficiency. The southern parts of NNGOs are often action oriented and prioritise their expenditures accordingly. A pressure from donors to keep overhead costs low, causes further tightening of the IS budgets. The resulting financial constraints

combined with the tendency (not only in DCs) to see mainly the hardware as 'the system', can prevent proper need analysis, planning, design, implementation, training, as well as investment in software and operation and maintenance services. Such a system is prone to generate more unexpected costs, hamper sustainability and cause part or total IS failure. Also costs for software licenses are traditionally insufficiently considered by organisations in DCs.

Another category of problems often encountered in DCs is related to the rather low value given to electronic data (Malling 2000). Protecting data from loss or corruption is not given much importance, and data backup systems and procedures, as well as protecting computer systems from viruses are considered luxury rather than a basic need. This increases the risk of data loss and considerably impedes reliability of ISs.

A further consequence of increased application of ICTs is the rise in the ratio of ICT related jobs, which might contribute to widening the gender gap in the southern part of the NNGO. In the context of DCs women's education level and their exposure to technology and OA is less than that of men. Hence, women are likely to be disadvantaged in jobs requiring ICT skills.

Problems due to mismatch in external environments of Field and Centre. FOs and HO are operating in very different environments (Figure 3-2). While the HO operates in the information society FOs are embedded in more traditional societies, where the value given to formal information, form of communication and the ICT infrastructure are quite different. This may cause problems in their alignment and result in tensions.

Part of Organisation:	Head Offices	Field Offices
Society Type:	Information Society	Rather Traditional Society
Value of Formal Information:	High	Low
Communication:	Formal	Informal
ICT Infrastructure:	Good	Weak

Figure 3-2: Difference in external environments of HO and FOs

Problems due to mismatch in intra-organisational context of Field and Centre. Adopting new IS and ICTs causes changes in organisations. People and organisations need time to adjust (Laver 1989). Organisational parts in the North (HO) and South (FOs) have probably a different pace, which creates barriers for IM and problems in alignment and integrity of the systems.

Heeks and Davies (1999) describe four stages of development during organisational 'information age reform': automation, optimisation, re-engineering, and transformation. During the automation stage the ICT (hardware and software) is often seen as an end instead of a means for powering ISs (Schueber 2001a). In this stage, when organisational concepts and strategies on IM are missing or not taking the new organisational reality and the environment sufficiently into account, the technology is likely not to produce the expected results and may even impede information processing (Gill 1995). While HOs are probably in the stage of re-engineering or transformation (due to their longer participation in the information society of the North), FOs and Southern partners are likely to struggle with the automation stage (Figure 3-3).

NNGOs' likely desire to standardise and to align HO's and FOs' systems (for the sake of IA), can result in imposing systems and technologies onto the FOs, which are not sufficiently locally supported, and which perhaps ignore the local know how of other (equally good) systems, which are used widely in other local organisations (Schueber 2001a).

Part of Organisation:	*Head Offices*	*Field Offices*
Reform Stage:	Re-engineering or Transformation	Automation or Optimisation
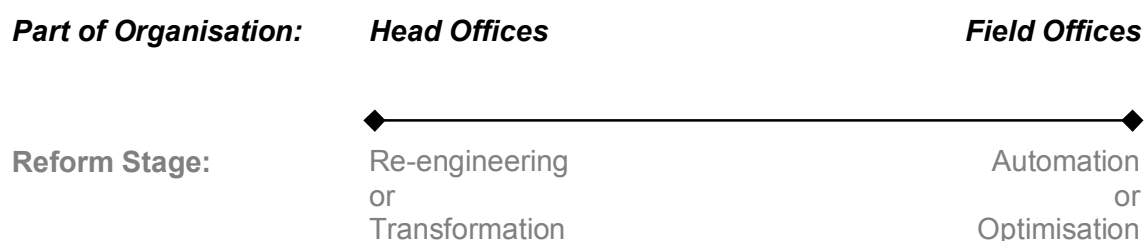
Figure 3-3: Difference in the stages of information age reform of HO and FOs (internal)

Problems due to imposed rationality, impeding NNGOs' process orientation. I have argued before that project management systems are beneficial in that they can help responding better to changed circumstances. NNGOs need flexibility to realise the shift from blueprint towards more process orientation. But still, every IS is designed with a limited set of certain inbuilt assumptions and forces the users to accept them in order for the system to work. This may

narrow the usefulness of a system to more blueprint rather than process orientation and may reduce the quality of work especially when designed for another cultural context. With increased use of formal ISs valuable informal information flows are likely to be discouraged.

In summary, it appears that while the benefits of ICT seem to affect mostly the linking of field and centre so also the potential problems seem to be related very much to the linkage of field and centre. They arise primarily from the need to appropriately integrate the field with the centre, while at the same time having to take into account the contextual differences as well as the different focus (stakeholder relationships) of field and centre.

3.4   CONCLUSIONS

The changing roles of NNGOs from service providers to facilitators, capacity builders and empowerers affect their information requirements. Operating simultaneously in the North and the South and networking with many different stakeholders gives them access to knowledge in several dimensions (Figure 3-1). The challenge is to manage this information in a way that serves their development mission. Appropriate IM is most vital for (1) managing multiple-stakeholder-relationships, (2) managing performance and accountability, (3) linking the field and the centre (FO and HO), (4) practising advocacy, (5) marketing the service and acquiring resources, (6) organisational learning and knowledge management, and (7) strategy development and change. Strategic IM in those seven themes seems to be crucial for NNGO's mission, and must therefore in theory be considered at the top of the IM, IS, ICT strategy hierarchy (Figure 3-4). Regarding them as focus themes of IM strategy formation in NNGOs, I will address them from now on as 'Strategic IM Themes of NNGOs (SIMToNs)'.
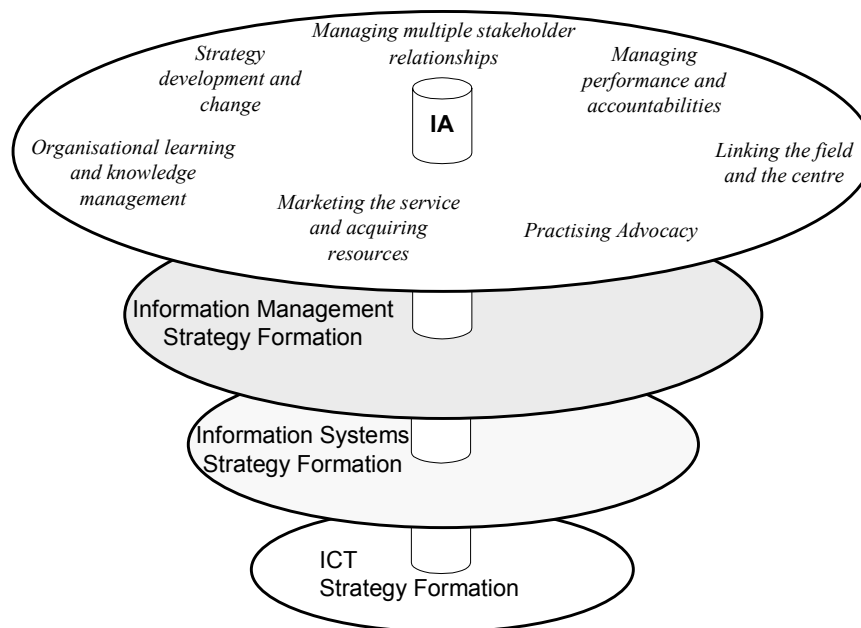
Figure 3-4: SIMToNs as key focus of IM strategy formation in NNGOs

In the information age, NNGOs are benefiting from the developments in ICTs which breed cheaper, faster, better and new kinds of IS. I have shown how ICT enabled ISs can vastly support IM in the seven strategic IM themes, especially in the overarching crucial linking of field and centre. The potential problems that ICTs may bring also relate very much to NNGOs' attempts to integrate the field and the centre. Field and centre represent the very different environments, different cultures with different priorities in the North and the South, which require appropriate interfacing and alignment in order to learn from each other, while being careful not to discourage creativity through too much control from the centre.

The theoretical considerations of the current Chapter are essential for this research because they reveal important issues and themes (like the SIMToNs) that are likely to be very relevant for IM strategy formation in NNGOs. This again is necessary in order to prepare myself appropriately for exploring IM strategy formation in Helvetas. However, before approaching the field research it is imperative to also review IM strategy formation processes themselves from a theoretical perspective, in the next Chapter. Yet, before that, the two issues and research questions that emerged from this Chapter are listed hereunder.

Emerging issues and research questions

- To what extent have the seven SIMToNs been considered in the strategy formation process?
- To what extent have the potential benefits and problems of ICTs been considered in the strategy formation process?

CHAPTER 4:
Information Management Strategy Formation in NNGOs: More Planned or more Pattern?

"…We found strategy making to be a complex, interactive, and evolutionary process, best described as one of adaptive learning… The process was often significantly emergent, …[and] …strategies appeared in all kinds of strange ways in the organizations studied. Many of the most important seemed to grow up from the 'grassroots' (much as weeds that might appear in a garden are later found to bear useful fruits), rather than all having to be imposed from the top down …".

(Mintzberg and McHugh 1985 in Mintzberg 1994:110).

4.1   INTRODUCTION

Mintzberg's and McHugh's (1985 in Mintzberg 1994) findings of strategies being emergent and 'growing up' from the grassroots is a very interesting contrast to traditional views, seeing strategies as being deliberately planned in a rational manner. However, despite the recognition of such unplanned elements, there is still a distinct purpose of strategic planning, which is to facilitate appropriate use of information and knowledge, align organisational processes and systems and to prevent counter-productivity (Mullins 1999) as well as to take the future into consideration (Mintzberg 1994).

Chapter three revealed the complexity of NNGOs and of their IM processes. To understand IM in NNGOs I applied several perspectives, which are reflected in the seven SIMToNs, and which all shed light on some aspects. Only paying attention to all those aspects gives a deeper insight into IM processes in NNGOs. Also IM strategy formation in NNGOs needs to be explored through different perspectives, first on strategy formation in general (Section 4.2), then on IM strategy formation (Section 4.3) and finally on IM strategy formation in NNGOs (Section 4.4).

4.2   STRATEGY FORMATION

Strategic planning and decision making is concerned with the interpretation of the present reality and assumptions and intentions about the future. Looking at some models of decision-making in organisations will help the exploration of strategy concepts.

Shoemaker (1993) compares four classes of strategic decision-making in organisations. While building on Allison's (1971) framework, which reflects the (1) unitary, rational; (2) organisational and (3) political perspectives, Shoemaker (1993) realises the need to further address internal and external complexity, affecting decision-making processes and thus still adds the (4) contextual perspective.

The *unitary, rational actor model* takes the view that organisations are united decision-making entities, comparable to a single person (Schoemaker 1993). It "…assumes shared values and high rationality ...perfect foresight and infinite information-processing capacity" (ibid:109). The *organisation model* acknowledges the existence of more players, with imperfect coordination. But, it presumes that despite the existing diversity, all members of the organisation work for the same objectives and goals. To reflect the conflicting interests in decision-making, the *political model* is more appropriate, acknowledging that departments and individuals in organisations may pursue their own agenda, besides or even before the organisational objectives. Since many decision events in real life cannot be explained with the above three models, the *contextual view* is of considerable significance.

Schoemaker (1993) analyses the case of the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 to highlight how events and errors, following deliberate as well as emergent actions in the internal and external context of an organisation can drive decision-making and result in completely unintended and unexpected outcomes. What was then the effect of strategy on the results? If there were little relationship between results and strategy, why would organisations then invest so many resources in strategic planning?

There is no consensus among scholars and practitioners about the precise meaning of strategies and how they are created. Depending on their perspective, writers have given different definitions of strategy (Ansoff 1965; Hax 1987; Johnson and Scholes 1993; Mintzberg 1979;

Mintzberg and Quinn 1992; Porter 1980; Quinn 1980; Robson 1997; Steiner and Miner 1977) and have come up with different 'schools of thinking' about how strategy formation happens (Mintzberg 1994; Mintzberg et al. 1998). The research of how strategy formation happened in organisations, what was the effect of it, what was learned from it and how it could have been done possibly better, resulted in the creation of models and concepts about the process and content of strategy formation.

A review of some of those concepts can provide an organisation's leadership with orientation for decision-making. Having said this, I need to stress the importance to be simultaneously aware of all the contradictions and controversies in the literature on strategy (Mintzberg et al. 1998). Mintzberg and his colleagues have developed several theories and concepts on strategy formation purposely embracing controversies and non-rational approaches. A comprehensive review and consolidation of those is presented in Mintzberg et. al. (1998). Mintzberg et. al. (1998) argue that strategy cannot be explained by one definition. Of the many definitions suggested by them (ibid.) I am mainly concerned with two. Prescriptive theory sees strategy as a plan, the intended strategy when looking forward, while descriptive theory sees strategy as a pattern, the realised strategy when looking backward (ibid.). Thus, strategy could be seen to have several forms (Figure 4-1).
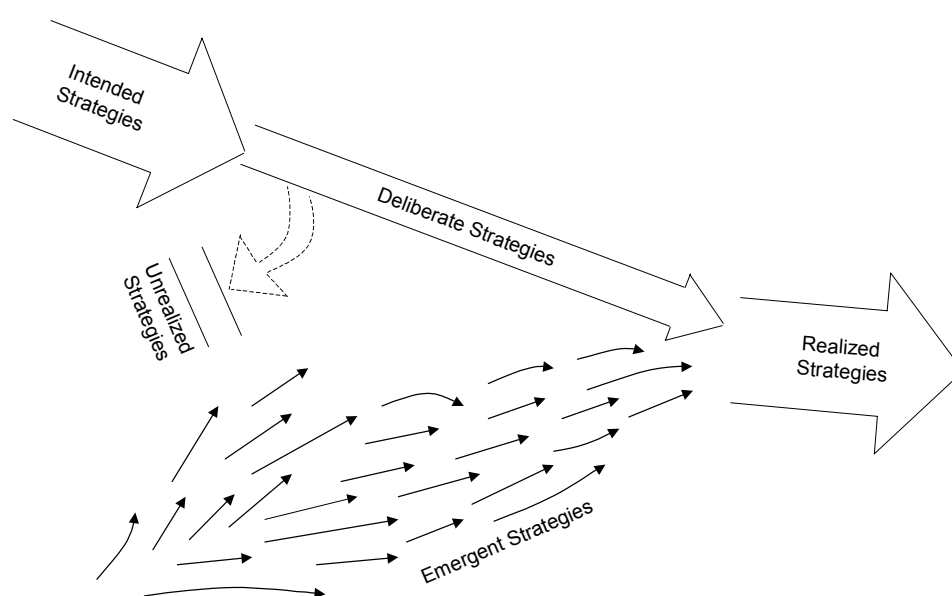
Figure 4-1: Forms of Strategy (adapted from Mintzberg 1994:24)

Strategy can be a plan for the future, which is the intended strategy. The deliberate efforts to implement this plan are quite likely complemented by an emergent strategy, resulting in the realised strategy, which could be seen as a pattern (ibid.). In this process, some elements of the initial plan might have been dropped (unrealised strategy). Thus, says Mintzberg (1994) strategy can be both, a plan (the intended part) and also a pattern (the realised part) that evolved in the process.

From the many strategy types that Mintzberg et. al. (1998) describe, I want to draw attention here only to the (1) planned strategy, the (2) umbrella strategy, the (3) process strategy and the (4) imposed strategy. *Planned strategies* are "…precise intentions …formulated and articulated by the central leadership" (Mintzberg 1998:16). They are highly deliberate and assume a predictable environment (ibid.). *Umbrella strategies* are deliberate strategic boundaries defined by the leadership, within which people may act (ibid.). They intend to set a direction but acknowledge the need for diversity and creativity, resulting in partly emergent patterns, under the umbrella. *Process strategies* are concerned with controlling the process of strategy-making rather than the contents, and are thus a combination of deliberate and emergent strategies. *Imposed strategies* are dictated by the external environment and are thus largely outside the control of the organisation. This however raises the important question: whose strategy is it that we are talking about? For many actors in an organisation much of strategy may somehow appear as imposed whether from outside or from within.

All these strategy models apparently lie on a continuum between deliberate and emergent and this is indeed one conclusion of Mintzberg's and his colleagues' work: "Our conclusion is that strategy formation walks on two feet, one deliberate, the other emergent…managing requires a light deft touch- to direct in order to realize intentions while at the same time responding to an unfolding pattern of action." (Mintzberg and Waters 1985:271). If a strategy was only deliberate, it would imply there was no learning and if a strategy was only emergent[6] there would be no control. The wisdom that arises here is pointing towards an appropriate balance between the two forces.

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[6] Inkpen and Choudhury (1995 in Mintzberg et al. 1998) for example advocate 'the absence of strategy as virtue'. They (ibid) argue that strategy is likely to decrease flexibility and block learning, and thus suggest "…deliberate building in of strategy absence may promote flexibility in organizations… and send unequivocal signals to both internal and external stakeholders of its preference not to engage in resource-consuming ceremony…" (ibid:19).

The required balancing task could be addressed by considering strategies with different focuses as proposed by Robson (1997), which essentially resembles Mintzberg's (1994) concept of operationalising strategy. Robson (1997) distinguishes between corporate strategy, business strategy and functional strategy. Corporate strategy reflects the umbrella concept. Creating business strategies under this umbrella should express the intention of the particular business unit, trying to integrate it with the corporate strategy. This again will be the umbrella for functional or sub-strategies, which deal with optimising use of available resources. The relationship between all those strategies could be seen, from a top down point of view, or from a bottom up point of view (Robson 1997). Top down: the higher-level strategy sets the frame for the next lower one (corporate-business-functional). Bottom up: each group of lower level strategies actually forms the higher-level strategy, or umbrella (several functional form one business strategy, all the business strategies form the corporate strategy).

Mintzberg's (1994) search for the most ideal description of the strategy formation process resulted in the metaphor of 'crafting a strategy'. The crafting of strategy reflects elements of vision, traditional skills as well as intuition, dedication, commitment and striving for perfection. It represents the image of a "... fluid process of learning through which creative strategies evolve" (Mintzberg 1994:110) resulting in mastery of detail and in harmony.

To summarise the discussion, strategy formation involves interpretation of the present reality and assumptions about the future. It is affected by the perspective on organisation, decision-making processes and by assumptions about the creation and effects of strategies. Organisations can be seen as machines, organisms, brains, cultures and political systems among others (Morgan 1997). Decision-making can be interpreted through a unitary perspective or a more contextual perspective. The perspective taken emphasises more rationality concerns or more reality concerns as expressed in Figure 4-2.

Organisational reality is complex and understanding it in its complexity is difficult. Simplified models and images can help comprehend certain aspects of reality and of rationality. Representing the complexity through several models and concepts allows us to study it from various perspectives in order to facilitate more appropriate assumption- and decision-making. All mentioned approaches present attempts in trying to understand what happened and why and how it influenced the organisation, looking from a particular point of view. The point of view

that is taken affects the kind of questions that are being asked, the answers that are given and the conclusions that are drawn.

Concern: *Rationality*   *Reality*

Organisation: Machine   Political System
Decision-making: Unitary Actor Model   Contextual View Model
Strategy-formation: Planned   Emergent

Figure 4-2: Rationality and Reality perspectives

Therefore it is of utmost importance to apply as many views as possible, even conflicting ones, with the intention to understand as much of the messy reality as one possibly can, in particular to recognise patterns of strategy that have emerged and how the original strategy plan has affected those and been affected by them. There is no one best way to create strategies, as there is no one best way to interpret an organisation's actual strategy. How can different perspectives facilitate the understanding of IM strategy formation in organisations?

4.3   INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FORMATION

There appears to be considerable difficulty to define proper boundaries between Information strategies, IS strategies, ICT strategies and IM strategies (Powell 2001; Smits 2000). Although different writers associate different meanings to those terms, see different relationships between them and give different priorities to them there seems to be no doubt that they are closely interwoven. Galliers et. al. (2000) for example view 'Change Management strategy' together with information strategy, IT strategy and IM strategy as part of IS strategy.

I would like at this point to build on the hierarchic view arrived at in Chapter two (Figure 2-7) and Chapter three (Figure 3-4), which suggests IM strategies in organisations are concerned with the management of information and all related systems for supporting the NNGO's business

processes in the seven SIMToNs. Thus, IM strategies can be seen to form an umbrella for IS strategies which are again the umbrella for ICT strategies.

The preceding discussion on strategy concepts has indicated that there are various possibilities of how strategies are formed. IM strategies are likely to be formed by a process involving some kind of deliberate plus perhaps imposed and surely emergent elements, and they can be seen more as a plan or more as a pattern.

4.3.1   A planning perspective

Based on research and the study of cases, scholars and practitioners have proposed approaches for strategy formation, which are often referred to as 'Strategic Information Systems Planning' (SISP). The intention of SISP is to create "a plan for information systems and their supporting infrastructure which maximises the ability of management to achieve organisational objectives" writes Heeks (2001b:1). Adding to that, I think that the strategic plan should also address information management processes. Here, I want to summarise shortly the approaches to SISP proposed by Robson (1997) and Heeks (2001b) as examples.

Robson's (1997) concept is built on the model of three interrelated strategic management elements, which is adapted from Johnson and Scholes (1993) and shown in Figure 4-3.

The 'strategic analysis' scrutinises environment and values and objectives of the organisation as well as available resources. Robson's (1997) comprehensive work describes a whole range of tools for this kind of proposed analysis. 'Strategic choice' is concerned with the generation of options, their comparison and eventually the selection of strategy from the various options. 'Strategic implementation' deals with implementing the plan, while taking care of required resources and required changes to organisational structure and culture. This stage also focuses on people and systems in order to operationalise the strategy.
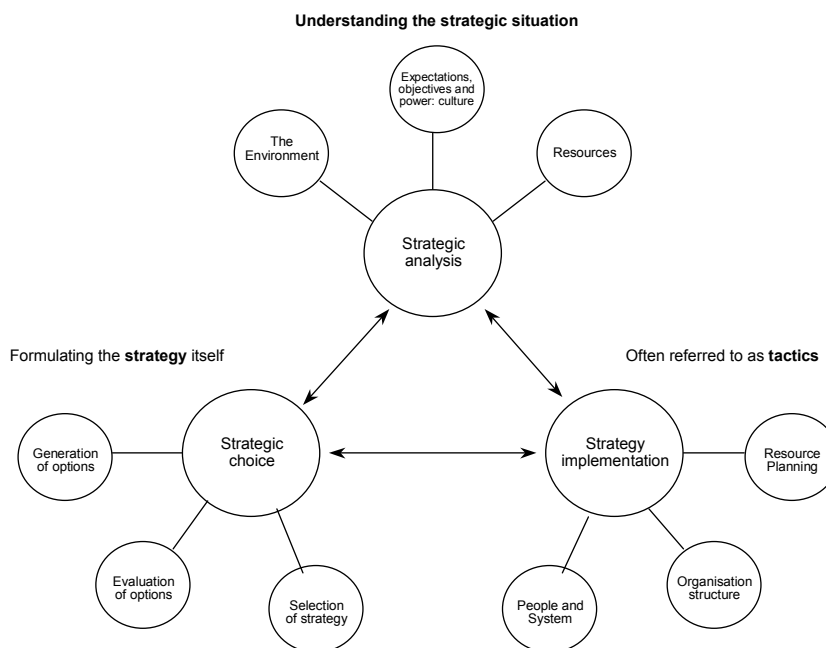
Figure 4-3: Model of strategic management elements (Robson 1997:10)

Heeks' (2001b) 'stepwise' approach (Figure 4-4) is more sequential as compared to Robson's (1997) triangulation, although here too some procedures are proposed to be conducted simultaneously.

The overall process starts by setting up a coordinating body (1), the steering committee comprising of senior staff and the main stakeholders. The step 'conduct ISs audit' suggests to study the present information systems (2a) simultaneously with an effort to align the IS strategy (to be developed) with the wider organisational strategy (2b). Now, with the findings of 2a and 2b the requirements should be formulated (3). Step 4 produces a plan of the IA and the ISs that the organisation will require in the future. The prioritisation of IS projects (5a) and the determination of the overall IS strategy (5b) follow simultaneously. Step 6 formulates an action plan for implementation and the last step is concerned with the actual management of the IS strategy, including an appreciation for emerging matters that evolve and the very important review of the whole process.

1. Create Appropriate Organisational
Structure

2a. Conduct an Information Systems
Audit

2b. Place the Information Systems
Strategy Within a Wider
Organisational Strategy

3. Establish Organisational Information
Systems Requirements

4. Determine the Information
Systems Architecture

5a. Prioritise Information   Systems
Projects

5b. Determine the Overall Information
Systems Strategy

6. Detail an Action Plan for Strategy
Implementation

7. Manage, Evolve and Review the
Information Systems Strategy

Figure 4-4: Stepwise approach to SISP (adapted from Heeks 2001b:2)

Both of the introduced concepts are concerned with identifying the information needs, IS needs and ICT needs related with the organisation's wider business strategy. They are based on rational considerations and assumptions, and reflect a centralised effort that aims through planning and prescription to steer and control the expected and intended change that the new strategic plan wishes to bring about.

How appropriate is such a pure 'planning perspective' for understanding and guiding the strategy formation in NNGOs? Although IM and IS are intended to increase rationality in organisations to a certain extent, the above perspective pays rather little attention to the social, behavioural, political, contextual, the non-rational aspects of organisational reality which influence IM strategy. The approaches above suggest however that one should consider the organisational culture and involve stakeholders, thereby showing some concern for the social dimension. It is particularly this social dimension of the socio-technical reality of IM and environmental factors, which are very difficult to take into account in a rationally planned strategy formation effort. Can this be better captured by another perspective?

4.3.2   A pattern perspective

While the prescriptive planning approach is mostly concerned with putting deliberate intentions into a plan that should guide implementation, the descriptive, pattern perspective seeks to interpret actual, past and present actions and happenings to identify patterns, which could serve as guiding principals for further development.

The planning concept is more concerned with the effect to be achieved, while the pattern concept tries to understand what caused the identified patterns of actions. An example for a prescriptive IM strategy formation process in an NNGO would be, to first centrally assess various documentation management systems used by the NNGO's different FOs and projects and then centrally (perhaps with respective participation) decide on one particular system to be implemented in all parts of the organisation. One could imagine another scenario: one or more FOs or projects adopt the documentation management system used in a certain project, because they see and experience how useful it is. Being satisfied users, they again advocate the system to other parts of the organisation, where it gets adopted too. In this way, implementing that particular system has become the organisation's strategy, through a pattern of decisions, in a decentralised process.

Some theorists may argue that the approach described in the second scenario was actually reflecting tactics rather than strategies, because they see strategies as more important and wider reaching than tactics, the latter of which they associate with the operationalisation of strategies. I however agree with Mintzberg (1994) that it depends on the effect on the organisation how much strategic a certain move should be judged. What seems tactical now may cause a very significant effect later on in the organisation and will have to be considered strategic. The intelligent findings or ideas of a person at the bottom of an organisation could change the whole organisation, if their ideas where communicated to the leadership, appreciated, investigated and further developed (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). To benefit from such employee creativity, an appreciative and encouraging organisational culture is necessary plus a respective IM infrastructure and IA, which allows the employee's idea to be known and communicated to the appropriate part of the organisation.

While the concern of the planning approach is control, the pattern approach is concerned with learning about potentially appropriate or innovative and even challenging ideas and undertakings. Both approaches have their strengths. The decentralised pattern approach takes the local socio-technical context, environment and the potential of the people at the periphery into consideration, while the more centralised planning approach aims to maintain consistency, exchange knowledge and facilitate appropriate interfacing of systems and re-prioritise strategies to adjust to changed internal and external conditions.

Chapter three revealed that almost all IM issues identified in NNGOs feature a strong need for linking the field and the centre, in a way that fosters creativity and respects diversity as well as provides alignment and control. Is there an IM strategy approach that is most appropriate for the particular reality and rationality of NNGOs?

4.3.3   A core-periphery perspective

Organisations seen as social systems consist of parts (people, subsystems), which have a purpose of their own (Ackoff 1999) in contrast to those seen as machines or organisms. This purpose may conflict with the purpose of the whole. Subsystems create output, which is input in other sub-systems. However, subsystems need not only to be effective and efficient, but also need to coordinate and cooperate to achieve synergy (Ansoff, H. 1969 in Mullins 1999). There may arise the need to strategically strengthen weak subsystems or to slow down or refocus advanced subsystems, in order for the whole system to be in harmony. The success of the overall system is not determined by the high performance of any individual subsystem but by the cooperation of all subsystems towards a synergy. Is there a strategy formation perspective that takes both the IM needs of the subsystems as well as the needs for coordination and control of the whole into consideration?

Heeks (2001b) elaborates a "core-periphery approach to information systems strategic planning" (ibid:17), which is born from the observation that organisations often move from a centralised approach to a decentralised one and then back to somewhere in between. Figure 4-5 shows five types of strategic planning on a continuum from centralised to decentralised planning. The three

middle ones are considered core-periphery approaches, because they seek to integrate central and local interests and views.
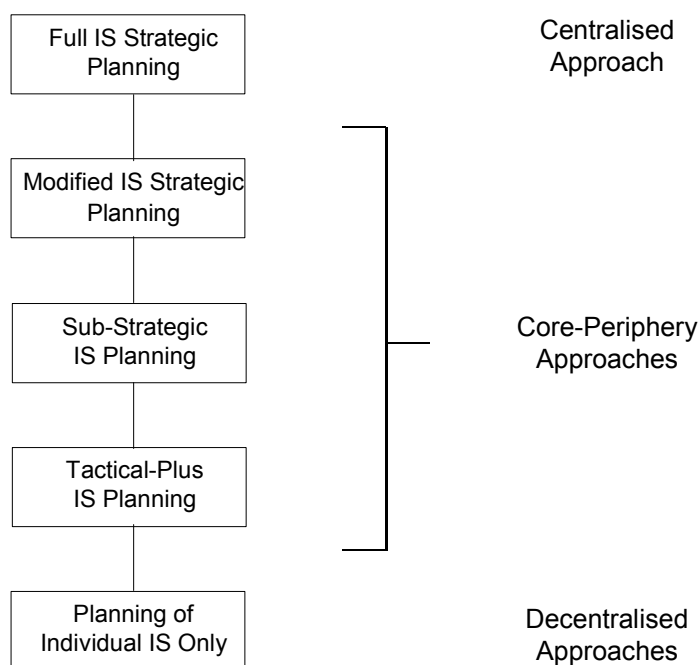
Figure 4-5: Core-Periphery approaches to Information Systems Planning (Heeks 2001b:18)

The 'Modified IS Strategic Planning' is rather centralised planning with a strong participation from the periphery. 'Sub-Strategic IS Planning' is concerned with strategy formation that suits the present reality under the umbrella of 'core' intentions. It consciously anticipates emergent strategies, which blend in with the centrally intended ones. The third category, 'Tactical-Plus IS Planning' is more based on decentralised strategy formation, the pattern of which influences and together forms the overall strategy. It reflects an upstream process where the central function is mainly to facilitate compatibility with other existing systems (see Subsection 4.2.3).

Hence the core-periphery approach consists of a variable mix of planned and pattern elements, on a continuum between the two extreme poles. The strength of the periphery-born part of the IM strategy-formation lies probably in identifying the most appropriate socio-technical solution to the particular organisational part's IM tasks and context. The strength of the core-born part of the IM strategy-formation results from the overview at the centre of the organisation. A tangible output expected from the efforts at the core is the IA. The IA offers a way to strategically bind, align and integrate all of an organisation's IM subsystems, while offering a frame in which those

systems can live, develop and evolve. Another substantial, although more intangible, output of the strategy formation process is the information management culture, which is a combined product of the periphery as well as of the core.

Summarising, each of the presented three perspectives has particular advantages and limitations and can be imagined somewhere on a continuum between rationality and reality (Figure 4-6). Rationality concern emphasises planning and control, whereas reality concern emphasises learning and discovery. The core-periphery perspective to IM strategy formation seeks to balance rationality with reality.

Concern:	*Rationality*	*Reality*

Organisation:	Machine	Political System
Decision-making:	Unitary Actor Model	Contextual View Model
Strategy-formation:	Planned	Emergent

Emphasis:	*Planning →*	*← Learning*

IM Strategy-formation Perspectives:	Planned	← Core-Periphery →	Pattern

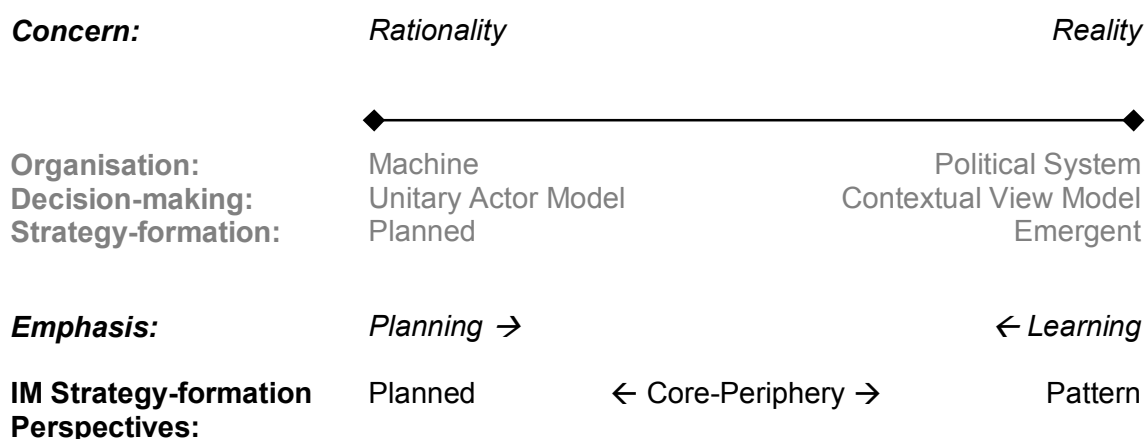**Figure 4-6: Concern, emphasis and perspectives of the IM strategy formation**

For NNGOs, where the periphery, located in a multiple DC context is likely to know the particular IM needs and the knowledge potential of their local stakeholders best, the core-periphery perspective seems most appropriate for integrating the interests and potential of periphery with those of the core, the parts with the whole.

4.4   INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FORMATION IN NNGOs

From Chapter two it derives that IM in NNGOs is concerned with managing information, IS, ICT and IA. Chapter three reveals the strategic importance of IM by means of the SIMToNs. Henceforth, theoretically IM strategy formation in NNGOs is concerned with both. Yet, how are they related?

4.4.1   Inter-relationships between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation in NNGOs

To understand those relationships it seems to be useful also here to apply several perspectives.

Rationality perspective

IM strategy formation is in theory aimed at helping to achieve an organisation's mission. For NNGOs, the SIMToNs were identified as crucial for the organisation's mission and business processes and thus as focus and driver for IM strategy formation. They can be imagined as representing the top layer from which IM strategy formation (second layer) gets its input (Figure 3-4). The next lower layer, IS strategy formation takes IM strategies into consideration. And eventually ICT (lowest layer) strategy formation is based on the formed IS strategy. Hence, the rationality view suggests a planned, top down hierarchy, from SIMToNs to IM to IS to ICT strategy formation.
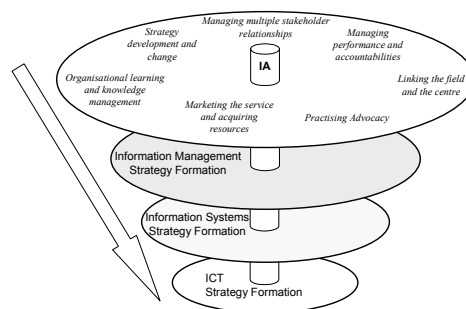
Reality perspective

The exploration of strategy concepts (Section 4.2) and IM strategy formation (Section 4.3) drew attention to emergent strategies and the pattern perspective (Figure 4-6). This perspective encourages recognising the strategic value that certain concepts, approaches and practices, developed anywhere in the organisation, can have for the whole of the organisation. Such a reality view is concerned with learning about innovative and appropriate developments and how they can serve the higher goals. The reality view on IM, IS and ICT relationships suggests that
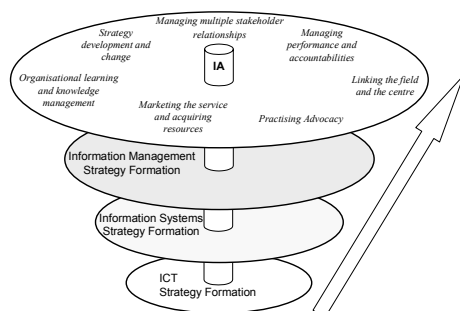
an emergent, bottom up hierarchy is also possible: ICT developments may drive ICT strategy formation. ICT strategy formation thus influences IS strategy formation. IS strategy formation thus influences IM strategy formation, which then serves the SIMToNs. This perspective is also represented by Figure 3-4, but with an upwards process of influence.

Balanced perspective

Quite likely in an NNGO that is trying to balance rationality with reality, the actual inter-relationships reflect a combination of both of the above: IM strategies are umbrella and process strategies for IS strategy formation. IS strategies are umbrella and process strategies for ICT strategy formation. And pattern of ICT strategies contribute to IS strategy formation. Pattern of IS strategies contribute to IM strategy formation.

Since all those processes are happening probably simultaneously in a fluid, dynamic manner, the theoretical strategy hierarchy depicted in Figure 3-4 is likely to merge into a multidimensional, multidirectional, interactive process and relationships where it is difficult to distinguish hierarchical layers. This is represented by the model in Figure 4-7, derived by flattening the stacked disk model of Figure 3-4. The IA however remains the central, aligning element in relation to IM, IS and ICT strategies.
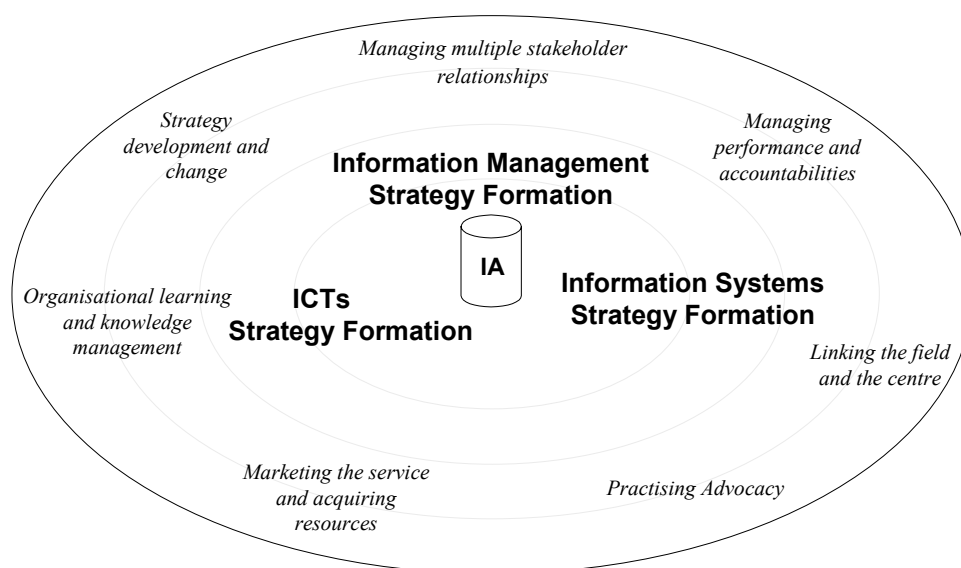
Figure 4-7: Simultaneous, interactive IM strategy formation with focus on the SIMToNs (Pancake model)

To summarise briefly, NNGOs operating simultaneously in the North and South need to pay careful attention to the differing realities of the field and the centre. But they also need rational alignment of IM strategies. The balance of rationality and reality perspectives melts away top down as well as bottom up hierarchy between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation. A perceived lack of hierarchy between the IM, IS and ICT strategy considerations could blur the vision of what is means and what is end. The resulting need for orientation consequently enhances the importance of the SIMToNs as guiding themes in the strategy process.

4.4.2   Revisiting the SIMToNs as focus for planning and learning at the core and the periphery

While NNGOs need to be realistic and learn about the their micro and macro environment, they also want to change this reality that is responsible for creating the conditions which contribute to the marginalisation and poverty of the people in the South. This definitely requires rationality and planning. From Section 4.3 it derives that an IM strategy formation process where the core (the centre) as well as the periphery (the field) contribute both appears most appropriate for

NNGOs. Contribution to strategy formation can be in the form of conceptualising and planning and as well as in the form of identifying, learning, interpreting and adopting appropriate practices. And this ideally happens both at the core and periphery. Chapter three has argued that for NNGOs to be successful in achieving their mission, appropriate IM in the SIMToNs is of utmost importance. The theoretical considerations presented so far suggest a need for balance between planning and learning at the core and the periphery with focus on the SIMToNs.

Managing multiple stakeholder relationships.   NNGOs, owing to their mission of enhancing social justice are rather democratic organisations, which is probably reflected in the organisational culture and information and communication flows, where most staff members are likely to interact with one or more of the many stakeholders and are all 'information managers'. Each part of the organisation (see Figure 3-1; FOs, Programmes, Projects) needs IM strategies that suit its particular stakeholders as well as internal customers (type of data, quality, format, timing). There may be the need that information flowing in either direction (centre/field) is translated, reformatted or re-interpreted in order to suit the receiver's genuine need or to prevent confusion. Staff needs to be empowered and have access to information that is relevant for working with their particular stakeholders. Further, there must also be a rather centralised strategy element, which takes care for integration and interfacing between internal customers and which produces the IA.

Managing performance and accountabilities.   Here, strategic IM must be concerned with learning and orientation on stakeholder requirements and capabilities. Not only rational (donor related) but especially social (and perhaps political) information processes need to be developed. IM strategies must make sure that not mainly upward (towards donors) but especially downward (towards the beneficiaries) accountabilities are practiced.

Linking the field and the centre.   Different stages of growth in the information age reform (Heeks and Davies 1999) of different parts of the organisation (especially FOs and HOs) need different strategy approaches. Context specific micro strategies need to take national culture, ICT infrastructure and the local skill base into consideration while organisation-wide macro

strategies must specify the interfacing (hardware, software) and data flows (IA). The question to what extent to align local strategies with HO strategies needs to be carefully considered. Forcing too much of the HO's standards onto FOs may save alignment efforts but may cause a design reality gap too big (or too costly) for the FO to close (by additional input of hardware, software, training, coaching) successfully. The IM strategy needs to delicately balance the linking of field and centre, by balancing planning attempts with existing patterns.

Practising advocacy. Knowledge about the information source, selecting the most appropriate recipient (with the means and power to influence the situation in favour of the underprivileged) as well as the quality, relevance and consistency of information are crucial for advocacy to be effective. Proving the credibility of the NNGO and choosing the most appropriate timing for the information event are further strategic IM factors. Advocacy efforts happen probably simultaneously (pattern) at various locations in the organisation but need also to be coordinated (planned) in order not to be counter-productive.

Marketing the service and acquiring resources. For the service to be marketable it must be relevant to beneficiaries and donors. Here strategic IM needs to define new and coordinate existing processes, which manage and make available the knowledge about the needs of the South as well as the resources available in the North (e.g. KM systems). Networking for IM with partners is as crucial and strategic as is the need for demonstrating credibility by disseminating information that convinces stakeholders of the core as well as of the periphery (Figure 3-1) of the NNGO's self-critical learning attitude.

Organisational learning and knowledge management. Here, strategic IM should be concerned with developing an organisational culture of sharing knowledge and experience, respecting different views and promoting learning as a way of life. Learning from successes is easy but learning from failures requires a strong commitment to first acknowledge and then explore failures and should be of strategic importance.

Another focus must be the linking of North and South through knowledge. This would involve identifying and sharing of knowledge and facilitating appropriate learning methods, which suit different stakeholders' respective context. IM strategy formation should aim at institutionalising OL and KM through appropriate structures, processes, systems and empowerment of employees in order to create a true learning culture.

Strategy development and change. A strategic precondition for strategy development and change is knowledge about the present reality, internal to the organisation as well as external, which requires appropriate IM. Throughout this Chapter it becomes clearer that strategy formation is a socio-cultural and also political process. It is not only concerned with balancing core-periphery and context-specific interests, but also the (perhaps conflicting) interests of the individual employees who are the 'organisation'. The IM processes need to facilitate understanding of these factors through raising awareness of strategic issues (e.g. on the SIMToNs), encouraging participation and effective exchange of views across the whole organisation.

Summarising, I have argued that the SIMToNs could be the main guiding focus for IM strategy formation. They could be the focus for learning and planning both at the core and the periphery, the centre and the field.

4.5 CONCLUSIONS

Mintzberg's and McHugh's (1985 in Mintzberg 1994) observation that important strategies emerged from the grassroots, seems quite relevant for NNGOs, who are concerned with empowerment of the people at the grass root level. However, for those grass root strategies to become effective, they must be recognised, welcomed, shared and integrated into the whole of organisational IM strategy, which requires an information infrastructure and an appropriate information culture.

The core-periphery approach to IM strategy formation tries to take the strategic needs as well as the current realities of both the core and the periphery into consideration. Learning at the core (centre) involves identifying IM strategy needs (in regard to the SIMToNs) for the core and recognising and interpreting IM strategy patterns from periphery, while planning at the core means forming IM umbrella strategies and process strategies, based on previous learning. At the periphery (field), learning involves identifying strategic IM needs (in regard to the SIMToNs) for the local situation and interpreting IM strategies from the core, while planning aims at forming contextually relevant, functional strategies and tactics within umbrella strategies. Hence, IM strategy formation in NNGOs can be regarded as a function of planning and learning at the core and at the periphery with a constant focus on the SIMToNs (Figure 4-8).
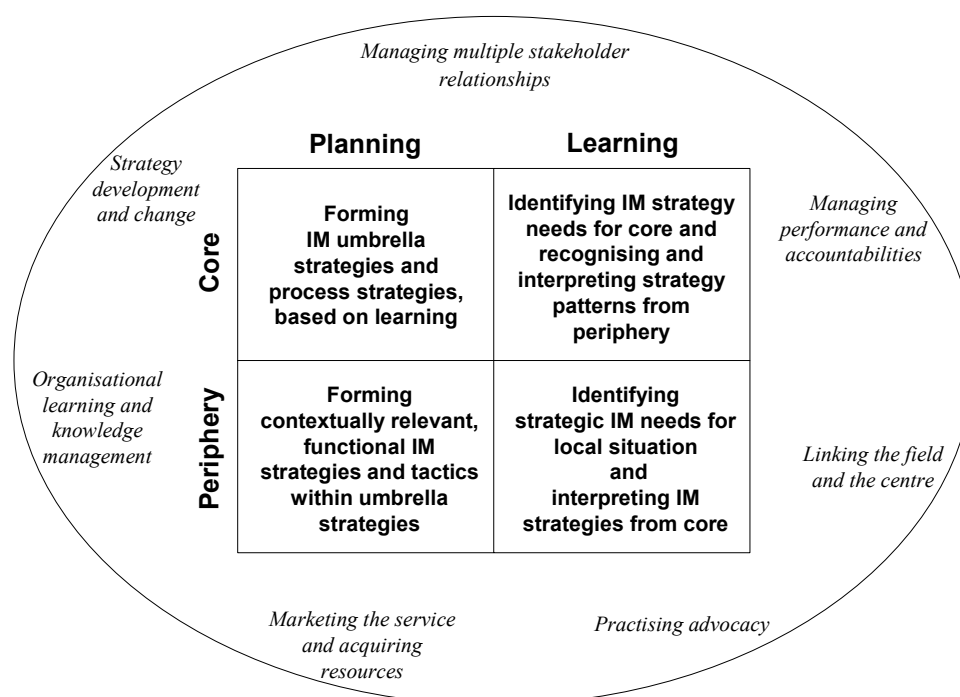
Figure 4-8: Core-periphery-planning-learning framework of IM strategy formation in NNGOs

At the same time, IM strategy is formed and reformed by and also forms and reforms the IS strategy, ICT strategy and IA in this process (Figure 4-7). Both Figures are meant to visualise that IM strategy formation in NNGOs is a continuous, iterative and dynamic process. The core-periphery-planning-learning process affects every part of the organisation and gets input from everywhere in the organisation and also from outside. It is affected by people and organisational culture; organisational processes, systems and structures; leadership; technology; and the

external environment. As a result of the theoretical analysis of Chapter four, the following questions for further research emerge.

Emerging Issues And Research Questions

- To what extent have present pattern of IM strategy been identified (e.g. through mapping of IM processes)?
- Is the IM strategy formation guided more by planning or by existing pattern? More planned or more emergent?
- What has been the contribution to IM strategy formation, by core and by periphery?
- How have organisational structures, processes and systems affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?
- How have people and organisational culture affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?
- How has the leadership affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?
- How has the technology affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?
- How has the external environment affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?
- How has IM strategy formation been affected by IS and ICT strategies?
- How have ICT strategies been affected by IM and IS strategies?
- Have core, umbrella strategies been formed? How?
- Who has been involved in IM strategy formation and implementation at the core and periphery?
- Who is involved in facilitation of IM strategy formation processes?
- How have the local IM needs (e.g. at FO, Programme, Project level) been taken into consideration?
- To what extent have OL, KM and IM strategy formation been institutionalised?

CHAPTER 5:
Research Framework and Research Methods

"The range of what we think and do is limited by what we fail to notice. And because we fail to notice that we fail to notice there is little we can do to change until we notice how failing to notice shapes our thoughts and deeds."

R. D. Laing (undated).

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Learning is affected by one's perception, the latter of which is the product of one's previous knowledge and experiences. It influences what we see, how we see it and what meaning we attribute to it. The theoretical part of my research has been affected by my research paradigm and has also contributed to shaping that paradigm. It is going to influence my further exploration of reality, since the generation of empirical material (the positivists would call it data collection, as if the data were out there just to be collected) is guided by the conceptual framework of the researcher (Yin 1994).

Exploring the context of IM strategy formation in NNGOs from a theoretical point of view has deepened my insight into the subject area, provided me some orientation and helped to construct an explicit research framework, intended to guide me in critically exploring the reality in the Swiss NNGO Helvetas. Such a framework serves the purpose of providing perspective and focus, selecting relevant themes and issues, and structuring the analysis, as well as choosing the most appropriate methods for further research (Yin 1994). Section 5.2 explains the framework and the themes for guiding the field research, while Section 5.3 addresses the methods that have been applied in the study.

5.2   CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE GENERATION OF EMPIRICAL MATERIAL

Chapter two suggested that IM, IS and ICT strategies could be related in a hierarchical (Figure 2-7) as well as in a dynamic circular way (Figure 2-8). Chapter three identified the SIMToNs as potential strategic focus themes for IM in NNGOs. Considering them crucial for the NNGO's mission and business processes, they were added on top of the perceived strategy formation hierarchy (Figure 3-4). Chapter four then argued that the initially hierarchical seeming relation between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation is likely to be more of a simultaneous, dynamic and less hierarchical nature, (also taking Figure 2-8 into consideration) where the SIMToNs could play a focal role and thus saw the hierarchy collapsed into a single layer (Figure 4-7), where IM-, IS- and ICT strategies influence each other and are influenced by the SIMToNs. The sequence of these considerations is depicted by Figure 5-1 below.
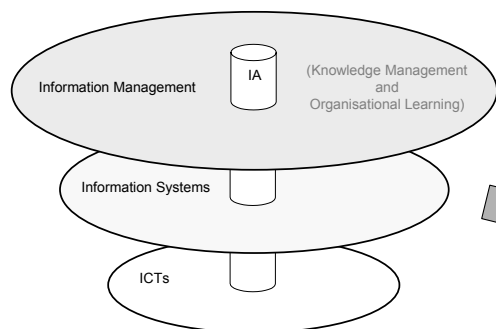
Figure 2-7: Theoretical relationship between IM, IS, ICTs and IA
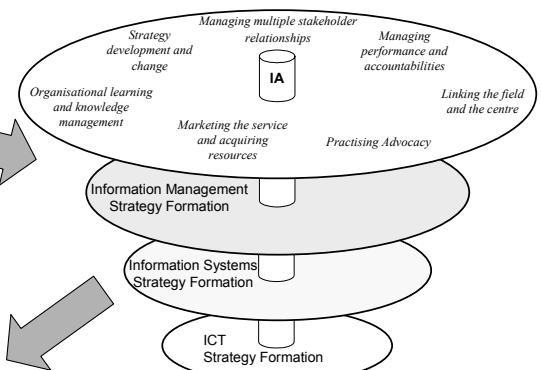
Figure 3-4: SIMToNs as key focus of IM strategy formation in NNGOs
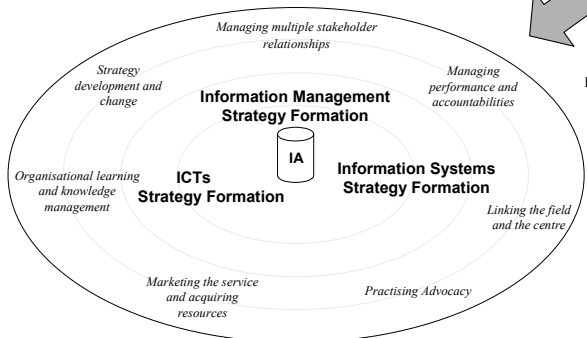
Figure 4-7: Simultaneous, interactive IM strategy formation with focus on the SIMToNs (Pancake model)

Figure 5-1: IM Strategy formation hierachy 'collapsed'

The review of IM strategy concepts in Chapter four has generated the core-periphery-planning-learning framework in Figure 4-8. When this framework is combined with the view of interactive and interdependent IM-, IS- and ICT strategy formation, which are aligned by the IA (Figure 5-1), then the theoretical framework in Figure 5-2 is derived.
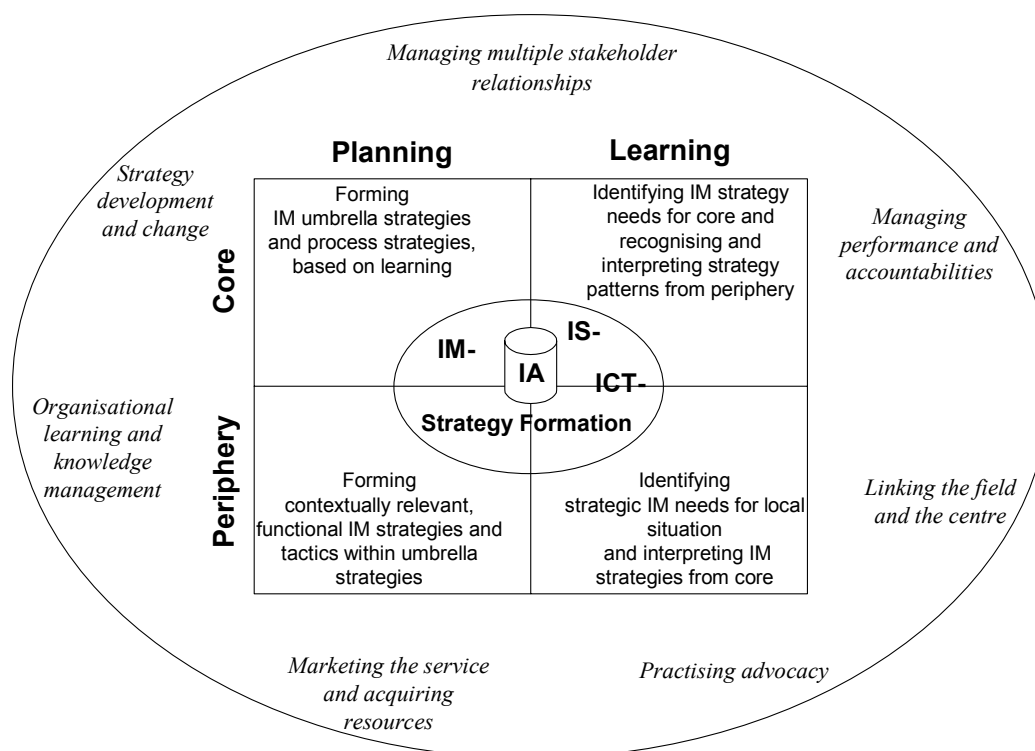
Figure 5-2: Theoretical framework of IM strategy formation in NNGOs

This framework is not supposed to be a model of reality. It is a construct based on my review of the literature in reference to my research paradigm. In order to guide my further research it helps me to select themes and issues relevant for studying and understanding IM strategy formation in Helvetas and for addressing the research questions. Since the framework is meant to enhance and thus narrow my focus, it seems very important (reminded by Laing's (undated) quotation) to remain conscious and open for experiences (while interacting with Helvetas), that lie beyond what the framework suggests and that may significantly further contribute to the understanding of IM strategy formation in NNGOs.

Themes, issues and sub-research questions

IM strategies in NNGOs are likely to be formed by a combination of deliberate planning as well as through emerging patterns involving the core and the periphery. From the framework in Figure 5-2 the following themes of relevance can be distilled (Table 5-1).

Table 5-1: Themes of relevance for IM strategy formation research in NNGOs

	Focussing on the core		**Focussing on the periphery**
TC1	The contribution to IM strategy formation from the core	TP1	The contribution to IM strategy formation from the periphery
TC2	Planning at the core	TP2	Planning at the periphery
TC3	Learning at the core	TP3	Learning at the periphery
TC4	Extent to which the SIMToNs have been considered at the core	TP4	Extent to which the SIMToNs have been considered at the periphery
TC5	Relationship between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation at the core	TP5	Relationship between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation at the periphery
TC6	The role of IA at the core	TP6	The role of IA at the periphery
TC7	The effect of the IM strategy formation on the core	TP7	The effect of the IM strategy formation on the periphery

Most of the issues and sub-research questions identified at the end of Chapters two, three and four are related to above themes of relevance as shown in Table 5-2. Those, which are not related, are treated as additional issues of relevance. These themes, issues and research questions identified so far will guide me in the generation of empirical material from the core as well as from the periphery of Helvetas. They will also be of relevance later for the analysis of findings. While the issues and questions will drive the discussion on and interpretation of empirical material (in Chapters six and seven) all questions compiled in Table 5-2 will be revisited in the concluding Chapter eight.

Table 5-2: Issues of relevance and sub-research questions

Chapter two	i1	To what extent are NNGOs making efforts to create awareness across the organisation on the issues: IM, IA, KM, OL, IS, ICT?	TC/TP 2,3,5,6
	i2	Who within the NNGO is involved in a respective discussion on IM ?	TC/TP 2,3
	i3	Do NNGOs take a more technology- or more human-centred approach to their ISs and IM?	Additional issue
	i4	Do NNGOs take a tactical (i.e. departmental) or a strategic approach to ISs?	TC/TP 2
	i5	To what extent is the IA mapped?	TC/TP 2, 6
	i6	Who is concerned with the planning of IA?	TC/TP 6
	i7	Where is the balance of emphasis for NNGOs between management of information, knowledge and learning?	Additional issue
Chapter three	i8	To what extent have the seven SIMToNs been considered in the strategy formation process?	TC/TP 4
	i9	To what extent have the potential benefits and problems of ICTs been considered in the strategy formation process?	Additional issue
Chapter four	i10	To what extent have present pattern of IM strategy been identified (e.g. through mapping of IM processes)?	TC/TP 3
	i11	Is the IM strategy formation guided more by planning or by existing pattern? More planned or more emergent?	TC/TP 2,3
	i12	What has been the contribution to IM strategy formation, by core and by periphery?	TC/TP 1
	i13	How have organisational structures, processes and systems affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?	TC/TP 2,3
	i14	How have people and organisational culture affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?	TC/TP 2,3
	i15	How has the leadership affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?	TC/TP 2,3
	i16	How has the technology affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?	TC/TP 2,3,5
	i17	How has the external environment affected the planning as well as the learning, at the core as well as at the periphery?	TC/TP 2,3
	i18	How has IM strategy formation been affected by IS and ICT strategies?	TC/TP 5
	i19	How have ICT strategies been affected by IM and IS strategies?	TC/TP 5
	i20	Have core, umbrella strategies been formed? How?	TC/TP 2,3,5
	i21	Who has been involved in IM strategy formation and implementation at the core and periphery?	TC/TP 2,3
	i22	Who is involved in facilitation of IM strategy formation processes?	TC/TP 2,3
	i23	How have the local IM needs (e.g. at FO, Programme, Project level) been taken into consideration?	TC/TP 2,3,7
	i24	To what extent have OL, KM and IM strategy formation been institutionalised?	Additional issue

5.3   METHODS APPLIED FOR EXPLORING IM STRATEGY FORMATION IN HELVETAS

For exploring IM strategy formation in Helvetas the following methods were chosen.

5.3.1   Review of literature

IM strategy formation in NNGOs is hardly addressed in the literature. Accordingly I had to depend on literature that touches upon the three areas of IM/IS/ICT, organisational strategies, and NGO management and development studies. I have selected literature which appears to be sufficiently critical towards the effects of IS, ICT on organisations, critical towards management and IM in NGOs and critical on strategy formation and decision making, in order to understand conventional thinking as well as the critique of it in the three areas. The results of this effort are reflected in the Chapters two to five.

5.3.2   Study of organisational documents (of Helvetas)

Already during the early planning stage of my research I requested my main reference person in Helvetas, Mr. Marc Steinlin (Programme Coordinator Knowledge Sharing) for relevant organisational documents. He supplied me with a series of working papers and presentations that were made on the subject of KM/IM strategy formation and he continued to keep me updated with new versions. The Helvetas 'Information Pack' ordered via Internet provided useful material on the organisation in general, its guiding philosophies and strategies. Other key sources for me were www.helvetas.ch and www.helvetasnepal.org.np. The former provided more information and documents on Helvetas' development mission and strategies as well as on initiatives regarding ICTs in development and KM, while the latter gave a good overview on the Helvetas Nepal Country Programme and its projects. On my request, Ms. Esther Oettli (Head of Foreign Department) sent me several conference papers presented at the Swiss Meeting on Global Knowledge Sharing, and other related information regarding the use of GIS in Helvetas projects. From my former work in Nepal I still had the 'Learning Through Monitoring' strategy

paper (Helvetas-Nepal 1998) of the Nepal Country Programme. Those of the information sources that are cited in the text are included in the list of references.

The study of all these items of information helped me to familiarise myself with Helvetas' IM and IM strategy processes prior to conducting interviews with Helvetas personnel.

5.3.3   Generation of empirical material

Studying relevant theories was helpful for guiding my exploration and interpreting empirical material. It reflects the rationality aspects of this research but needs to be complemented with a reality aspect. The reality aspect is provided by the generation of empirical material on IM strategy formation in Helvetas. In order to address the research themes and issues that evolved from the theoretical part of the study, empirical material from the core as well as from the periphery needed to be generated. I decided to visit Helvetas HO in Zurich Switzerland to conduct face-to-face interviews with participants relevant to the IM strategy formation process.

Interviews with participants from the periphery (Helvetas Country Programmes in the South) had necessarily to be conducted by email only. And here again in order to gain sufficient depth, I choose to work only with ex-colleagues of mine in the Country Programme in Nepal, instead of dividing my attention and efforts across several 'Helvetas countries', which is obviously one of the limitations of this research. Appendix [1] gives an overview of the interviews and communications with participants..

Semi structured face-to-face interviews

Between 2002-06-07 and 2002-06-13, I interviewed face-to-face Mr. Werner Külling (Secretary General), Ms. Esther Oettli (Head of Foreign Department), Mr. Marc Steinlin (Programme Co-ordinator Knowledge Sharing), Mr. Franz Gähwiler (Programme Coordinator Nepal and Head of Technical Advisory Group Rural Infrastructure) and Mr. Ruedi Düscher (ICT Manager)

(Appendix [1]). I knew all participants except Franz Gähwiler from my previous work with Helvetas. Their position in the organisation is shown in Figure 5-3.

Each interview lasted for at least one hour, while I talked with Marc Steinlin twice for over two hours and also used an extended set of questions here. All participants agreed that I record the talks and use the information given by them for the purpose of my research, provided that Helvetas received a copy of my paper.

The interviews were based on guiding questions (see Appendix [2]), through which the themes (Table 5-1) and issues (Table 5-2) were explored. Participants were encouraged to express any other additional issues that they found relevant. Also, sometimes, to explore several perspectives, a participant was asked to comment on points previously raised by another interviewee or from the field. All interviews were summarised in respective forms (see two samples in Appendix [3]) and the tape recordings copied to CD for later reference.
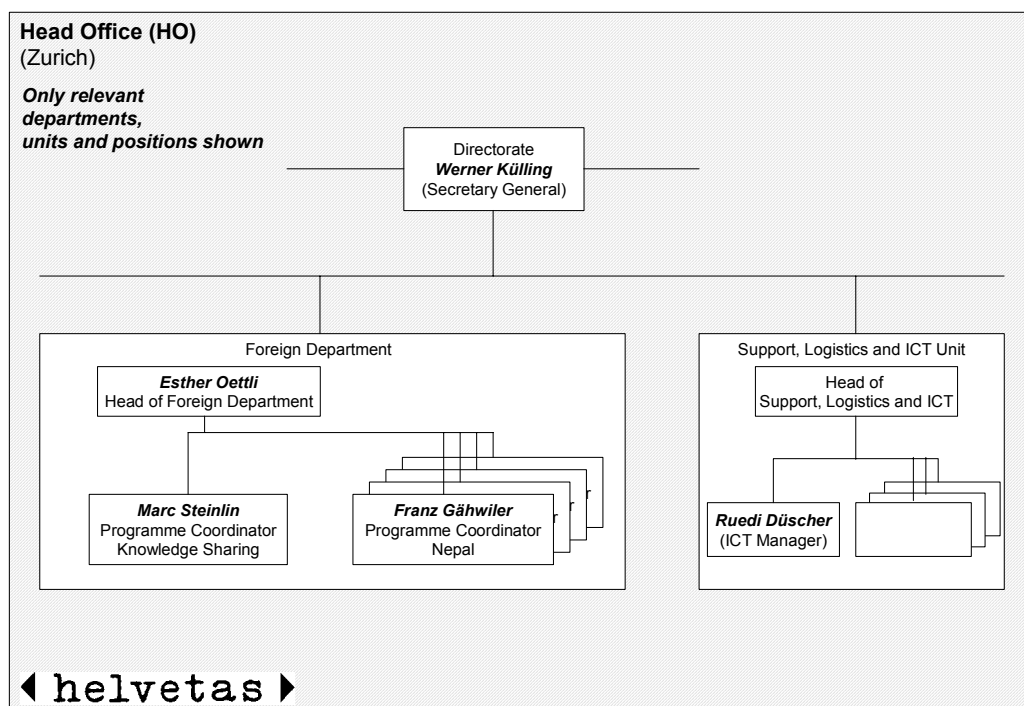
Figure 5-3: Position of participants from Helvetas HO

Electronic interviews with open-ended questions

Mr. Neil Walton (Programme Director, Helvetas Nepal), Mr. Adhir Sharma (Senior Programme Officer) and Mr. Sudhir Dhungel (Computer Services and MIS Officer) all from the Helvetas Nepal Programme Coordination Office in Kathmandu, offered their cooperation in my research. Since I wanted input still deeper from the field, from the project level, I also asked for the participation of two project managers. Mr. Tulsi Nepal, Regional Programme Coordinator of the Trail Bridge Sub-Sector Project (TBSSP), accepted my request, as did Mr. Achyut Luitel (presently Deputy Team Leader of the DfID funded RAP Project), who participated in his capacity as Ex-Team Leader of the Self Reliant Drinking Water Support Programme (SRWSP) and the Water Resources Management Project (WARM-P). Figure 5-4 shows the position of all participants from Helvetas Nepal.

They were sent by email a set of open-ended questions preceded by a brief introduction into the study (Appendix [4]). Most of them responded before my visit to HO. Their replies, in the light of the interviews in Zurich prompted for some more exploration and all except Mr. Dhungel were requested to answer another set of questions. Also, Mr. Steinlin and Mr. Gähwiler of the HO were asked another round of questions for clarification by email.
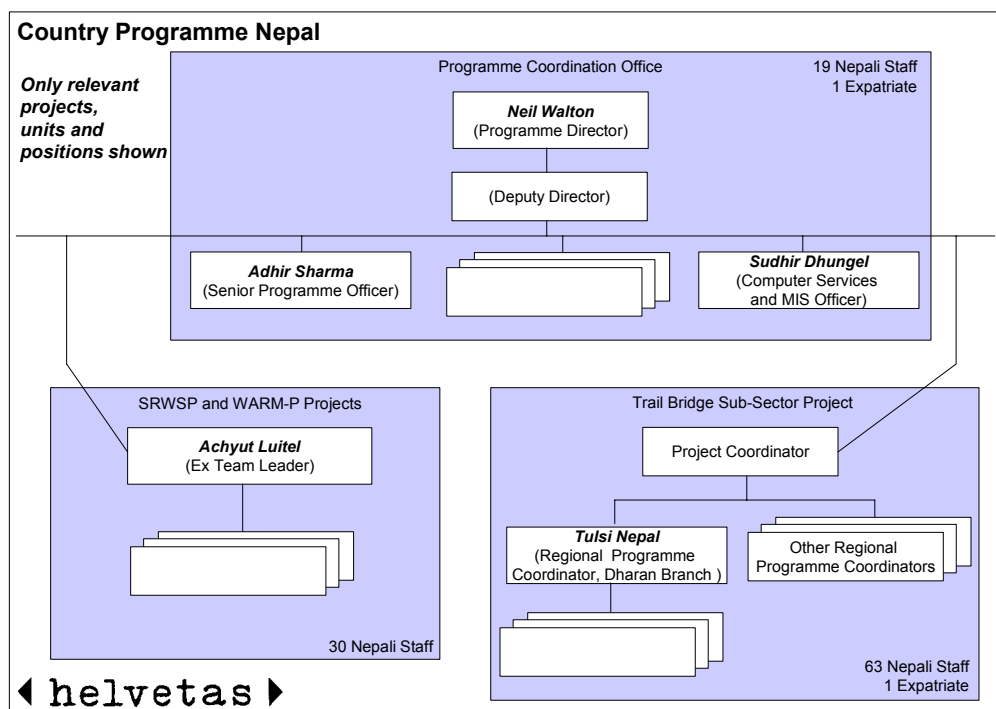
Figure 5-4: Position of participants from Helvetas Nepal

5.3.4   Analysis of the findings

Before attempting to analyse and interpret the findings in Chapter seven, Helvetas and its IM strategy formation process are briefly described in Chapter six. The analysis then addresses the themes derived from the research model as well as additional issues that emerged from the field research. It attempts to identify significant and relevant concerns and issues, conceptual relationships and conceptual tensions, in order to give some more insight into IM strategy formation particularly in Helvetas and in NNGOs in general.

Chapter six was sent to Marc Steinlin, with the request for checking if there were any factual errors in the description of the organisation and the description of IM strategy formation processes. He "..didn't find any major bugs [and gave] just some tiny remarks" (<Steinlin> 2002a), which I appreciated and accordingly updated the Chapter. This seems to be a sign that I have got quite to the roots at least of his reality regarding IM strategy formation in Helvetas.

5.4   CONCLUSIONS

The significance of this Chapter lies in its linking of several aspects of the research. Firstly, it combines considerations from three theoretical areas to form a perspective for approaching the exploration of reality in Helvetas. Secondly, it links the generation of empirical material with contemporary theoretical concepts. Thirdly, it transcends from the theoretical realms into the generation of empirical material, in terms of content and process. Sections 5.1 and 5.2 were written before the field research while from Section 5.3 onwards the writing is influenced by my experience of the field research. From this point on the reader may notice a respective shift in my thinking and perspective due to my deeper exposure to the reality in Helvetas. Finally, the Chapter reveals the strength of my approach, which is the triangulation of methods (literature review; analysis of organisational documents, interviews) and sources (HO – field; management – ICT personnel). This triangulation was however not meant to verify my data, which would be a positivist approach. It was intended to deepen my credibility among the participants (which encouraged critical discussion) as well as to enhance the interpretation of complex, messy reality through another multi-perspective view.

CHAPTER 6:
Information Management Strategy Formation in Helvetas

"Development must be sustainable. This means that from the very start it must treat with great care - or must repair - that on which it depends: natural resources and energies as well as human creativity and imagination. Both our environment and our inner dimension need to be treated with special care, because together they are fundamental to development. We have only begun to realize just how much there remains to be learned in this regard.

Development and sustainability belong together. In order for human beings to develop, not only here and now but tomorrow and everywhere, sustainability must be assured. And the reverse is true as well: if the community of nations wants to assure sustainability today, all human beings must have the chance to develop. This applies to society, the economy, science, as well as to those forces inside us that sustain our human ability to think and act creatively.

Seen from this perspective, Helvetas regards development cooperation not only as a commitment towards the countries of the South, but in equal measure as an opportunity for us to learn for our own future. "

(Helvetas 1996a:16)

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As Helvetas has been evolving as a development organisation, so has its information management. Right now Helvetas is passing through a phase where information management seems to be more important than ever for influencing the forces that impact on sustainable development. This is likely to affect the organisation at the HO and at the Country Programme level as well as all the stakeholders.

Section 6.2 describes briefly the organisation in general; the Head Office, representing the core, and the Country Programme in Nepal, which represents the periphery in my research[7]. From now

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[7] This Section is based on information obtained from the documentation mentioned in Subsection 5.3.2 and from the interviews with Helvetas personnel.

onwards Helvetas is addressed as <h> as in most organisational documents. The process of IM strategy formation as understood from the interviews with <h> colleagues at the HO and in Nepal and from <h> documentation is then presented in Section 6.3, before drawing some conclusions on the findings. Also, all interviewees will now be referenced with <> around their names (e.g. <Steinlin>) to distinguish them from references to literature.

6.2 THE ORGANISATION

Helvetas was founded in 1955 as the first private Swiss development organisation and as such had a pioneering role for other Swiss organisations working in international development aid. <h> strives to contribute to the improvement of living conditions of economically and socially disadvantaged people in developing countries. Currently <h> works in 19 countries in Asia, Africa and Latin-America, mostly together with local partners for sustainable development, focussing on the needs of the poor majority in those countries. The key working areas are 'Infrastructure in Rural Areas', 'Sustainable Use of Natural Resources' and 'Education and Culture' (Figure 6-1) plus a new area that was recently added: 'Civil Society and the State'.
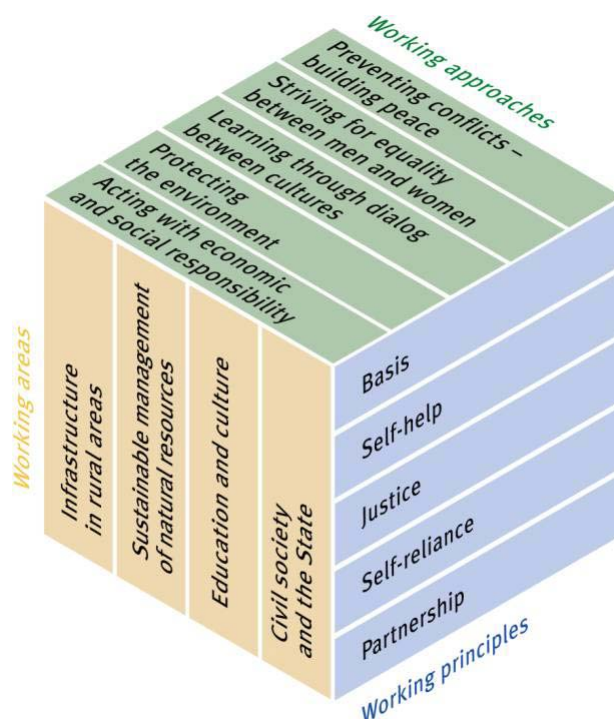
Figure 6-1: Strategy Cube of Helvetas

In the partner countries <h> has approximately 400 local collaborators and 50 Swiss personnel. The 45 employees in Switzerland run the HO in Zurich and two Branch offices, in the French and Italian speaking Regions, and are working with Regional Groups to promote awareness, engagement, solidarity and contribution of the Swiss public regarding the development of the countries of the South and East (Figure 6-2). Funds for the execution of activities are raised by memberships, donations, and marketing of Fair Trade products from developing countries, supplemented by government funds and income from projects executed under contracts (see Appendix [5]). At present, <h> has about 33,000 members and 40,000 supporters in Switzerland.
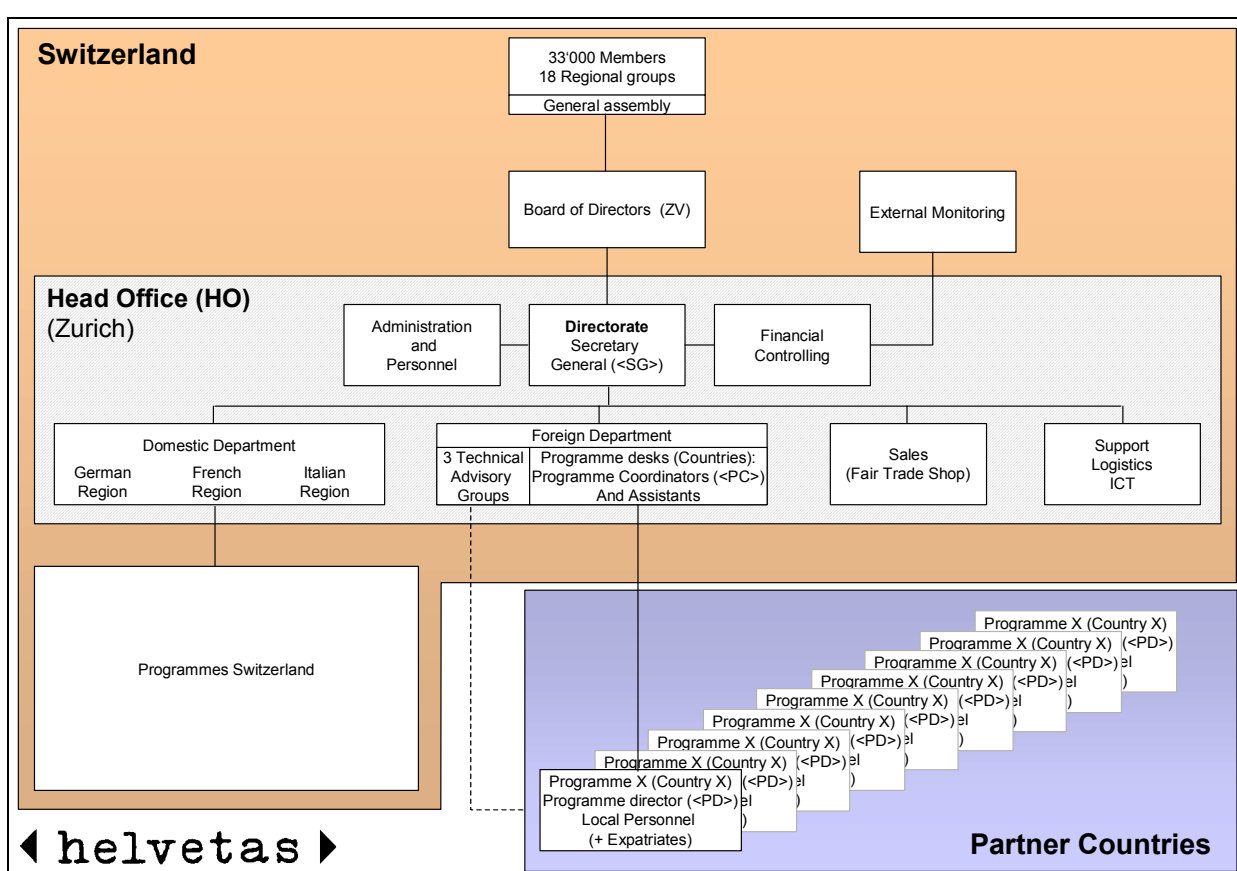
Figure 6-2: Organisational Structure of Helvetas (adapted from Helvetas 2002a:2; Steinlin 2002b:3)

<h>'s work in the four areas is guided by principles and approaches (Figure 6-1) (Helvetas 1996a; Helvetas 1996b; Helvetas 1996c), which form the umbrella strategy for all the diverse projects in the various countries.

Country Programme Nepal – the periphery

Each Country Programme is headed locally by an expatriate Programme Director (<PD>), who is supported by a team of local professionals and if necessary by other expatriates. <h> Nepal is one of the biggest <h> Country Programmes and is currently employing 146 local collaborators, who run the seven programmes in the four working areas across the country. The number of expatriates, holding leadership or specialist positions in Nepal has declined from more than nine in 1990 (Helvetas-Nepal 2002) to presently five including the <PD>.
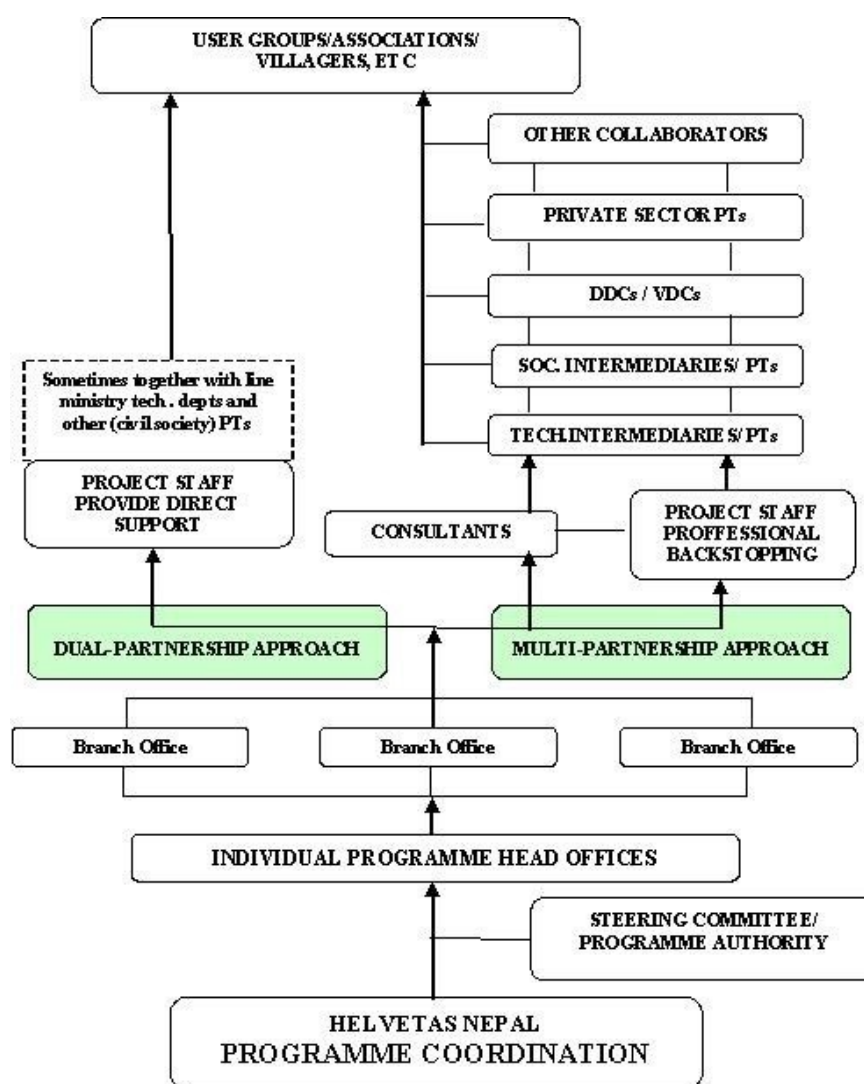
Figure 6-3: Helvetas Nepal Programme structure (www.helvetasnepal.org.np)

The increasing reliance on local potential is also reflected in the shift from service provision and direct implementation (called dual partnership in <h>) towards capacity building of and engaging more local NGOs and the private sector as partners for development (called multiple partnership in <h>) (Figure 6-3). Whereas in the past <h> implemented mainly own projects and programmes in dual or multiple partnership it now increasingly manages projects (that are in line with its philosophy, Figure 6-1) for a variety of donors and also provides experienced local and expatriate collaborators to partner programmes like the DfID funded Rural Access Programme (<RAP>).

Head Office – the core

In the HO each Country Programme is looked after by a Programme Coordinator (<PC>) and their assistants (Figure 6-2). The Technical Advisory Groups (<TAG>) for each of the key working areas provide professional resources for programmes and projects. The Foreign Department is responsible for coordinating, guiding and monitoring the foreign programmes as per <h> philosophy (Helvetas 1996b) and strategy (Figure 6-1) (Helvetas 1996c), as well as for acquisition of new projects and reporting to donors. The Domestic Department works together with members and regional groups for advocacy, solidarity and fair trade as well as to promote openness towards the cultural richness of the countries of the South. It is responsible for fundraising and member services as well as information and media work, publishing the magazine 'Partnerschaft', and organising educational and cultural events.

The Foreign and Domestic Departments cooperate closely together in order to pursue both their missions, which <h> considers as the two sides of the same coin. The sales unit (with Fair Trade Shop) interacts intensively with both departments for design, procurement and marketing of products, while the 'Support, Logistics and ICT' unit provides services to HO as well as to Country Programmes (on demand). Human and financial resources are managed by the two respective units in cooperation with all other parts of the organisation. The Secretary General (<SG>) leads <h> and is accountable to the board of directors, donors and members.

The coordination of <h>'s foreign and domestic work depends very much on effective management of information. Appropriate information must flow in all directions and connect a

variety of stakeholders for the purpose of learning and planning, at the core and the periphery, which is echoed by the quotation opening this Chapter. How is this facilitated?

6.3   INFORMATION MANAGEMENT STRATEGY FORMATION PROCESSES IN HELVETAS

To understand the interpretation of findings of my field research, presented in the next Chapter, the reader needs some orientation on the key IM strategy formation processes that took place in <h>. This Section aims to provide a respective overview.

When asked, "what constitutes in your opinion the IM strategy of <h>" participants came forward with quite different views. In the HO all participants pointed to the present KM strategy effort (Appendix [6]). The three Nepali programme staff regarded the 'Learning Through Monitoring (<LTM>)' concept developed by <h> Nepal (Helvetas-Nepal 1998) as the key IM strategy element (<Luitel> 2002a; <Nepal> 2002a; <Sharma> 2002b), while the <PD> had a more holistic view. He saw <LTM> as one aspect of IM, the formal and informal procedures that regulated information flows between <h> Nepal staff, stakeholders, projects and the HO as another one, and the HO's KM initiative as a third aspect (<Walton> 2002). The Computer Services and MIS Officer regarded the concepts on maintenance of ICT infrastructure (including respective HRM) in <h> Nepal as the IM strategy (<Dhungel> 2002).

This diversity of views on IM strategy in <h> is not surprising, as it reflects the blurred borders between information and knowledge as well as between IM, IS and ICT strategies which were discussed in Chapter two and four. It also reveals a context specific view on IM strategy and shows the different concerns of each participant. While the programme coordinators are strongly concerned with interfacing with the target communities for monitoring and learning, the <PD> links and integrates <h> Nepal, the stakeholders and the HO. The Nepali MIS officer focuses on enabling a supportive infrastructure appropriate for the local context. The HO intends to better utilise all the different knowledge available in <h> for improving advocacy, acquisition of new projects, enhancing effectiveness of development efforts and strengthening sustainability.

Information has always been managed and there have always been formal and informal IM strategies (plans and patterns) as products of IM strategy formation processes in <h>. Since

2000, however <h> is highly concerned with improving IM/KM through an HO led KM strategy effort outlined in the strategy document 'Helvetas Strategy Knowledge Sharing, V6 (25/06/02)'.

That paper first displays the anticipated, ideal knowledge flows in the Helvetas Knowledge Network (Figure 6-4) and then looks at reality, the unsatisfying situation that existed before the recent KM strategy formation effort (Appendix [6]:7). It is interesting to notice here that this diagram is rather similar to my diagram in the beginning of Chapter three, which formed the foundation for screening the complexity of information flows as well as relationships and accountabilities in NNGOs, and which led to the identification of the SIMToNs. Such a matching of theoretical with practitioners' views on the context of the NNGO sector thus indicates a good starting point for further exploration.
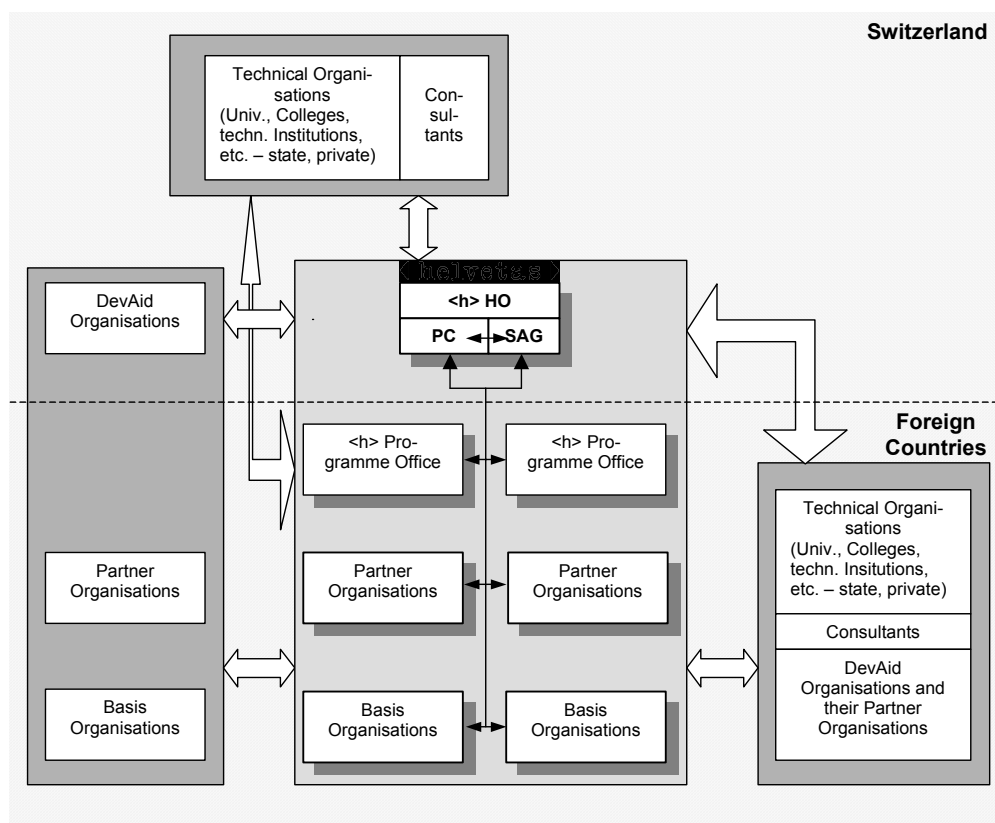
Figure 6-4: The Helvetas Knowledge Network (Appendix [6]:7)

The strategy paper explains that the actual knowledge network was not effective enough. There was a lack of knowledge exchange between field and HO, among the field offices, and between <h> and external institutions. Also, since the <PCs> were mainly geographically oriented there

was insufficient exchange between them. The Technical Advisory Groups (<TAG>) (in Figure 6-4 called SAG) did not collect, assess and use the knowledge in the programmes systematically enough. Too often, external consultants were engaged instead of making use of relevant in-house competence that was available, somewhere in <h>. And the acquired know-how of the external consultants and partners was not sufficiently transferred back to <h>. While ideas for improvement were around and had resulted in occasional activities and trials (i.e. the publication of best practice in sustainable community drinking water supply (Leermakers 2000)) there was hardly any strategic planning and no holistic concept on IM and KM (<Steinlin> 2002b).

Those barriers to effective information and knowledge sharing, highlighted in the strategy document, were also mentioned by all participants at HO. The participants in Nepal did not observe any shortcomings regarding IM in their part of the organisation and did not express a lack of IM between HO and Nepal. They however stressed a need for improving especially information exchange between <h> countries, preferably face to face, to overcome the present star configuration where most information was flowing via the HO, resulting there in information overload and a bottleneck effect (Figure 6-5).
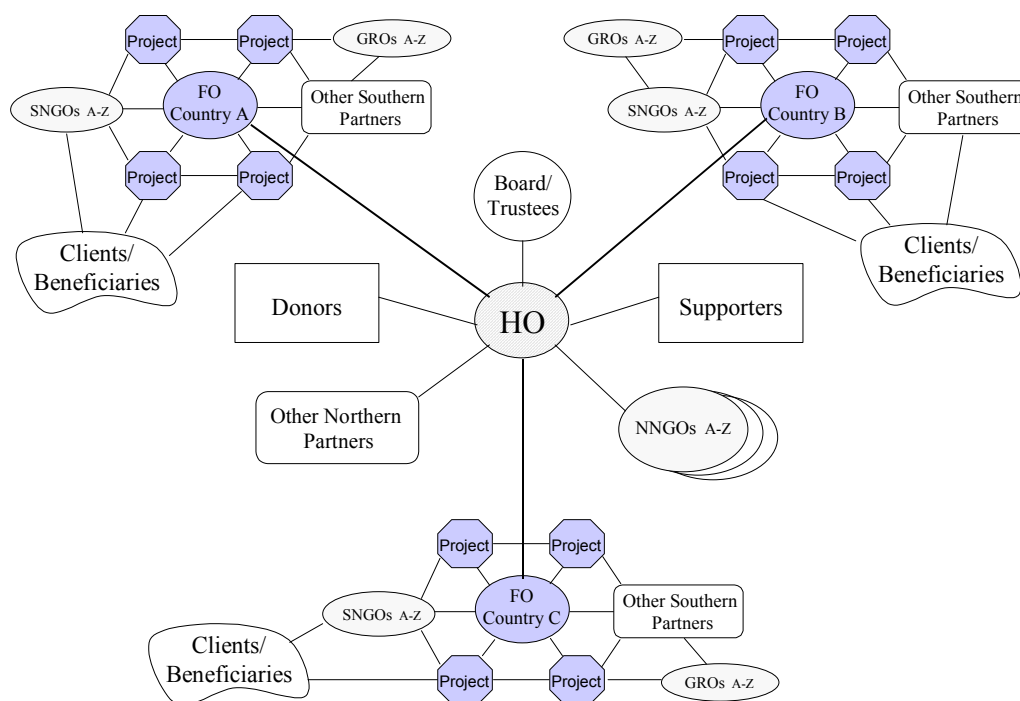
Figure 6-5: Actual current knowledge flows in <h> (before recent KM strategy implementation)

The present IM/KM strategy process aims to overcome these barriers, to open up information flows and to transform <h> into the envisioned learning organisation. To achieve that relevant KM concepts, KM tools and action plans are presented in the strategy paper.

From my interviews I constructed the timeline of events (mostly informed by <Steinlin> 2002b) regarding the recent KM strategy formation (Figure 6-6).

Year 2000	**Year 2001**	**Year 2002**
January: HO internal (Foreign Dept) Seminar in Ruedlingen; Formation of KM task force (<WGKM>)	*January:* Throughout 2001 intensive work on KM strategy (coordinated by Marc Steinlin)	
March: Marc Steinlin starts at <h> as Programme Coordinator Knowledge Sharing	*March*: <h> organises KM conference in Bern (Swiss meeting on Global Knowledge Sharing)	*March*: Concept development of Thematic conferences; First pilot CoP
June: Marc Steinlin participates in Bellanet KM conference; Virtual electronic forum on ICTs for development (<h> intern, world wide)	*June*: First attempt to decide on a KM strategy	*June*: Helvetas Strategy Knowledge Sharing (Version 6), concepts and action plan
August: <PD> Seminar in Ruedlingen expresses need for KM strategy	*September*: Preparation of specifications and TOR for Intranet implementation; Call for Offers	*Planned*: First baseline study of KM practices in <h>
		Start of First Thematic conference
Novmeber: Board of Directors is informed about KM initiative; discusses and encourages to continue	*December*: Approval of KM strategy by Directorate and by "Leitender Ausschuss"; Contract with Intranet Implementer, System provider	

Figure 6-6: Timeline of relevant events regarding <h>'s IM/KM strategy formation

While I did not sense any disagreement about sequence and events that contributed to the process, there were divergent opinions on whether the process was more planned or more emergent. This could also reflect participants' level of involvement. Those who have been less involved tend to see it more as emergent. <Oettli>, Head of Foreign Department sees the processes as very much planned because she has kind of initiated it in 1999, formed the first task force the Working Group on KM (<WGKM>) and persistently spread her ideas on KM throughout <h> (<Oettli> 2002).

When <Steinlin> joined <h> as Programme Coordinator Knowledge Sharing he brought relevant concepts from the corporate sector into the <WGKM> and interchanged views with external KM initiatives (Bellanet, TearFund). The <PD> seminar in August 2000 (Helvetas 2000) dealt in depth with IM/KM issues in <h> and expressed a need from the field for a corporate KM strategy. <Steinlin> (2002b) explains that although there was consensus among the <PDs> and a commitment for better IM and KM it were more those who were aware and enthusiastic about ICT among the <PDs> who contributed afterwards. The level of ICT involved in the ideas that were floated, actually caused some colleagues to feel overburdened and hampered their potentially valuable participation in the strategy development according to <Gähwiler> (2002a). <Oettli> (2002) sees the lack of enthusiasm from some colleagues not so much related to demanding ICT knowledge but more to the inevitable change of culture regarding information and knowledge sharing and power positions. At present expatriate collaborators who maintain good private networks have powerful access to knowledge and an advantage over most of their local colleagues. Their advantage might disappear, when in the long run everyone has access to the wider <h> public network (ibid.). The negative effects of this legacy structure and culture, where expatriates formed the interface between field and HO and controlled information exchange, has independently been reported also from the field (<Nepal> 2002b). Giving local collaborators equal access to information resources as well as the opportunity to share their know-how and concerns has been the key motive for <Oettli>'s (2002) persistent efforts. She believes this will not only contribute to the strengthening of local competence and confidence, but also enhance internal equality and partnership as a strong foundation for corporate identity, organisational culture and overall performance (ibid).

The <WGKM> consists of HO staff only. How have colleagues in the field contributed to the strategy formation? During the interviews HO members categorised colleagues in the field into innovators, early-adopters, late-movers and resisters. In those countries where <PDs> were

personally interested in ICTs there was naturally a strong resonance or even a demand for a faster pace (<Oettli> 2002; <Steinlin> 2002c). While some <PDs> praise ICTs for development, like using GIS for participatory decision-making in communities in Cameroon (Helvetas 2001) others are sceptical and prefer IM by human interaction. Whatever their views and priorities, <PDs> have a great influence on the organisational culture of a Country Programme. This is obvious in the case of Nepal, where the <PD>'s strong concern for effective and sustainable community development, has led to the development of the comprehensive Learning Through Monitoring (<LTM>) strategy concepts. This concept paper is founded on the insight that "It is increasingly understood that planning and design of programmes is not as important as what is communicated, how this is communicated and most importantly what is learned and transferred into actions." (Helvetas-Nepal 1998). It consists of a framework that links a project's mission, objectives and actions with context and monitoring approaches (taking the <h> strategy cube into consideration) and is still being further developed and simplified to make it more useful for local partner organisations. <LTM> is the key IM/KM system of <h> Nepal's development work and provides the information architecture for the management of projects as well as for the flow of information and knowledge from the grassroots upwards into the organisation. This community focus is also expressed by putting the villagers on the top in <h> Nepal's organigram (Figure 6-3). Thus, while Nepal <PD>, <Walton> (2002) welcomes strategies for better knowledge sharing between field, field and centre he is sceptical regarding the overvaluing of ICT. "Helvetas field staff should be practitioners. We will create a new tool which all will enjoy. I am not convinced the poor will benefit from it though."(<Walton> 2002:Q18). This shows the diversity in <h> and also indicates the challenge to integrate those very diverse views into an appropriate IM strategy.

Before the first concepts were drafted in the HO all collaborators were invited to participate in a virtual electronic forum to elaborate on ICTs in development including relevant IM and KM issues (in June 2000). The resulting concept papers were circulated to selected <PDs> only. Meanwhile, the Swiss Meeting on Global Knowledge Sharing and ICT was organised by <h> in Bern, March 2001. It provided ideas and perspectives from partners and peers and profiled <h> as an organisation not only dedicated to pioneer new approaches for sustainable community development in the South but simultaneously working on the internal transformation of <h> into a true learning organisation. The latter is even written into the <h> policy: "Helvetas as development project. The organization of Helvetas structures and working processes is

determined by the same principles that govern its project work. Especially emphasized are the self-reliance of the various Helvetas organs, offices and staff, parallel with the practice of partnership on the basis of critical dialog."(Helvetas 1996b:15)

While the <WGKM> finalised the specifications for the setting up and hosting of the intranet, the field offices continued working on their own priorities and were little consulted and informed. This is what <Steinlin> (2002c) regrets and regards as a major weakness in the process, that the field has not been more consulted, not more encouraged to contribute and that no formal channels for input from the field had been created. The familiar dilemma, of high workload and conflicting priorities is seen to have prevented more intensive interaction and information exchange. <Oettli> commented on this shortcoming, that had the new KM system been already in place, the whole strategy formation process would have been very different, more participative and probably more effective (<Oettli> 2002). This seems to be supported by the good experiences in the recent sector strategy formation effort, which already made use of some of the new infrastructure and concepts, especially allowing local collaborators to be more directly engaged and contribute better.

In December 2001 the preliminary IM strategy concept and the Intranet was approved by the directorate and the "Leitender Ausschuss" (committee of all heads of departments). Then, the phase-wise commissioning of the Intranet (implementation and hosting outsourced) followed, which allowed the piloting of the first Communities of Practice (CoPs) in March 2002. Such prototyping was meant to identify conceptual and operational problems but more so, to give <h> colleagues a taste and stimulate their interest. In June 2002 the latest version of the strategy document (Appendix [6]) was distributed across the organisation, confronting collaborators with concrete action plans and probably triggering reactions that might range from welcoming enthusiasm to worry and fear. It is however this wealth of diversity and the wide range of knowledge, skills and conflicting views among collaborators, that <h> appreciates and wants to better utilise by the KM concepts, en route to a true learning organisation. HO regards the present concept as an umbrella strategy, which needs to be locally interpreted according to relevant contexts. It is now expected to trigger and facilitate a more holistic, healthy and critical IM strategy formation process, with intensified and more contribution from all parts of the organisation (<Gähwiler> 2002b; <Steinlin> 2002c).

6.4 CONCLUSIONS

The rapidly changing environment, the changing roles of Development NGOs and an increased awareness of the importance of information have led <h> to embark on a major strategic journey. This journey of IM and KM strategy formation seems to bring about far reaching changes. Because of their very different contexts, priorities and roles, the HO and the field do naturally have also different agendas regarding IM and KM strategies, which are going to affect the strategy formation in certain ways. The next Chapter looks into what influences the IM strategy formation processes, how they in turn affect the organisation and what can be learned from those dynamic developments.

CHAPTER 7:
Analysis and Interpretation of the IM Strategy Formation Process
in Helvetas

"Often I wonder, where we [Helvetas] should put our priorities. Poverty seems to be increasing day by day. And sometimes I am quite critical and ask myself whether we are not investing too much money, brain and material into this field [KM], and are working just for our own interest while forgetting the reality in the field."

(<Külling> 2002)

7.1   INTRODUCTION

The theoretical Chapter three suggested information management is of critical importance for NNGOs, which seems to be supported by my findings, described in the previous Chapter. IM strategy formation processes, like the one that <h> is presently engaged in, however cost money and energy. Additionally, they may not meet the immediate priorities of certain parts of the organisation, which can cause tensions and conflicts. The dilemma expressed by Secretary General, Werner Külling is a severe one, but there are also other, subtler, conceptual tensions that affect the IM strategy formation in Helvetas. Yet, to understand the IM strategy formation process in <h> in its whole complexity is beyond the scope of this paper. Accepting this, the analysis attempts to distil - by means of my research framework - major conceptual issues and tensions that are relevant and significant in the strategy process (Sections 7.2 – 7.7). Those are then summarised in Section 7.8, before concluding the Chapter.

7.2   CONTRIBUTION TO IM STRATEGY FORMATION FROM CORE AND PERIPHERY

The core and the periphery in <h> have contributed in their own ways to the IM strategy formation. The HO being actually the hub for IM in the organisation became increasingly aware that information and knowledge are by far not managed optimally and consequently drives the current IM/KM strategy formation process. The Field contributed to the recent KM efforts by

expressing the need (in the last <PD> conference) to improve sharing of knowledge and to reduce the relative information isolation of <h> countries (Helvetas 2000). This created momentum and generated commitment. Further contributions from the field regarding the present KM strategy process were limited to occasional inputs of interested individuals (mostly <PDs> of the categories innovators and early-adopters), who could rather easily identify themselves with the abstract concepts around ICT enabled IM and KM. The <WGKM> expects quite some contribution from the field in form of feedback, suggestions, critique and creative ideas, once the system will be up and running and can be experienced and tasted (<Steinlin> 2002b).

Interpretation

Phases of IM strategy planning are followed by phases of more emergent contribution, then again planning alternating with emergence (Figure 7-1).
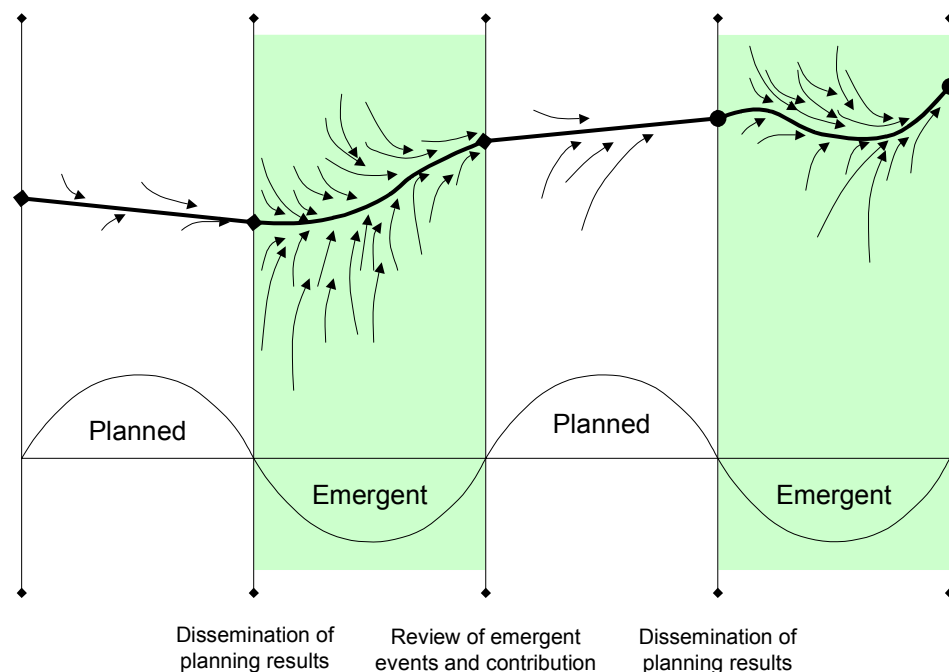
Figure 7-1: Planned - Emergent alternation in IM strategy formation in <h>

During a planning stage many colleagues, especially the action-oriented ones in the field tend not to contribute that much, presumably because for them those IM strategies under scrutiny are such abstract matters. When they however get confronted with outputs of the planning stage in form of intentions, guidelines, action plans or changes to existing systems and practices, 'abstract becomes reality' for them, which triggers reactions. This again creates the input (emergent) into the strategy formation process from all parts of the organisation that are effected.

A significant contribution to <h>'s overall IM strategies was <h> Nepal's development of the <LTM> concept. It represents IM directly related to their immediate stakeholders and the tapping into <h>'s most genuine resource 'the knowledge about the situation at the grassroots' (<Sharma> 2002b). <LTM> also reflects the country programme's effort to integrate and link all the projects in Nepal through an IM strategy and respective information architecture (<Luitel> 2002a). While the planning and development of <LTM> related strongly to <h> Nepal's reality, it seems to be rather abstract for HO, since it has not been acknowledged very much and interpreted by HO as a powerful contribution to <h>'s corporate IM strategy. That <h> Nepal's <LTM> concept did not get recognised more indicates also a lack of lateral information and knowledge flows. <LTM> reflects one of those strategy patterns, which crop up from the 'grassroots' (Mintzberg and McHugh 1985 in Mintzberg 1994:110) and can be very powerful and can effectively serve the whole organisation, when they get recognised as such. They need not only to be recognised but also need to be shared through lateral information flows. <Gähwiler> thinks that the <LTM> strategy concept could considerably help other Country Programmes that are presently struggling with building effective IM systems (2002b). This valuable learning has apparently not yet sufficiently fed into the planning of corporate IM strategies.

7.3   PLANNING AND LEARNING AT THE CORE AND AT THE PERIPHERY

The research framework (Figure 5-2) suggests that IM strategies in NNGOs are formed by learning and planning processes at the core and at the periphery. How both learning and planning have contributed to <h>'s strategy formation is discussed via a few examples, first from the HO, then from the periphery.

Learning at the core.

Regarding the context of information management:

1. There is lack of orientation on what information and knowledge is where, and there is unsatisfying use of existing <h> knowledge;

2. ICTs have lead to an increase in the quantity and speed of information flows. <Külling> thinks that "in the past there was more thorough communication and better reports were produced" (2002:Q4) while now colleagues suffer often from information overload;

Regarding the conditions and needs in the field:

3. The field feels isolated (<Gähwiler> 2002b);

4. Local collaborators' contribution and integration is hampered by prevailing processes, structures and cultures (<Külling> 2002; <Oettli> 2002);

5. The IA must take the reality in the field into consideration, must build on robust Internet technology and allow off-line operation in the field (<Steinlin> 2001; <Steinlin> 2002b);

Regarding external stakeholder requirements:

6. Key donors want to see <h> pioneering into KM (<Steinlin> 2002c);

7. The acquisition of new projects and funds requires better access to internal knowledge resources and an improved organisational profile (<Steinlin> 2002c);

Regarding other organisations:

8. Other organisations' (TearFund, Bellanet) experiences with new IM/KM practices might be in some ways useful for <h>'s strategy formation;

Regarding <h>'s weaknesses:

9. <h> suffers from a narrow focus, since HO and field both tend to look only at their immediate context and not much further (<Gähwiler> 2002b);

Regarding the processes of IM/KM strategy formation:

10. The abstract nature of IM/KM strategy is better communicated by metaphors and visual presentations than only by words (Steinlin 2001b);

11. New IM/KM strategy concepts conflict with existing organisational culture and trigger resistance, which is a painful process, but one that has to be faced (<Külling> 2002; <Oettli> 2002);

12. Some people have to be pushed to adapt to the new requirements (<Külling> 2002).

HO has learned about the general context of information management (1,2), the needs and context of internal (3,4,5) and external (6,7) stakeholders, developments in other organisations (8), shortcomings in <h> (9) and about the process and effects of IM strategy formation (10,11,12). This learning probably emerged during regular business activities and interaction with colleagues, before and during the actual IM strategy initiative. Especially those organised strategic learning events like the <PD> seminar were a particular rich source for mutual learning. Those directly involved in the IM strategy formation process also learned from the process and from colleagues' reaction to the outcomes of the process, which resulted sometimes rather fast in a change of strategy, as illustrated by the example below.

The management of <h>'s corporate Internet presence is a good example of how the interplay of planning and learning has resulted first in a centralised then decentralised and finally core-periphery strategy (Steinlin 2002a). HO initially started their website with a 'central only' approach and published information about the periphery that they found relevant. Then some isolated initiatives from country offices followed, setting up their own locally hosted website with their own content, which was welcomed by HO. This trend continued under a decentralised approach where the periphery was asked to follow some minimal standard-design-guidelines given by HO. Learning about the lack of compliance and the resulting diversity in <h> country programme websites, HO prescribed a core-periphery approach, where the layout and content are managed at the core (outsourced to a service provider) and the field is uploading their content to the service provider.

How has the learning at the core affected the planning at the core?

Planning at the core took all the above learning into consideration, by developing concepts not only for "document-based KM" (the content aspect) but also especially "person-based KM" (the process and social aspect) (Appendix [6]:8). It focussed on building an ICT infrastructure that better supports sharing and exchanging information (addressing learning 1,2), on mapping resources for better orientation (addressing learning 1,7), and on creating structures, channels and processes for better communication (addressing learning 3,4,5) (Appendix [6]). The Knowledge Map is supposed to become the institutional memory and help orientation. The CoPs (or 'Palavrion' as they are called in <h>) are supposed to offer learning and sharing platforms with strong lateral information flows and should better link field with field and with HO (addressing learning 3,4,8,9). To capture learning at any place in <h> more systematically, dedicated learning events and learning cycles will be built into organisational life, capturing the learning before, during and after relevant activities (addressing learning 8). To improve information handling <h> is fostering information on demand (pull instead of push) approaches and a change in the culture of reporting (addressing learning 2). Reports shall always include a meaningful lead or abstract and the practice of story-telling is advocated as a means to transmit complex information (<Steinlin>), which addresses learning issues 2 and 10.

The IM strategy plan aims at institutionalising IM/KM (addressing learning 6,7) and is expected to deeply influence the existing organisational culture by explicitly exposing colleagues to new IM practices (<Oettli> 2002) and guiding by new rules (addressing learning 11,12). Section 8.1 of the strategy document (Appendix [6]:15) is specifically dedicated to Human Resources Management (HRM) and describes activities which are geared to bringing about the desired shift in culture. Knowledge sharing is going to be addressed in staff appraisals, which signals reference to the learning issue 12. These plans represent umbrella strategies intended to provide structures and processes for enhancing IM throughout <h>. How local learning and planning at the periphery blend in with and complement strategy formation in <h> is discussed next via a few examples from <h> Nepal.

Learning at the periphery.

Regarding key stakeholder needs:

1. The need of the poor disadvantaged communities is action and support;

Regarding context of information and knowledge management in <h>:

2. Planning of effective interventions requires monitoring of results and impacts; and learning;

3. The knowledge at the field level is a genuine resource for <h> HO in order to reduce the gap between theory and practice (rationality and reality) and it needs to be captured and appropriately processed through <LTM> (<Sharma> 2002b);

4. There is a need at the country programme level to link the various project's learning and planning through a suitable umbrella strategy (<Luitel> 2002a);

5. The experiences of individuals (<Sharma>'s sharing <LTM> with Vietnam) and some projects to initiate cooperation with compatible programmes in other <h> countries have generated enthusiasm and demand (<Nepal> 2002a) for strengthening this kind of cooperation too;

6. <Walton> (2002) has learned about the negative effects of information overload. He is "very strict and stubborn regarding information overload and [has] absolutely no problem to immediately destroy incoming irrelevant material" (ibid:Q1);

Regarding umbrella strategy of HO:

7. HO's foreign programme strategy (Figure 6-1) needs to be translated into locally appropriate IM strategies;

Regarding the present IM/KM strategy process:

8. From the pilot CoP <Walton> got the impression that CoPs can "become equivalent to an 'in-tray dominance' syndrome" (<Walton> 2002:Q1) and can distract colleagues and skew priorities.

<h> Nepal has learned that their key stakeholders at the grassroots are in need of support that enhances confidence in their own potential as well as transparency of and confidence in the support system (1,2). Learning revealed IM issues, relevant to their context (2,3,4,5,6) and focused on interpreting the overarching umbrella development strategy of HO (7). Also the effects of the present IM/KM strategy formation have resulted in learning (8). Learning relevant for IM strategy formation is strongly based on individuals' focus on and commitment toward their primary stakeholders. It arises from solidarity in action, from reflection and informal discussions among colleagues. Besides, there are formal learning events, where experiences are shared in projects, across projects and with stakeholders (<Luitel> 2002a; <Luitel> 2002b). Exposure of individuals to other <h> countries triggers learning (4) as does the interaction with HO and the <PD>'s participation in HO's events.

How has the learning at the periphery affected the planning at the periphery?

<h> Nepal's IM planning provides a framework for learning about the effects of actions on the ground (addressing learning 1) and for guiding implementation by continuous learning cycles (addressing learning 2). The plan to simplify the <LTM> concept, making it more transparent for stakeholders and partners, and converting it into a tool for creating ownership and empowerment (<Sharma> 2002a) is supporting this observation. It also shows how the <h> foreign programme strategy (Figure 6-1) is interpreted and crafted into locally appropriate IM approaches (<Gähwiler> 2002b; <Sharma> 2002b), which addresses learning issue 7. The <LTM> concept represents also the umbrella strategy for guiding the various projects in their IM processes (addressing learning 4) and provides an effective instrument for capturing and channelling qualitative information and learning from the field upwards towards the HO (<Luitel> 2002a), which addresses learning issue 3. <h> Nepal's lobbying at HO to improve inter country IM and lateral knowledge flows, by setting up regional sector resource positions additional to those at HO (<Walton> 2002) is based on learning 3 and 5. And, planning is concerned with improving IM between HO and field by identifying "…what is the minimum requirement for information flows between Field Office and HO and how do we make sure (unplanned) 'critical event' information sharing is not neglected" (<Walton> 2002:Q3) (addressing learning 2,3,6,8).

Interpretation

The examples show that both core and periphery have gone through genuine learning cycles, where experiences have been analysed, interpreted, conceptualised and resulted in plans and actions. When analysing the findings in reference to the core-periphery-learning-planning frame of my theoretical framework in Figure 5-2, it appears that my findings in <h> match with three of the four theoretical considerations as shown in Figure 7-2.
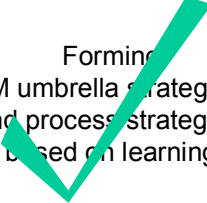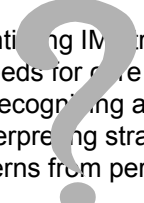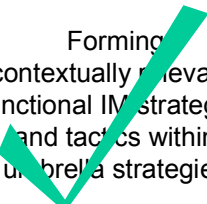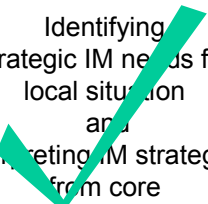
Figure 7-2: Findings compared with core-periphery-learning-planning frame

Regarding the learning at the core, strategy needs for the core have been identified, but the significant <LTM> strategy pattern from <h> Nepal seems to have not been recognised as such and not been worked into HO's IM strategy. I am however aware of one very important pattern at the periphery level, which was recognised by the <WGKM> and strongly affected the IM strategy formation: the learning that local collaborators' input as well as their orientation was hampered by prevailing IM practices, where expatriates seemed to control too much of the access to information. Recognising this pattern, which had formed over the years, prompted the <WGKM>'s efforts to address the situation by creating a more open and universally accessible platform for communication (the Intranet and CoPs). Perhaps other <h> countries' strategy

patterns have been integrated or at least had influence, but to investigate this is beyond the scope of this research. I believe that probably also many other potentially useful strategy patterns have not been recognised.

What prevented this can perhaps be understood by contemplating the sub-research questions i13, i14, i15, i16 and i17 from Table 5-2 and discussing how the learning and planning, at the core and periphery have been affected by organisational structures, processes, systems, people and organisational culture, leadership, technology and the environment.

Structures influence the flows of information and knowledge between field and HO. The flow in both directions used to be channelled mainly via the <PD> or other expatriates. Such structures do not well transmit the learning (individual's tacit knowledge) from both ends but merely the explicit concepts and plans. And the dissemination and sharing still depends on the goodwill and interpretation of the person at the gateway.

IM strategy formation at the periphery seems very much a result of learning by continuous informal *processes*, solidarity in action and the exchange of tacit knowledge, which Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) call socialisation, producing sympathised knowledge (Figure 2-4). At HO more formal processes of concept-development and exchange of explicit knowledge in form of written information (called combination in Figure 2-4 and producing systemic knowledge) seem to drive IM strategy formation. The tacit knowledge of the field seems not to find its way easily into HO, thus also hindering the creation of organisational knowledge through the spiral proposed in Figure 2-4.

Systems that affect the learning and planning processes include exchange between HO and field that happens mostly in explicit form through reports, emails, telephone calls (mainly between HO and <PD>). The much more limited exchange of tacit knowledge between HO and field takes only place during visits and formal face-to-face learning events like the <PD> seminars. Here again, since local collaborators are not participating in the <PD> seminars, their valuable tacit knowledge does not directly feed into those events.

The *organisational culture* of <h> Nepal features a strong concern for solidarity in action, which focuses on learning about, with and from the underprivileged people it wants to help. It seems to attach great value to the maintenance of relationships and the practice of informal information

sharing. The learning focus as well as the planning process and respective strategy products are affected by the values carried by <h> Nepal's members, which are influenced by Nepali culture, Swiss culture, the HO's culture (advocating solidarity with the underprivileged) and the <PD>'s ideology. All those influences have contributed to creating the <LTM> concept. Organisational culture at HO is affected by Swiss culture as well as the NGO culture of solidarity with the South. It is influenced by many years of experience in working with colleagues and partners in DCs. The values of western culture, which favours more formal information flows and exchange of explicit knowledge have resulted in striving for new ways of capturing organisational knowledge in explicit form (e.g. KM concept, CoPs, knowledge maps, etc.). The values of fostering equality have influenced the recent IM strategy towards enhancing the role of local collaborators, and thus opening <h> more up for learning from the South.

Leadership at the core as well as at the periphery is crucial for influencing the IM strategy formation. <PD> <Walton>'s clear priorities, which are solidarity in action, and less the piloting of new ICT enabled information systems affect organisational values and culture of <h> Nepal. At HO, the vision of <Oettli> regarding strengthening the role of local collaborators has been very much driving the IM strategy process. And the concerns of <Külling> (quotation at beginning of Chapter) seem to balance the innovation agenda of <h> with the development agenda.

Technology has had influence on the exchange of learning and planning products. Internet technology creates almost the same information access conditions at the field and the centre. It provides reality-supporting tools, like email and information on demand (www). Although technology cannot transmit tacit knowledge, email enables lateral exchanges between field and HO for both better learning and planning. Yet, despite the fact that email has been available to the field for quite some time, potentially enabling lateral information flows, this seems not to have happened as much as it could. Which shows that how technology is actually used depends a lot on organisational culture, structure and established information processes.

Changes in *environment*, like increased competition have resulted in a need for more effective exchange of learning and planning between field and HO, for better integration, better use of knowledge, human and financial resources. Those changes have been identified and interpreted

at HO and field, and contributed to the shaping of their specific IM strategies (KM at HO; <LTM> at <h> Nepal).

Summarising, I have assessed how prevailing structures, processes, systems, organisational culture, leadership, technology and changes in the environment have influenced IM strategy formation in <h>. The analysis suggests that this influence was probably responsible for a lack of tacit and also a lack of lateral knowledge exchange in the strategy formation processes, which explains why significant strategic IM patterns from the periphery have received relatively little attention. The new IM/KM strategy seems to address many of those barriers. It for example recommends more exposure visits to the projects and increased face-to-face communication to stimulate tacit and lateral knowledge flows and learning. It aims to create and eventually institutionalise effective and transparent systems for information and knowledge flow across the organisation, as envisioned in the energy flow model (Figure 2-6), which in turn will influence organisational culture and future IM strategy formation processes.

The core and periphery have already learned from the ongoing IM/KM processes, which will again feed new learning cycles at both ends. <h>'s present IM strategy formation effort seems more than just another new way of managing information, or an attempt for improving efficiency. It is an approach to manage change and to achieve long-term sustainability of <h> in a changing environment, which depends very much on mutual learning and planning of the core and periphery.

7.4   ROLE OF THE SIMTONS IN THE ACTUAL STRATEGY FORMATION

Several of the previous Section's learning examples related to those themes identified in Chapter three that I consider strategic for IM in NNGOs (SIMToNs). Without mentioning those SIMToNs, I asked all interviewees what they thought was the main purpose of and the key drivers for IM strategy formation in <h>. Participants at the HO referred (cumulatively) to all of the SIMToNs except 'Managing multiple-stakeholder-relationships'. The response from the field centred on 'Organisational learning and knowledge management' only. The force field diagram in Figure 7-3 gives an approximate impression of the participants' overall judgement.

The seven SIMToNs   **Considered as Drivers for IM strategy
                                      formation in <h>**

low   high

Managing multiple-stakeholder-
relationships

Managing performance and accountability

Linking the field and the centre

Practicing advocacy

Marketing the service and acquiring
resources

Organisational learning and knowledge
management

Strategy development and change

Figure 7-3: Explicit strength of the SIMToNs as drivers for IM strategy formation

Managing performance and accountability.   <h> is highly dependent on the Swiss Development Cooperation (SDC)[8] as key donor of <h> and also for acquiring projects to be carried out in commission. SDC on the other hand expects <h> to keep on pioneering innovative approaches from which other organisations can learn. And, SDC sees good KM as a means to ensure quality in development cooperation and considers effective KM practices as key indicators to judge <h>'s performance (<Steinlin> 2002b). This is obviously a major driver of the present IM strategy formation process at HO. The importance given to <LTM> at the field, clearly reflects their concern for finding ways to measure and report intangible results and to develop appropriate performance indicators. This confirms one of the key strategic concerns of NNGOs that was already suggested in Chapter three. My findings here also support another proposition of Chapter three: The HO is likely to feel more accountable to donors, while FOs feel strongly accountable to the grassroots.

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[8] SDC is the Swiss government's agency for coordinating Swiss development aid.

Linking the field and the centre. In the <PD> seminar (August 2000) the field expressed a need to diminish their geographic isolation. Some country programmes became aware of new opportunities or they were facing new challenges and more complex issues, which they felt difficult to tackle on their own. Others wanted more support in solving their strategic and operational problems (<Külling> 2002). Although a need for better IM between core and periphery had been contemplated before (<Oettli> 2002), it gained importance and became a driver for IM strategy formation through this seminar (<Steinlin> 2002b). Another important purpose for improving IM between core and periphery was the desire of HO (<Oettli> 2002) to give local collaborators in the field a better chance for integration and contribution through free information and knowledge exchange.

Besides the linking of field and HO there is the other dimension of linking projects in the field with the country programme coordination office. In this sense, the development of <LTM> was given high importance by the field (<Luitel> 2002a; <Nepal> 2002a; <Sharma> 2002b; <Walton> 2002) since it functions as an umbrella and process strategy for projects facilitating information flows between projects and country office and ideally also with HO.

Practicing advocacy. <Külling> (2002) considers it very important to improve the effective flow and use of information and knowledge from the field, the South back into Swiss society. He thinks the advocacy practice of the <h> Domestic department will be strengthened by the new IM/KM strategy. The intention to improve advocacy has also had some driving impact on the IM strategy formation.

Marketing the service and acquiring resources. Competition on the NGO market is increasing. <h> has to tender for acquiring contracts to implement projects for big donors. In order to provide the services that are in demand and to present attractive proposals <h> has to become more aware of and be able to better mobilise their knowledge assets (<Steinlin> 2002b). There is also the need to respond faster to offers and make them more cost effective. The costs for preparing one offer is approximately 20,000 Pounds Sterling and on average three offers are needed to win one contract (ibid). Further, all participants at HO expressed the view that the new IM/KM strategy is intended to strengthen the organisational profile, and corporate identity.

Organisational learning and knowledge management.   The desire to learn better and more effectively from all the diverse experiences in all parts of the organisation has been expressed by all participants at HO and also by all in the field as a key driver for the IM strategy formation, besides that it features as an objective in the overall <h> strategy (Helvetas 1996b)and a declared goal of the present KM initiative.

Strategy development and change.   Although this theme has not been mentioned explicitly as a driver, both <Oettli>(<Oettli> 2002) and <Steinlin> (2002c) said that if the anticipated KM system had already been up and running, the present strategy formation process would have been much easier, and more effective and would probably have benefited from a stronger involvement from the field. This confirms that IM strategies influence strategy development and change or, one could say, that the needs for strategy development and change also drive IM strategy formation.

Interpretation

Linking the field and the centre features as the strongest driver followed by the intention to promote organisational learning and KM. Also, the needs to acquire resources and to manage performance and accountability generate considerable momentum for the IM strategy formation. From the discussions at HO however, I sense that 'practicing advocacy' and 'strategy development and change' seem to have a higher importance in the process than explicitly expressed. Although I consider them all as important, I tend to interpret the driving strength attributed in <h> to each SIMToN as a clear concern of <h> for sustainability, which forms the foundation for IM strategy formation. Keeping the organisation together and ensuring the flow of information, the NNGO's life-blood, is first priority, followed by the need to learn, to explore and to adapt. Naturally resources must be secured not only now, but continuously, for which performance and accountability are crucial. To steer the organisation on a future course strategies need to be developed. Owing to the effects of global changes and to the changing roles of NNGOs, being advocates of the underprivileged, IM for advocacy needs to be strengthened too.

While participants from the field only referred to 'organisational learning' as a driver, their <LTM> strategy concept implies concern for stakeholder relationships, performance and accountability as well as developing strategies that better suit their mission and objectives. Above all <LTM> reflects a strong concern for linking their periphery (projects) with their core (FO) in <h> Nepal, which reinforces SIMToN three as the most powerful driver. Although nobody at HO and <h> Nepal mentioned 'managing multiple-stakeholder-relationship' as a purpose for IM strategy formation, most participants raised stakeholder relationship issues (<h> - SDC; core – periphery; local collaborators – expatriates; <PDs> - <PCs>; innovators – resisters; private networks – public networks) in regard to the strategy formation process. KM needs not only to provide access to knowledge but most importantly, to connect people, in order to generate new knowledge (Collison and Parcell 2001). <h>'s KM strategy document reflects this by advocating "person-based" KM (Appendix [6]:8). Hence, I would argue that identifying the various relationships and their effect on <h> has become a key concern along the way in the IM strategy formation process and thus, I strongly believe managing multiple-stakeholder-relationships is implicitly one of the major, if not actually the strongest driver for this IM strategy formation process in <h>.

The SIMToNs, born from my theoretical considerations in Chapter three are found to have indeed been driving and shaping the IM strategy formation in <h>. Only one additional driver has been mentioned during the interviews, which was the objective to improve <h>'s work in all the four working areas (<Külling> 2002). This objective can however not be served directly through IM/KM strategies, but instead through improving IM in the seven SIMToNs, which again supports their importance for IM strategy formation in NNGOs. It would be interesting to further investigate how useful the SIMToNs could be as starting point or structuring and framing mechanism for IM strategy planning. Would they be useful as a monitoring focus for IM strategy implementation?

7.5 RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IM, IS AND ICT STRATEGY FORMATION

When discussing with the ICT manager <Düscher> (2002) on his role in the recent IM/KM strategy formation process, it looked as if he had not been very much involved in the planning process. His role had been more to implement technology according to guidelines developed by

the <WGKM>. This seems to indicate some hierarchy as initially suggested in Figure 2-7. <Steinlin> (2002b) confirms this observation and thinks that ICT has no driving but rather an enabling character in <h>. He also agrees that in <h> IM/KM could be seen as an all-embracing concern. Part of IM is supported by IS; part of which is again supported by ICTs like depicted by smaller getting circles in Figure 2-7. Yet, although he sees a certain hierarchy from IM to ICTs, he acknowledges that in reality relationships between the three are rather dynamic in <h> (as suggested in Figure 4-7) (ibid). All interviewees from the HO and the field, except the Nepali MIS officer described <h>'s approach on IM strategy formation as human centred not technology centred.

Interviewees, especially at HO mentioned many of the potential benefits of ICT enabled information systems that I had also addressed in subsection 3.3.1 to show how they can support IM in the seven SIMToNs. However, owing to my theoretical analysis of potential problems of ICT based information systems (subsection 3.3.2) I had expected participants to report more apprehension or doubts on how the new ICT dependent KM system could become sustainable under DC circumstances. I had also expected more concern about the interfacing between HO and field due to differences in external environments (Figure 3-2) and differences in the stages of information age reform (Figure 3-3). But, all were quite optimistic about smooth interfacing and the management of technology. Since the system will rely just on robust Internet technology and offer off-line usability, it looks indeed appropriate for operation in a DC context.

Interpretation

At first, it seems that IM strategy formation in <h> is driven by IM needs, which subsequently drive IS, and ICT strategy formation. New developments in IS and ICTs are likely to influence this process and to open new possibilities. However, the ICTs and ISs currently used in <h> surely influence how strategy is formed. The IS 'Email' for example favours involvement only of *selected individuals* (private networks) while the IS 'CoPs' favours involvement of *interested individuals* (public network) in the process.

As already mentioned earlier, the abstract nature of the discussion on ICT enabled information management attracts more the ICT enthusiasts who, through their interests, demands and

initiatives (innovator <PDs>), probably become direction setters. Thus, it looks as if there is (in contrast to what may be intended) a significant influence of technology, through the input given by ICT fans. This may however change gradually, when the new KM system is up and running. A system that is indeed more user friendly and more open and attractive, to those collaborators who currently don't contribute much because they feel uncomfortable with ICTs, will slowly shift the influence on the strategy formation process (SIMToN Number seven) from technology towards the deeper IM concerns represented by the SIMToNs.

That the field does not seem to face the ICT related problems, which I had expected could mean that modern Internet technology represents actually a new generation of technology. A technology that is almost transparent, invisible, that does its job in the background, when needed and where needed. Users can again concentrate more on the essential, the information, instead of being distracted by and occupied with technology.

7.6   ROLE OF INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE AT THE CORE AND AT THE PERIPHERY

In the past, HO was concerned with the IA at HO only. <Steinlin> (2002c) talks about occasional efforts that were made to systematise the IA, but believes the "restructuring was not consequent enough since document management issues, access, location and responsibilities were not addressed adequately" (ibid:Q14). Thus, the IA grew organically, which made it less systematic, transparent and accessible (<Gähwiler> 2002b; <Steinlin> 2002c). The field offices have their own IA based on the reporting requirements between HO and field and the priorities and preferences of <PDs> and <PCs> (<Gähwiler> 2002b; <Walton> 2002). Thus there is evidence that IA in <h> is the product of planned and emergent influences.

Since the current IM/KM strategy formation effort is aiming at creating better transparency and access to information and knowledge wherever they may reside in <h>, an overarching IA seemed required. With the new Intranet a systematically planned IA parallel to the one in use will be created, which will be transparent and accessible. The IA will feature an information or knowledge map that allows users at core and periphery to locate relevant knowledge items, persons, projects and documents. It will use taxonomy and search engines. In order to derive the anticipated benefit and encourage use and contribution <h> is aware of the need for systematic

maintenance of the IA. HO will be responsible for maintenance of the map, for deciding which documents (produced anywhere in the organisation) qualify for being put on the Intranet and for extracting the relevant learning from the ongoing CoPs to be made available through the IA (<Oettli> 2002; <Steinlin> 2002c). Initially access will be available to <h> personnel only, in order to foster confidence and trust in the system, before possibly considering to give access to external stakeholders too (ibid).

Interpretation

<h> is recognising the importance of creating an organisation wide IA for effective IM. This is very much in line with my theoretical considerations in Chapter two, as is <h>'s concern for systematically maintaining the IA. But how does the IA serve the field and take their context into consideration? The current IM/KM strategy intends to provide opportunities. How and to what extent they are taken up depends on individual country programmes' needs, priorities and circumstances. The IA is implemented at HO, which represents the back-end (hosted by a service provider), while the field have to take responsibility to manage their front-end according to their context. The fact that the system is designed to be used by the field either online or offline (data available from CD and occasionally synchronised via Internet), shows that IM/KM strategy formation in <h> takes the needs and context of the field into consideration. Interestingly, <h> Nepal feels rather content with their present IA, however linked or de-linked from the HO's IA they are.

HO is on the one hand very concerned not to create the feeling in the field that the new KM strategy concept might be 'another way' of watching and controlling the field (<Gähwiler> 2002b), on the other hand IA is considered so important for effective corporation-wide IM/KM that HO takes control over it. This reflects once more the tension of finding the right balance in IM strategy formation between pattern approaches (encouraging creativity and learning from diversity) and planning approaches (through control).

7.7   EFFECTS OF IM STRATEGY FORMATION ON THE CORE AND THE PERIPHERY

The new IM/KM strategy is meant to give core and periphery better access to as well as stimulate sharing of information and knowledge resources and thus to support <h>'s work as outlined in the various mission and strategy papers (Helvetas 1996a; Helvetas 1996b; Helvetas 1996c). Besides that, IM in the seven SIMToNs is expected to improve, which should have a positive effect on the business processes of core and periphery. However, the anticipated IM/KM strategy requires new personal IM practices (<Külling> 2002) at core and periphery, it triggers resistance (<Oettli> 2002) and it will affect the organisational culture (ibid).

Interestingly, <h> HO considers this IM/KM strategy formation process as a tool to purposely influence organisational culture (<Oettli> 2002). IM strategies' potential to do so has already been discussed in subsection 3.2.2. HO intends to give local collaborators more access to information, corporate resources, corporate culture for strengthening their position and integrating them better with the aim of creating a stronger corporate identity and developing the organisation holistically. <h> will however not want to remove all expatriates in the field, some of whom appear to be hampering this important integration process, since <h> also sees a particularly essential role for expatriates. They, with their western culture, contribute in the field, to facilitating the linking of core and periphery, to cultural exchange and to creating a synergy of indigenous and western know-how, a synergy of forces (<Külling> 2002). They are considered valuable for guaranteeing accountability towards members and supporters of <h> as well as for practicing advocacy and for lobbying in the West for the cause of the poor (ibid). Yet, some of them are seen to impede the linking process because of their individualistic working styles and their power behaviour, which is found to prevent local collaborators from linking as effectively as they could and as they would.

Another effect of the IM/KM strategy could be the increase in workload it is likely to generate for personnel at the core and the periphery (<Düscher> 2002). Users are expected to participate and create content for the system (<Steinlin> 2002b) besides their normal activities. Also, the new facilities might even distract them from their key tasks and responsibilities (<Walton> 2002). <Steinlin> (2002b) argues that the KM strategy team has to rely on those innovators and early adopters among colleagues, who are convinced about the potential benefits for their own development and for <h> and hence prepared to make extra efforts. They are expected to

generate content and improve the system with their contributions. But, he also expects to find that 30% to 50% of the concept will not work (ibid). The key strategy consideration is to provide opportunities and see which ones are being taken up, in order to build on those while simultaneously analysing why the others were not used and finding out how to improve them. This sounds like a very convincing concept of organisational learning. The change in strategy regarding the management of corporate Internet presence, reported earlier (centralised, decentralised, core-periphery), could be seen a bit in line with such a learning approach. To operationalise it further would also require at least some kind of monitoring system with appropriate indicators for guiding decision-making.

Interpretation

This IM/KM strategy formation effort is actually a process of organisational transformation. I am not sure if this had been intended to such an extent, but now it is in process and needs to be managed appropriately throughout the organisation and on all levels. Increased awareness and exposure to effects of strategies (rather than abstract concepts) triggers resistance as well as dialogue. This process is seen to gradually generate more goodwill and openness for new experiences. Some positive experiences – like the successful use of internal consultants from one country advising a project in another country (applied KM) and the piloting of the KM approach for the sector strategy development – have stimulated optimism.

The effort to create an environment, a culture where local collaborators' confidence and role gets enhanced is very much in line with <h>'s views on partnership and cooperation in development, expressed in the Model/Guide strategy paper (Helvetas 1996a). Hence, the IM strategy formation process reveals how consequently <h> applies its principles of solidarity and equality also inside the organisation, whereby demonstrating credibility as a development organisation.

7.8   CONCEPTUAL TENSIONS AND DILEMMAS

While exploring reality in <h> a number of tensions have been revealed. Some were already anticipated (i.e. planned vs. emergent, rationality vs. reality) from the theoretical study but also unexpected ones emerged.

Abstract vs. concrete

Information and knowledge management are rather abstract fields, compared to HRM and financial management. IM and KM, especially when not only concerned with the immediate working environment but on a corporate level, are less tangible and not easy to envision and to plan. This is supported by the observation that involvement of most employees in HO's recent KM strategy process consisted mainly of reactions to the new or different concepts or systems they got confronted with. Contribution during the planning stage was mostly limited to ICT aware innovators. Does this explain why IM strategies are so often driven by the developments in technology that subsequently confront people with new realities, which then trigger response and suggestions? Those reactions feed again into planning, creating phases of planned – emergent – planned – emergent contributions. These findings reveal also the importance of prototyping, in order to bring out the emergent contributions for successive improvements in an iterative process.

Planned vs. emergent developments; control vs. letting go; hegemony

Where is the right balance between controlling through planning and letting things evolve or emerge? Who sets the agenda in a learning organisation? These are questions that arise, when looking at <h>'s present IM/KM strategy formation process. On one hand HO wants a level of coherence and alignment (see IA and Website management strategy) in its complex organisation. On the other hand it considers diversity as a source of inspiration, creativity and learning, as an asset (giving local collaborators more access to share their experiences) and does not want to curtail or threaten the dynamic.

Organic IA structures can easily be understood and effectively used by people of the same culture and in a familiar context, but for enabling transparency of and access to information and knowledge resources across <h> systematic structures seem to be more desirable. Where is the right level of alignment regarding IA as well as regarding organisational culture, in an organisation that is interfacing with so many diverse cultures? How much freedom should colleagues have to decide if they want to contribute to CoPs or how much should they be obliged? While HO is trying to avoid creating the impression that the new KM concept is another control mechanism (<Gähwiler> 2002a) there is also the perception that some people probably need to be pushed (<Külling> 2002) to comply with the new requirements on behaviour and IM culture. This tension cannot just be solved but needs to be managed carefully to allow creativity and at the same time maintain direction and integrity. How to measure the tension, in order to be able to manage it? Are there appropriate indicators for this tension? Where is the optimal balance between planned and emergent? It seems worth an attempt to try identifying indicators by taking organisational reality and priorities into consideration with a self-critical review of underlying motives of involved actors and partners and in a transparent participative process. This would first of all acknowledge the tension, draw attention to and monitor it, and then might help to identify desirable and possible means to influence and balance it.

HO vs. field

The IM needs of the field and the HO are different. While the HO is strongly emphasising a platform for knowledge exchange for linking all parts of <h> better, <h> Nepal seems rather content with its present IM practices. HO is however not only concerned with the capturing, mapping and exchanging of information through electronic media but also and more even in connecting people and facilitating social processes that tap into peoples' tacit knowledge (Helvetas 2002b).

Could it be that <h> Nepal is so content with its IM/KM processes because it is already so advanced in its social networking practices? Maintenance of interpersonal relationships and social networking are key aspects of Nepali culture, where social capital is considered of utmost importance, but where information and knowledge are also stronger associated with power

(Malling 2000; Schueber 2001a). This consideration might also reflect the more abstract nature of IM at HO (mainly planning) compared to the more concrete nature of IM at <h> Nepal (mainly action and interaction oriented). It would be interesting to further investigate this line of thought and see to what extent HO could then actually learn from the social IM and communication practices of <h> Nepal as well as perhaps of other <h> countries. The effective <LTM> strategy reflects an effort to link the field (projects) with the country office en route to better linking of the periphery with the HO.

How to use this internal IM product, the experience, the strategy pattern for the wider benefit of <h>? This points to another interesting question about HO's role in periphery-periphery interchanges. To what extent do they need to be moderated? Do they need a role at HO that 'translates' experiences from the field in order to generalise them, so that all can learn from them, so that they contribute to a synergy? The CoPs are supposed to be the appropriate platform for such interchanges and the KM strategy explains their management and HO's role in it. But, where do lateral flows (between field and field) get facilitated and where hindered through HO's involvement? Where is the right balance here? Are there indicators which show which amount of steering input is right?

Private networks vs. public networks

The <WGKM> sees the exclusive private networks maintained by some expatriate collaborators as hampering the concept of a wider <h> information-sharing platform. Those private networks were once useful when there was no <h> wide facility but they are now seen as a means for some individuals to maintain power (<Steinlin> 2002c). Hence, all <h> colleagues are encouraged to rather join instead the CoPs on the <h> Intranet to get and share their knowledge and information.

Those small private networks however have shown to be effective. They operate on the notion that one is prepared to give because one is receiving. They benefit from a shared context, shared code of communication, and trust among the users. Having experienced those benefits of a private network, one is likely to create resistance against trading it with a wider one. Opening small personal networks up to a wider public might lead to a loss of focus (the shared

information might for many users not be so relevant as it would be in a small network), dilute the content and reduce efficiency and above all compromise on confidentiality (if this is important). This is also demonstrated a bit by the fact that <WGKM> itself is using a smaller network of selected members, which are being asked for feedback on the strategy drafts and for contribution, rather than involving everyone. I share the concern of <h> HO, but assume that it will be difficult to convince colleagues to give up their proven communication and decision-making infrastructure unless they experience or at least clearly envision the benefits of doing so. Here again, the critical question appears: Where is the optimal balance for the organisation between the use of private and public networks?

Free knowledge exchange vs. knowledge economy

In his presentation of the KM vision of the foreign department Steinlin argues that "Knowledge is the only resource that grows when it is shared" (2001b:Slide13). With adopting and promoting the OpenContent License (OPL) strategy (Helvetas 2002b) <h> advocates the sharing of knowledge across <h> borders, from which stakeholders and partners will benefit.

On the other hand is <h>'s new KM strategy also meant to capitalise on its internal knowledge assets in order to better compete in the acquisition of new project contracts? Consequently, this leads to the question: Will the open sharing of knowledge not also impede <h>'s competitive advantage at some stage in the future (<Gähwiler> 2002b)? Knowledge is power (see the private-public network discussion). Where is here the right balance between sharing power and increasing, maintaining and using power for pursuing of one's own or the organisation's (noble) mission?

Cause and effect relationship of organisational culture and IM

IM strategies are likely to or even intended to affect the organisational culture (<Oettli> 2002). The prevailing organisational culture on the other hand also affects IM strategy formation (i.e. peoples' contribution and cooperation, openness for change, resistance). Therefore, IM strategy formation ought to pay attention to organisational culture because it could help or hamper the strategy formation process. Early efforts to create awareness for and ownership of the IM

strategy formation process might influence the organisational climate, which is more malleable than the organisational culture (Schueber 2002a), and might help the overall process. Those efforts do however not remove the generic abstract – concrete barriers, discussed earlier.

<h>'s new IM/KM strategy will influence organisational culture through the efforts to better integrate local collaborators and to better link field with field and HO. The resulting changed culture will again affect new IM strategy formation in unpredictable ways, bringing about new emergent strategy patterns and reproducing the never-ending cycle of planned-emergent strategy formation.

Short-term results vs. long-term sustainability

<Külling>'s (2002) doubts presented at the beginning of the Chapter are mirroring the dilemma of finding a balance between short term results (helping the poor right now) and long term sustainability (improving the organisation so that it can more effectively serve the poor in the long run). While consuming considerable funds, the IM/KM strategy is unlikely to generate immediate benefits for the poor. As discussed earlier it seems to be geared towards organisational transformation and not intended to be a quick fix. Becoming a learning organisation and finding ways to better manage <h>'s intangible assets needs time and should contribute to long-term effectivity and sustainability. But how to know that the investment was justified? And more importantly, how to know which aspects of the organisation were improved and which not through the IM/KM strategy, in order to learn and correct the strategy. A monitoring concept is necessary.

The effects of IM/KM strategy on development are difficult to measure, because so many factors influence the impact. <Steinlin>'s intention to carry out a base line survey (Steinlin 2001a) on employees' perception of <h>'s IM practices and IM culture, before implementing the KM strategy and again after it had been in operation for some time, seemed certainly a step in the right direction. Till now however it has not been carried out due to workload and other priorities. But, would this rather general survey (addressing mainly SIMToN Number six) capture the impacts of the IM strategy sufficiently?

Drawing together here the discussion on the conceptual tensions it appears that to deal with those tensions they need some monitoring. Having found that the SIMToNs reflect indeed key purposes for IM strategy formation in <h>, would suggest: Could they not be useful as focus areas for monitoring improved IM in <h>? If all parts of the organisation at core and periphery developed specific indicators that showed how the seven SIMToNs are affected by IM strategies this could offer effective learning cycles for those parts of the organisation as well as for <h> as a whole.

7.9   CONCLUSIONS

The present IM/KM strategy formation process shows evidence of <h>'s effort to become a learning organisation. As argued in Chapter two (Figure 2-6), a learning organisation is characterised by the free flow of energy (mostly information) between individuals and collective, between vision and action. Those flows are seen to be happening to some extent in <h>, but they seem also to be hampered by various factors. There are surely factors specific to interpersonal relationships, which to investigate is beyond the scope of this study. Hence, I have tried to highlight those factors specific to the reality of HO and <h> Nepal and some generic tensions and dilemmas, which might offer new insight from an outsider, that insiders cannot easily acquire because they are so engaged and entangled with the organisation.

Core and periphery are continuously learning about benefits and drawbacks of ongoing IM practices and about their IM needs. Here and there, efforts take place to turn these learnings into concepts, planning and action. I wonder, how the present IM/KM strategy formation could ensure to better appreciate and capture the learnings and IM strategy patterns from the periphery?

The objective of <h>'s KM strategy is to improve the overall learning by creating appropriate structures, processes and encouraging a suitable organisational culture. The dilemmas and tensions addressed above could be potential barriers to achieving this or they could become sources of insight and wisdom if they were addressed consciously and managed appropriately. Having a concept for monitoring these tensions as well as the effects of IM strategy formation

would be useful. In this way continued learning and actually 'double loop learning' could be institutionalised, by learning not only about the effects of IM strategy formation but also about the factors that influence IM strategy formation (Argyris and Schön 1978). Such a holistic approach to IM strategy formation could serve as a means for NNGOs to manage the revealed critical tensions and to maintain a sense of direction in the midst of uncertainty and chaos.

CHAPTER 8:
Conclusion: Navigating the Transformation Process of NNGOs by Means of Information Management Strategy Formation

"I do not know exactly where this [IM/KM strategy formation process] will lead us, a new way of working will emerge, and I am not sure if I will always be able to cope with that. I only know that the organisational culture will be extremely touched and I am actually happy that we don't know where this will go; otherwise there would be more resistance. We have to grow into it. We are now rolling and we rather roll slowly to give people time to adapt. I am however convinced that we had to get rolling and improve our IM/KM."

(<Oettli> 2002).

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Esther <Oettli>'s (2002) statement suggests that Helvetas is in the midst of a transformation, a journey into unknown terrain. Her (ibid.) frank and honest assessment on the profound effects of IM strategy interventions also indicates the complicated nature of this transition process. There seems to be indeed very little relevant guidance available from the literature and from other organisations, which could help NNGOs in their quest for exploring better ways of information management and for crafting a more appropriate information culture, which are certainly needed to prepare NNGOs for coping with changing environments in the North and South as well as the changes in the NGO sector itself.

Could the findings of this research offer some orientation in this organisation-specific transformation process? After revisiting the research questions, which drove my exploration into the reality of <h> (Section 8.2), Section 8.3 then synthesises my findings into a model intended to guide NNGOs in such crucial transformation processes. Section 8.4 discusses what this research could mean for Helvetas, while Section 8.5 looks at the transferability of created meaning and the need for further research. Section 8.6 features a reflection on the process of this research project, before closing the paper with a final remark.

8.2   REVISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main research question has initially guided my exploration of theories. Along this exploration more questions accumulated, which resulted in a research framework (Figure 5-2) and shaped the inquiry into the reality of <h>. The questions, compiled in Table 5-2 formed the foundation for my interviews and subsequently brought out all those findings presented in the descriptive and analytical Chapters six and seven.

Originally asked in regard to NNGOs in general, all the questions have been answered explicitly or implicitly (in the previous two Chapters) in regard to the reality in <h>. Yet, the analysis in Chapter seven went further than just contemplating those questions. It revealed some deeper issues and conceptual tensions, which seem relevant and useful for understanding IM strategy formation in Helvetas. Before shifting my attention to those more conceptual findings and contemplating how they could perhaps be synthesised into something even more useful, I revisited the research questions once more. The resulting compilation of answers features a rather detailed discussion of the more practical issues and outcomes of my work, followed by some specific recommendations for Helvetas. Realising that this compilation represented probably a suitable reference point for Helvetas and perhaps also for other NNGOs, in exploring their reality of IM strategy formation, I decided to place it in an Appendix ([7]) and present here only my short answer to the initial research question before venturing into a final analytical reflection.

The main research question - *How are IM strategies in NNGOs formed and what are key factors influencing the process?* – I would in regard to Helvetas answer as follows:
IM strategies are formed by a combination of planned and emergent strategies. They are the result of learning and planning efforts at the core (the HO) and the periphery (the field). IM strategy formation is influenced by people and organisational culture, organisational structures, processes and systems as well as by technologies and the external environment. Also, IM strategy formation is influenced by considerations reflected in the seven SIMToNs and in the seven Conceptual Tensions.

8.3   SYNTHESIS OF THE FINDINGS

The research questions were meant to explore and understand IM strategy formation in the case of <h>. But, do my findings and interpretations not offer more than mere understanding and knowledge of <h> specific IM strategy formation processes?

The analysis in Chapter seven gives a taste of the complexity and magnitude of change processes that are intertwined with <h>'s IM strategy formation. IM strategy formation affects every part of the organisation and probably every staff member. Although intended to improve the organisation those dynamic change processes may also cause negative effects, and they surely have unpredictable effects as <Oettli> (2002) highlights. Thus, there is a serious need for orientation amidst turbulent developments. New approaches and instruments are required for guiding organisations in their IM strategy formation, based on organisational values and flexible enough for responding to internal and external changes (Remenyi 2002). With this awareness, I synthesised my findings into a model (Figure 8-1), which could be developed into such an instrument for guiding <h> and possibly other NNGOs in their transformation.
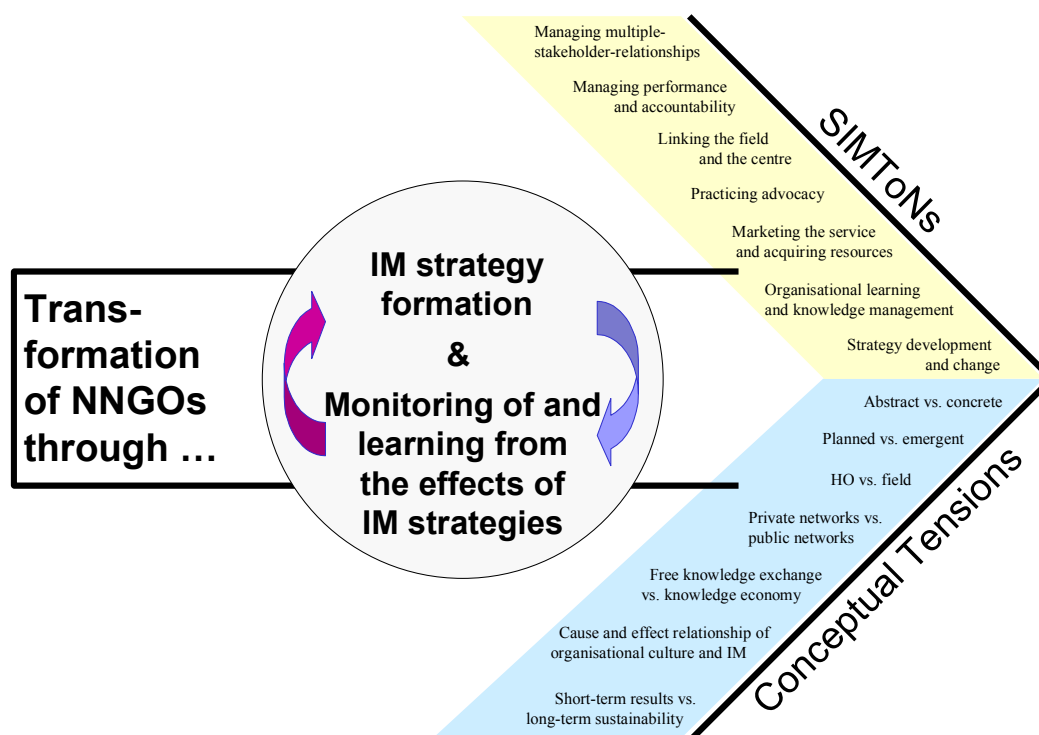
Figure 8-1: Navigating the transformation of NNGOs by means of IM strategy formation and monitoring the effects of IM strategies

This model suggests that the transformation of NNGOs might be navigated through a combination of IM strategy formation and the monitoring of effects of IM strategies, using the seven SIMToNs and the seven Conceptual Tensions as indicators and focus themes. The model could form the base for developing an organisation-specific structuring mechanism for IM strategy formation and implementation, and an organisation-specific monitoring system for learning about <h>'s IM. It could facilitate relevant learning about the actual state of IM in the seven SIMToNs and the state of Conceptual Tensions, thus the state of the organisation. Such learning might accordingly enable the organisation to give appropriate and timely steering input, for better aligning organisational culture, structures, systems and processes with organisational values.

8.4   RECOMMENDATIONS FOR HELVETAS

This study is not meant as an evaluation or assessment of <h>'s IM/KM systems and practices but is an academic research into organisational processes in order to contribute new knowledge to the field of information management in NNGOs. I would however be happy if my analysis and interpretations could benefit <h> in its efforts to become a true learning organisation and consequently, I offer some recommendations.

Recommendations for further deeper research, building on this research

Helvetas could use my model as a starting point to develop an organisation-specific framework with indicators (related to SIMToNs and Conceptual Tensions) for monitoring the effects of IM strategies throughout the organisation (HO and field). Also, the deeper tensions of values, perspectives and cultures that affect IM and organisational processes in <h> need to be identified, acknowledged, addressed and put on the agenda for discussion, for which the mentioned indicators could be quite appropriate. An action research programme might be a good approach here, combining academic research with organisational emancipation and learning as suggested in the article of Zuber-Skerritt and Perrry (2002). The resulting organisation development process would surely benefit <h> as well as all the participating employees and stakeholders. Additionally, other organisations could benefit through the academic publication of

findings to a wider audience. This would also reinforce <h>'s role as innovator, pioneer and resource organisation, as a true 'beacon organisation', not only in the field of development cooperation but also in approaching complex organisational transformation processes.

During my visit to <h> HO, I got the feedback that it would be very interesting to expand my study to other '<h> countries' besides Nepal (<Gähwiler> 2002). Apart from being able to compare field with field, such wider research might actually contribute to better linking, useful cross fertilisation and deeper learning in <h> (ibid.). I entirely agree, and recommend <h> to plan such further research.

I see also other areas in <h> which could be explored through action research, by interested internal or external researchers. Such research will contribute to a more holistic picture (helicopter view) of the organisation, which insiders (position holders) alone usually cannot take because of their lack of distance. The resulting learning of participating and concerned staff would contribute to continued organisational development and strengthen <h> as a learning organisation. Therefore, one recommendation to Helvetas is to allocate respective resources for research.

Recommendations of a more practical nature

Besides the above given recommendations for further research, some more practical suggestions related to the findings from my sub-research questions are provided in Appendix [7].

8.5   TRANSFERABILITY OF CREATED MEANING AND NEED FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Derived from my choice of methodology - single case study - many research findings are naturally specific to <h>. However, some findings identified through the exploration in <h> combined with the analysis of literature, seem of quite a generic nature and are probably relevant for other NNGOs too. The fact that the concept of SIMToNs (developed in Chapter three without any reference to <h>) hints at various tensions between HO and field, which was confirmed to be

very relevant and useful for analysing and explaining IM strategy formation in <h>, increases the likelihood that they might be useful for other NNGOs too.

Researching the transferability

Hence, I see potential for the transferability of the meaning and knowledge created by this research. This should however be further investigated through research in other NNGOs, to see to what extent the concepts of SIMToNs, IM problems between core and periphery, relationship between IM and organisational culture, relationship between IM, IS and ICT strategy formation, and the addressed conceptual tensions are relevant, recognisable, supported or contradicted. Here again, an action research approach appears to be most suitable for deepening the understanding of IM strategy formation in NNGOs through participative learning, planning, analysis, documentation and publication of findings.

Developing tools for helping NNGOs in the transition process

Complemented by results from the suggested research on transferability, my findings and the model in Figure 8-1, could provide the foundation for developing and testing appropriate generic tools that help NNGOs in navigating and monitoring their IM/KM strategy processes. These instruments would feature adaptability to organisation-specific needs and aspects of NNGOs.

Summarising here my projection into the future, I sincerely hope that some development practitioners, researchers or organisation development facilitators, find certain documented experiences and learnings of <h> and some of my findings and interpretations useful and encouraging for embarking on further and continued research into NNGOs' transformation through IM strategy formation processes.

8.6   REFLECTION ON THE PROCESS

Here, I want to share some of my reflections on the process of conducting this research project.

Access to organisations to be studied

Initially, I had planned to study IM strategy formation in several European NNGOs. Six organisations, including Helvetas, were contacted by email. I introduced and explained my intention and requested their cooperation, which was then followed by some further communication by email. Helvetas agreed quickly. The others expressed several reasons why they could not cooperate; or were so slow in responding that I gave up. What could have been the reasons behind this lack of cooperation? Was it the abstract nature of IM strategies? Was I therefore not able to communicate my intention convincingly enough? Did they feel disoriented regarding organisational IM and respective strategies and did they not want to expose a mess or shortcomings? Was it such a low priority for them to find out about their IM strategy formation processes? Was it the lack of credibility I had with them, which was required for getting access?

The abstract nature of the subject must have caused the same barriers in communication with <h>, but the trust in my good intention was stronger than doubts. Helvetas was aware about their shortcomings and even expressed them in the interviews. It was probably both, the trust in my good intention as well as an openness to learn from faults and constructive critique that fostered such a good cooperation from <h>. With <h> I had enough credibility to get cooperation due to my previous work there and I was even welcomed with enthusiasm. Hence, I learned that researching IM in organisations requires high credibility of the researcher and that the organisation (especially its leadership) is open for real learning rather than just wishing to project a polished image to the outside.

Given the limitations of a Masters research project and the complexity of the matter, I realise now, when looking back, that it was probably more useful to study one case more thoroughly than several cases more superficially, for me as well as for the participating organisation.

Face-to-face interviews vs. electronic interviews

The people in face-to-face interviews come over more critical and self critical than those who gave written comments. This could suggest that face-to-face communication contributes to creating confidence, trust and to stimulating the discussion of controversial issues, while there appears to be hesitation to express critique in writing, despite my rapport with the interviewees. It could have also been the effect of Nepali culture, which discourages critique and rather seeks harmony that is reflected in this observation.

Another interesting feature of the face-to-face interviews was that they often brought out different issues than I was asking about. This reveals once more the strength of face-to-face dialogue and the limitations of email communication, which needs to be considered in IM strategy formation in organisations.

Personal communication as a catalyst for reflection and analysis

Not only from the interviews but also from my efforts to express, understand and analyse complex matters I learned about the importance of direct inter-personal communication and dialogue. I experienced how difficult it was often for me to express abstract, tacit knowledge in written language. At those moments, the discussions with my partner at home or with my colleagues at the Institute for Development Policy and Management (IDPM) were so helpful to express my thoughts, stimulated by their questions and feedback.

My change of perspective and perception with increased knowledge

Throughout the work on this project, I witnessed how my perspective and also my perception changed with increased awareness and knowledge. Once my tacit knowledge was expressed and made explicit in writing, it represented awareness of an issue or relationship and became a reference point. This new reference point made me look at things from a different angle and steered my observation. The new awareness influenced how I saw things. When I then with my changed perception and from my new perspective looked back at my earlier writing, which had

led me to this point, it did not anymore appropriately reflect my new thinking. What had then been important seemed now less important and vice versa. Relevancies had shifted and new questions started emerging in a seemingly never-ending iterative process of learning.

This intellectual journey reveals that my understanding of reality, which restructures my existing knowledge, is shaped by the perspective taken, which again is based on existing knowledge. Hence, my knowledge is restricting as well as enabling my learning. I believe that we can overcome the restricting effects by respecting and appreciating other people's different views and experiences and using them as inspiration for critically reflecting on our knowledge and on our relationships with the world around us.

8.7 FINAL REMARK

Motivated by the desire to contribute with this research to improving development work, I asked myself often if all the energy that went into those intellectual, iterative learning processes was really justified and useful. I was longing to work again on some 'real' development projects, where people benefited directly and where I could see results. But, I soon also recalled again my experiences as a project manager, where I always had to shift attention too fast from one issue to another. At that time, I regretted never having enough time to step back for observing, reflecting and exploring an issue deeply and more satisfyingly.

Both experiences are very valuable and encourage me to search for the right balance of action and reflection. As much as my academic work has benefited from my experiences in the field (reality perspective), so will my future fieldwork be enriched by my academic reflection (rationality perspective). I believe it is the combination of work on the ground (serving people) and intellectual inquiry (reflect how to serve them more effectively) that results in the deepest learning, a holistic learning with body and mind, balancing rationality with reality perspectives.

In the course of my research I have learned a lot, about IM strategy formation, about Helvetas and about myself, which is all somehow reflected in this paper. I hope it will help Helvetas in their quest for becoming a true learning organisation. And I wish that my research and Helvetas' example stimulates other NNGOs to explore their IM processes and strategies, and to share their

unique learning and transformation experiences, thus contributing to better development cooperation and the strengthening of underprivileged people in the South.

I found that all interviewees were quite frank in expressing a critique about Helvetas, parts of the organisation and also self-critique on their own judgement, performance or action. I interpret this type of constructive criticism as an indication of ownership and concern for the development of Helvetas. It reflects trust, optimism and commitment, which are preconditions for learning processes and a learning organisation. Working with my former colleagues of Helvetas was very inspiring. The time they spent and the enthusiasm they showed for my research were as convincing as my research findings that Helvetas is a learning organisation.

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List of participants and overview of communications

*Personnel at Helvetas Head Office, interviewed face to face
between 2002-06-07 and 2002-06-13
in regard to IM strategy formation in Helvetas*

Person	Designation	Dates and times
Düscher, Ruedi	ICT Manager	2002-06-07; 1:30 h
Gähwiler, Franz	Programme Co-ordinator Nepal and Head of Technical Advisory Group Rural Infrastructure	2002-06-13; 1:15 h
Külling, Werner	General Secretary	2002-06-10; 1:00 h
Oettli, Esther	Head of Foreign Department	2002-06-11; 1:00 h
Steinlin, Marc	Programme Co-ordinator Knowledge Sharing	2002-06-10; 2:15 h 2002-06-11; 2:30 h

*Email communication and electronic interviews with Personnel at Helvetas HO
between August 2001 and September 2002
in regard to IM strategy formation in Helvetas*

Person	Subject	Dates
Steinlin, Marc	Several communications to introduce and explain my research plan	August 2001
	Several communications to gain information about Helvetas strategy process and relevant organisational documents	Sept 2001-May 2002
	Several communications to arrange interview appointments with personnel at Helvetas HO	May 2002
	Electronic Interview to clarify issues that arose from the interviews at HO and the electronic interviews with the field	2002-07-02
	Received latest Strategy document (Version 6)	2002-07-02
	Received feedback on my Chapter six	2002-09-20
Gähwiler, Franz	Electronic Interview to clarify issues that arose from the interviews at HO and the electronic interviews with the field	2002-07-15

*Personnel at Helvetas Nepal Country Programme, interviewed by email
between 2002-06-04 and 2002-07-16
in regard to IM strategy formation in Helvetas*

Person	Designation	Dates
Dhungel, Sudhir	Computer Services and MIS Officer	2002-07-16
Luitel, Achyut	Ex-Team Leader of SRWSP and WARM-P Projects	2002-06-10 2002-07-04
Nepal, Tulasi	Regional Programme Coordinator	2002-06-08 2002-06-26
Sharma, Adhir	Senior Programme Officer	2002-06-10 2002-07-16
Walton, Neil	Programme Director, Helvetas Nepal	2002-06-04 2002-06-25

Guiding questions for semi structured face-to-face interviews

These questions were the basis for interviewing participants
at Helvetas HO, Zurich, Switzerland

01	Do you think information is managed optimally in Helvetas overall? Please explain.
02	What are the key purposes of IM strategy formation in Helvetas overall? What drives the IM strategy formation process? Please explain. Quantify the strength. *(Business => Profit, financial capital; Public Sector => services, regulation, political capital.)*
03	Who is involved in IM strategy formation?
04	How have the needs of field and centre been taken care of?
05	Does IM strategy formation happen more planned or more emergent? Please explain.
06	Do you have any other comments?

Two samples of summary reports of face-to-face Interviews

Summary report 1:
Face-to-face interview with Mr. Werner Külling
at Helvetas HO, Zurich, Switzerland

Respondent:	*Werner Külling*
Designation:	*General Secretary*
Subject:	*Information Management strategy formation in Helvetas*
Date:	*2002-06-10; Time: 1:00 hour*

Focus Themes, Guiding Questions:

01	Do you think information is managed optimally in Helvetas overall? Please explain.
	He thinks No. In the past they tried to foster exchange of information and knowledge by moving people around in the organisation. Now, new ICTs offer new opportunities and they are working on a KM strategy.
02	What are the key purposes of IM strategy formation in Helvetas overall? What drives the IM strategy formation process? Please explain. Rate strength. *(Business => Profit, financial capital; Public Sector => services, regulation, political capital.)*
	The purpose of <h>'s IM/KM strategy is the improvement of <h>'s work and knowledge exchange in the 4 sectors (rural infrastructure, natural resource management, education and culture and civil society and the state) through optimising the sharing of Knowledge and Information. <h> wants to facilitate that the experiences gained in the projects are made available to those who can use it.
03	Who is involved in IM strategy formation?
	Actually everybody should be involved, because everybody should benefit from it. But right now there is a strategy steering team consisting of Esther Oettli (Head of Foreign Department), Marc Steinlin (Programme Coordinator for Knowledge Sharing), Remo Gesu (Programme Coordinator Philippines and head of the <TAGs> on "Education & Culture" and on "Civil Society & the State"). At one point, also Ruedi Duescher (IT Manager) was involved.
04	How have the needs of field and centre been taken care of?
	The fieldwork is very decentralised and expression of needs depends very much on individuals. Some younger colleagues are more open for new ways of IM and KM.

Marc coordinated with a number of selected Programme Directors, in order to get their feedback and input. Marc also gave a presentation to the Board of Directors to get feedback and input.

Q: what effect has the IM strategy on HO?
It requires new ways of personal IM. It requires new processes and a new culture.
Right now staff are facing information overload, too many emails. He has the feeling that IM was more effective in the past. People were valuing information more, there was more thorough communication and better reports were produced. He feels electronic communication is inferior to face-to-face communication. Now, quantity is dominating the quality of information. This has to be improved. He hopes that the new IM/KM strategy will reduce information overload and contribute to a better IM culture. Some people are reluctant and have to be pushed to cooperate.

Q: what effect has the IM strategy on the field?
It will also ask there for a different IM culture. All in <h> will have to learn to use the new system and to make it effective and efficient instead of producing huge quantities of irrelevant data.

Q: what is the role of HO in the strategy formation effort?
The role is too dominant right now, too pushing, because there is too little initiative from the field. HO would like a much stronger input from the field.

Q: what is the role of field in the strategy formation effort?
He thinks that often, colleagues from the field come when they need support for operationalising their ideas but they don't contribute enough to the long-term strategy process. However, in the field there is a great diversity of people, which ranges from keen supporters and enthusiasts to resisters. HO would like to see more ownership and input in the IM strategy from the field.

| 05 | Does IM strategy formation happen more planned or more emergent? Please explain. |

It is a combination. In case of the KM strategy, he was not pushing, he was rather hesitant, wanted still to wait. But ideas were around and it coincided with Marc's involvement with <h>. Esther was convinced that it would be good if <h> started pioneering in the field of KM. There was some reluctance from some colleagues. The flow of events:
Emergent (ideas floated) -> Esther (exploring how to go ahead) -> Marc (some systematic input) -> Strategy steering group formed -> Resonance and need expressed from field (PD Seminar 2000) -> Vision formed -> Pioneering approach -> Planning -> Awareness raising (every one talks about it) -> In line with mainstream organisations -> Pioneer among Swiss NGOs.

| 06 | Do you have any other comments? |

He has always doubts where <h> should put priorities. So, also with the KM strategy, he wonders if <h> is not investing too much energy, time, money and resources and thus sacrifices the project work, the help to the poop people in the South. How to justify high investment in ICTs while poverty is increasing. How to justify this investment towards <h>'s members. Sometimes, he has to play the bad guy and has to limit or stop such developments and shift priorities again to the work on the ground.

He feels that communication between the field and the HO is very important, also for awareness creation and practicing advocacy in the West (through <h>'s Domestic Department).

Summary report 2:
Face-to-face interview with Ms. Esther Oettli
at Helvetas HO, Zurich, Switzerland

Respondent:	*Esther Oettli*
Designation:	*Head of Foreign Department*
Subject:	*Information Management strategy formation in Helvetas*
Date:	*2002-06-11; Time: 1:00 hour*

Focus Themes, Guiding Questions:

01	Do you think information is managed optimally in Helvetas overall? Please explain.

No, she thinks it is not. Right now, knowledge is only available in the heads of some people and some reports, but not optimally used in <h> overall. Sharing of knowledge can be fostered to a limited extent by moving people around within the organisation. She is pushing people to exchange. There is no formal exchange. The informal exchange that is happening right now is useful to some extent but by far not sufficient. IM is not institutionalised and she thinks it should be. A Programme Coordinator (<PC>) who is responsible for several countries does naturally foster some linking between those country programmes. However if one <PC> will exchange info and knowledge with another one depends on their personal relationship. Another exchange tool is the Programme Director Seminars, every 2 years, but the question is what of the information shared there are the <PDs> sharing again with their local collaborators at home. How information is shared depends also on peoples' priorities and workload.

Q: What is necessary to change this? Is it structure, processes or organisational culture?
All. A change in culture is most important and also most difficult.

Q: Is IM strategy more concerned with changing structure, processes or culture?
The present strategy process is concerned with changing IM processes, but she hopes this will change the IM culture. It will force people to change. Culture cannot be changed through planning but only by exposing people to new realities.

Q: Do many people think like that, also in the field? Do <PDs> think things have to change? Is this more the view of HO or more of the Field?
Colleagues in the field don't feel the need for change is as big as it is felt at HO. HO is in need for coherence for exchange all over the organisation. In the field they are more concerned with their local needs, and they always think their case is special and they cannot be compared with others. They have different point of views.
But she sees a difference in the field between the interests of <h> expatriates (<PDs> and project managers) and the local collaborators. The local collaborators seem almost more interested to exchange info with HO and sharing than the expatriates. They are curious for other countries' and for international experiences.

Expatriates have already their own international networks but the local collaborators probably not. And it is the responsibility of <h> to give local collaborators access to info and to facilitate sharing. <h> cannot only rely on the rotation of expatriates for moving info and knowledge around.

| 02 | What are the key purposes of IM strategy formation in Helvetas overall?
 What drives the IM strategy formation process? Please explain. Rate strength.
 (Business => Profit, financial capital; Public Sector => services, regulation, political capital.) |

The main purpose is to link field and HO.
Another important purpose is to enable local collaborators to access and share information directly without having to go through a filter e.g the expatriates who sit in between local collaborators and the HO.
Building <h> corporate identity among the local collaborators (previously they might have been more included or more excluded at the will of the expatriates, sitting in between).
With the new KM, IM platform, where everybody has access, local collaborators become more equals, can access more opportunities. This will slowly change power structures and culture.

Q: Managing multiple stakeholders - how important?
Not really an issue.
What is seen very important is linking field with field through CoPs. In the past field to field communication went via HO, now it can go directly.
Everyone can open and coordinate CoPs. <h> will involve in CoPs for 2 reasons:
1. important findings from the CoPs are made available in the archive and knowledge map;
2. those CoPs which have dried out get closed.

| 03 | Who is involved in IM strategy formation? |

Q: How did IM strategy formation start? What was triggering event?
She started the discussion, because of the gaps, the lack of flow of know-how from one point to another. Another objective was to give local collaborators a real chance to become full-fledged members of <h> culture through free information and knowledge exchange.
In 1997, she was consultant to SDC in the partnership with Worldbank's 'Global Knowledge Initiative'. There, she got in contact with KM ideas and started a discussion on more systematic management of <h>'s corporate information and knowledge.
This coincided with Marc's apprenticeship in <h>, where his interest and knowledge in the field was welcomed.

Q: Marc said one triggering event was the need expressed by the field during the <PD> seminar in 2000.
She sees this only as confirmation of the need, which she had already identified earlier.

| 04 | How have the needs of field and centre been taken care of? |

In the field she sees differences between expatriates and local collaborators. They seem to have sometimes quite different needs. She wants to take care of the needs of the local collaborators (see above). Besides, the field have their limited focus, while HO is much more in need for coordination, integration, and exchange and building of a corporate identity.

| 05 | Does IM strategy formation happen more planned or more emergent? Please explain. |

She sees it not as emergent. She thinks it was planned and was hard work. There were supporting factors. Some colleagues supported which was very important in order to stay patient despite all the resistance.

Now things have started rolling and she does not know exactly where they will go. Some people are quite slow and resistant and she does not know how they will adapt to the new system and the demands for new ways of working. The strategy is bound to change the way everyone is working and this will deeply effect <h>'s culture. But she is also happy that nobody knows exactly where it will lead. If people knew it, she thinks there would probably be more resistance. She is happy that it is rolling and prefers to roll slowly but steadily. This gives people time to adapt.

Q: But you must also have a positive vision, the vision of a better organisation?
She is still convinced it will go into the right direction.

Q: Do you already see some results?
Yes, she sees some successes. For working on a new sector strategy selected local collaborators have been directly involved as effect of the KM strategy concept. The results showed the competence of local collaborators in <h> and how it was possible to utilise these resources. This gave a taste of what the intranet will facilitate eventually.

Q: Marc felt the biggest shortcoming in the IM strategy development was the big gap, the long period where the field was not consulted by HO, but instead now presented with a comprehensive paper mostly worked out by HO.
This is due to the high workload and could not be avoided.

Q: Marc thought more intensive engagement of the field would have fostered better ownership.
She thinks this is true. And here she sees already how the intranet would have improved the work on the IM/KM strategy and given the field more access and transparency. This kind of access they have presently only at HO but not <h> wide.
Thus strengthening the 'strategy development and change' process can be seen as one reason for the present IM strategy development.
Right now people get selected to cooperate, but later with the new KM system anyone who is interested can join.

| 06 | Do you have any other comments? |

She is convinced that the system will provide an added value to <h>. Even if the CoPs will not be so effective, she believes the system will allow more people to exchange info and have access to info.
She also thinks <h> will probably have to exchange some personnel who are not able to adjust, not able to learn, not able to fit with the new culture.

A similar discussion is going on regarding the use of GIS. Some colleagues are very much against it. But in some projects <h> has had very good experiences and she sees scope for using it also in other projects.

Open-ended questions for electronic interviews (set 1, 2 and 3)

Question set 1 (including introduction), which was used to interview all participants at Helvetas Nepal except the Computer Services & Management Information System Officer.

Respondent:	
Designation:	
Subject:	*Information Management strategy formation in Helvetas*
Date:	

Introduction:

Your task in Helvetas involves managing information. Since information is probably quite important for achieving the objectives of your organisation, it is likely that Information Management (IM) is guided by some kind of strategy for improving it. Information management strategies can consist of formally planned strategies but also of some kind of principle (formal or informal) that has been and is guiding parts of the organisation (Helvetas HO, PO, Programmes, Projects) in decision making regarding information management (incl. information systems and information and communication technologies). Also, IM in your part of the organisation could be affected more by strategies local to your part of the organisation or more by Helvetas' overarching corporate strategies.

I want to explore how such strategies that guide IM are being formed in Helvetas. What is the role of the HO (the centre) and what is the role of the Field (the periphery) in the strategy formation process? Are the resulting IM strategies more planned or more emergent?

I would not be surprised if you found some of my questions confusing or vague. Please don't hesitate to ask me for clarification. Based on your response to my questions, I may want to ask a bit further, later on. I am going to visit Helvetas HO from 06 till 13 June and may want to ask you more after my discussions there.

Please type your response in the fields below the questions and send the file back as email attachment to **MichaelSchueber@gmx.net**. I would be very pleased if you returned the form to me by June 13, 2002. Thank you for your cooperation and efforts.

01	Generally speaking, do you think you lack important information in order to do your job, or do you suffer more from information overload? Please explain.
02	Do you think information is managed optimally in your part of the organisation, in PO and in Helvetas overall? Please explain.
03	How is the way you manage information effected by stakeholders, colleagues, PO, HO?
04	Assuming, your information management is guided to some extent by some kind of strategic considerations, is it more guided by strategic considerations from your part of the organisation or more by Helvetas Corporate strategy? Please explain.
05	What constitutes in your opinion the Information Management strategy of Helvetas? Is it known? Is it written? Is it practised? Please explain.
06	How does Helvetas' IM strategy take care of the different needs of HO and field? Please explain.
07	Is Helvetas' IM strategy more concerned with technology or with humans? Please explain.
08	If you wanted to change, amend or improve IM strategy elements, that effect you most, how would you proceed?
09	What is the role of the HO (the centre) and what is the role of the Field (the periphery) in the strategy formation process?
10	Are Helevetas' IM strategies more planned or more emergent?
11	Do you have any other comments?

Question set 2 (including introduction), which was used to interview all participants at Helvetas Nepal except the Computer Services & Management Information System Officer.

Respondent:	
Designation:	
Subject:	*Information Management strategy formation in Helvetas*
Date:	

Dear ………….,

Thank you very much for your efforts to answer my first round of questions so thoroughly. Your response was very useful for my talks in Helvetas Zurich. The talks with HO and my attempts to understand KM/IM strategy formation processes in Helvetas have resulted in some further questions, I would like to ask you. I hope this is not demanding too much of your energy, and also hope your thinking about the subject might also be in some way useful for your work not only for mine.

Please type your response in the fields below the questions and send the file back as email attachment to **MichaelSchueber@gmx.net**. I would be very pleased if you returned the form to me by July 07, 2002 approximately. Thank you for your cooperation and efforts.

12	What do you think were/are the key considerations and purposes that are driving the present <h> KM strategy process? Would you see this KM strategy process as HO's response to needs expressed from the field (Programmes, Projects) or more grown from the needs of HO? Please explain.
13	To which extent have you been informed about or involved in that process? Has your input into the strategy process been requested? Please explain.
14	Has the <h> Nepal 'Monitoring Carpet' (LTM) been shared with <h> Programmes and Projects in other countries? If yes, do you know if it is used?
15	Have the experiences, tools, approaches of other <h> countries been reviewed by <h> Nepal to see if and how they might enhance <h> Nepal's work?
16	Do you have more information exchange with HO or more with other <h> Programmes Projects in other countries? Please explain.
17	Do you think the new KM/IM system will increase <h>'s dependence on Information and Communication Technology (ICT).
18	Do you think the appropriate management and maintenance of the ICT required to make the KM/IM system work will be a problem in Nepal and in developing countries in general? Please explain.
19	Do you have any other comments?

Question set 3 (including introduction), which was used to interview
the Computer Services & Management Information System Officer at Helvetas Nepal.

Respondent:	*Sudhir Dhungel*
Designation:	*Computer Services & Management Information System Officer*
Subject:	*Information Management strategy formation in Helvetas*
Date:	

Dear Sudhir-ji,

I worked with Achyut Luitel in SRWSP. In SRWSP as in most of my previous jobs (19 years in Nepal) I was involved in information management and the configuration of information systems and respective ICTs. Now I am researching Information Management Strategies in NGOs. I want to explore how Information Management (IM) strategies are being formed in Helvetas. What is the role of the HO (the centre) and what is the role of the Field (the periphery) in the strategy formation process? Are the resulting IM strategies more planned or more emergent? I would be happy if you could spare some time to answer some questions for me.

I would not be surprised if you found some of my questions confusing or vague. Please don't hesitate to ask me for clarification. Based on your response to my questions, I may want to ask a bit further, later on.

Please type your response in the fields below the questions and send the file back as email attachment to **MichaelSchueber@gmx.net**. I would be very pleased if you returned the form to me by July 01, 2002. Thank you for your cooperation and efforts.

01	Do you think information is managed optimally in your part of the organisation, in PO and in Helvetas overall? Please explain.
02	What constitutes in your opinion the Information Management (IM) strategy of Helvetas? Is it known? Is it written? Is it practised? Please explain.
03	How much does Information Management in Helvetas Nepal at present depend on ICTs? Have there been any ICT failures recently, which seriously hampered IM in Helvetas Nepal?
04	Can you explain what is at present your biggest concern regarding the management of ICTs in Helvetas Nepal?
05	You probably know that Helvetas is working on its Intranet and KM strategy. Do you think the new worldwide Helvetas KM/IM system will demand better ICTs and better management of ICTs in Helvetas Nepal or do you think the present ICT set up will be appropriate? Please explain.
06	Do you sometimes communicate with Helvetas HO or other Helvetas Country Offices regarding some Information Management or ICT issues?

Helvetas 2002 at a glance

Project locations

● **Benin/Togo.** Since 1995.
Rural road building. Drinking water supplies. Health centres. Promotion of decentralised organisations and sustainable development of natural resources.

● **Bhutan.** Since 1975.
Training of agricultural advisers. Advice and research in agriculture and livestock development. Food processing. Forest management, suspension and road bridges, teacher training. Promotion of a decentralised school system, education and further training.

● **Cameroon.** Since 1964.
Rural drinking water supplies. Road building. Protection of water catchment areas. Women's programmes. Improvement of utilization of land. Promotion of human rights and decentralisation.

● **Colombia.** Since 1991.
Support of «Sustainable upland agriculture» programme in partnership with CISEC.

● **Dominican Republic.** Since 1986.
Support of private women's and farmers' organisations. Sustainable development of natural resources, training of veterinary assistants and young farmers, training in teaching theory and methods, harvest protection and protection/management of the Rio Macasias catchment area, promotion of cultural activities.

● **Guatemala.** Since 1973.
Collaboration with farm organisations in the highland areas in farming, rural infrastructure, promotion of the peace process, decentralisation at community level and cultural activities. Since 1996 «ProBosques» resources conservation programme with strengthening of community autonomy.

● **Haiti.** Since 1983.
Rural drinking water supplies and settlement sanitation. Agro-forestry and farming. Promotion of farmers' organisations and harvest protection. Support of a literacy programme and of cultural activities in rural areas.

● **Kyrgyzstan.** Since 1995.
Agricultural advising, processing and marketing in the Naryn, Issk-Kul and Jalal-Abad regions. Promotion of smallest rural enterprises in the tourism sector, agricultural vocational education in Naryn Oblast. Rural legal advice.

● **Laos.** Since 2001.
Support the National Agriculture and Forestry Extension in three provinces.

● **Lesotho.** Since 1978.
Support of local authorities responsible for drinking water supplies in rural areas. Promotion of family, and sustainable, farming. Support of measures to preserve native languages and traditional knowledge.

● **Mali.** Since 1978.
Consultation in the maintenance of drinking water supplies, support of agricultural initiatives and organisations, planting and marketing organic cotton, democracy and community advancement, cultural activities.

● **Mozambique.** Since 1980.
Support for the reorganisation of water supplies in Cabo Delgado province. In Maputo province: support for rebuilding civil infrastructure; advice in connection with the new land law; provision of income promotion measures.

● **Nepal.** Since 1955.
Village drinking water supplies. Construction of suspension bridges. Informal vocational training. Regional development. Upland farming. Promotion of local partners. Rural road building. Promotion of small enterprises.

● **Paraguay.** Since 1972.
Collaboration with private and state partners. From 2001 new programme: support of farmers' group initiatives and activities, promotion of creativity in rural areas, promotion of local learning processes utilising new communication technologies.

● **Philippines.** Since 1981.
From 2002 collaboration with non-governmental organisations and local government in the rural development sector, promotion of the national decentralisation and local government programmes.

● **Senegal.** Since 2001.
Promotion of know-how in organic farming.

● **Sri Lanka.** Since 1978.
Cooperation with local organisations: drinking water supplies; rural infrastructure; regional and community development; organic agriculture; support for self-help activities in villages and plantations. Redevelopment and peace promoting activities.

● **Tanzania.** Since 1996.
Support for the «Tingatinga» cultural workshop in Dar-es-Salaam.

● **Vietnam.** Since 1994.
«Social forestry» training and institutional capacity building project. "Cao Bang" development project with emphasis on agricultural extension. "Babe National Park" support programme with emphasis on income generation. NGO natural resources promotion programme.

Principal objective of Helvetas

Helvetas is committed to aid economically and socially underprivileged people in Africa, Asia and Latin America by promoting self-sufficiency through working with local organisations, communities and individuals.
The organisation aims to secure basic human needs as well as promoting further personal development.

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Helvetas in figures

Expenditure 2002 in CHF (millions)

Foreign Department		
Programmes in Asia	24,31	48,6%
Programmes in Africa	13,01	26,0%
Programmes in Latin America	5,16	10,3%
Reserve for cultural projects and development programmes (Asia, Africa, Latin America)	0,35	0,7%
	42,83	85,6%
Domestic Department		
Domestic activities: public relations, local campaigns, fund raising	1,90	3,8%
Contribution to the coalition of aid agencies: Swissaid, Swiss Catholic Lenten Fund, Bread for all, Helvetas, Caritas and to other development organisations as well as to service centres for development cooperation	0,47	0,9%
	2,37	4,7%
Administration		
Head office in Zurich with foreign and domestic department, data processing, accounting and logistics	4,37	8,8%
Branch office French region	0,35	0,7%
Branch office Italian region	0,08	0,2%
	4,80	9,7%
Total	50,00	100,0%

Income 2002 in CHF (millions)

Helvetas Generated Funds		
Membership dues, donations	3,60	7,2%
Contributions from communities, church organisations, cantons and project partnerships	2,10	4,2%
Donations from companies, associations and others	1,00	2,0%
Retail sales	0,60	1,2%
Capital gains	1,10	2,2%
Purpose-linked provisions and hidden reserves	0,50	1,0%
	8,90	17,8%
Project Income (Government and International Organisations)		
Projects under contract	15,45	30,9%
Commission projects	11,15	22,3%
Contribution to programmes	10,20	20,4%
Contribution to administration	4,20	8,4%
Contribution to information	0,10	0,2%
	41,10	82,2%
Total	50,00	100,0%

Project achievements

Population provided with access to drinking water	231 213
Pedestrian and road bridges built	217
Maintenance programmes for drinking water supplies and bridges	276
Reafforestation (in ha.)	242 926
Farmers and agricultural advisers trained	97 040
Programmes for supporting farmer organisations (methods, organisation, marketing, advising)	3 341.

Advice to, and support for, administration centres (planning, local initiatives, political advice)	546
Trained specialists (skilled manual workers, teachers, entrepreneurs)	2 714
Literate adults	11 991
Visitors to cultural and educational events	1 003 786
Employees receiving training / further training	2 159

(These figures represent achievements for 2000)

Helvetas in brief

Founded in 1955 as the first private organisation in Switzerland for development cooperation, Helvetas is an association with no religious or political affiliations, supported by 33'000 members.

In 19 countries the organisation currently employs 50 Swiss and more than four hundred local people who are engaged in around 150 projects. Helvetas concentrates on developing rural infrastructures, promoting sustainable development of natural resources as well as furthering education and culture.

In Switzerland Helvetas employs a staff of 45. The head office in Zurich and the branches in the French and Italian regions are, together with very active local groups, engaged in promoting solidarity with developing countries. In pursuit of its commitment to the promotion of fair trade, Helvetas sells a wide range of products from many developing countries.
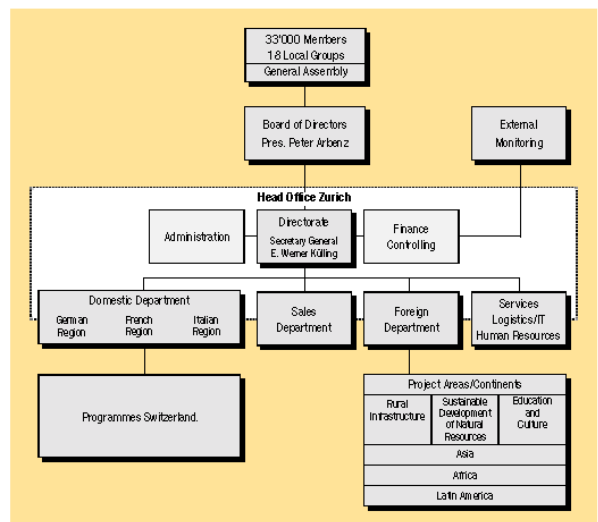
Organigram

◀ helvetas ▶

Swiss Association for International Cooperation
St. Moritzstrasse 15, CH-8042 Zurich
phone ++41/1/3686500, fax ++41/1/3686580

Internet: www.helvetas.ch
e-mail: helvetas@helvetas.ch