

THINKPIECE - PRESENTATION OF IDEAS, OPINIONS, DISCUSSION & FACTS

November 2006: Setting the scene for Mkombozi's "change vision"

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INTRODUCTION:

In 2006, Mkombozi found itself in a situation which demanded reflection about the organisation's core purpose and its goals for the next 5 years. This "thinkpiece" is the first in a series that will document Mkombozi's plans to strategically undergo significant change as it evolves and grows, while achieving a specific "change vision" for the future. In particular, this paper synthesises our thinking about why we have been feeling resistance to change within the organisation and our strategy for achieving the following...

Mkombozi's change vision is to move ahead in a determined and proactive way as a leading NGO in the field of child rights. This vision defines our intentions to be an innovative, grassroots NGO that others choose to follow and it inspires our work to change the public perception of vulnerable and street children. To this end, we will:

- Place the rights and empowerment of children / youth at the heart of all we do.
- Offer exceptional services for children and young people, in particular, the highest quality and most effective services at the least possible cost.
- Be an exemplary organisation that others choose to follow.
- Break new ground, innovate and create new paths for NGOs in Tanzania.
- Embrace risks that other organisations fear.
- Challenge the traditional organisational hierarchy so that every staff member at Mkombozi is a "leader" who brings 100% of him/herself to work each day.
- Encourage staff to trust each other, self-motivate and take pride in our work.
- Enable staff to flourish and to make a difference in the world each day.

THE CHANGE CONTEXT:

In East Africa much of the development sector focuses on the "outer"; that is, the visible results of activities such as services in local communities and small-scale economic initiatives. Success in these initiatives is contingent upon strengthening organisations and institutions that mediate such development work. Much effort has gone into designing planning and measurement frameworks to improve the management of resources, activities and people. However, this paradigm of development is primarily one of "inputs and outputs" and neglects the fundamental premise that development stems from the relationships that people have with their "inner" selves and with others.

In an ideal scenario, a Civil Society Organisation (CSO) gets involved in development work, not to replicate what the government or private sector should do, but in an effort to bring prominence or dominance of their unique values in influencing how society and its institutions organise themselves to achieve development goals and targets. Management of a CSO must therefore work for the sustainable development of individuals, the organisation itself, the sector and beneficiaries. A consciousness of how a CSO's values and action influence others in society is fundamental to this. Such self-awareness also enhances a development worker's ability to work in a CSO as a unique organisational type. Indeed, it is the values, vision and choices we make that provide the basic definition of the structure and systems in an organisation. An organisation functions well when the outer manifestations of its structure and systems are aligned with the value choices of the organisation and its core purpose. Creating alignment requires two key processes: (1) developing new alignments to preserve the core and stimulate progress; and (2) eliminating misalignments (i.e. those that drive the company away from the core ideology and those that impede progress toward the envisaged future) (Collins & Porras, 2002, p. 238).

At this stage in its evolution, Mkombozi believes that its identity is one of a CSO that is challenging a status quo which accepts the abuse of children. This identity, however, is not a historical one for the organisation. When it was founded in 1997 it perceived itself as a provider of social services to children and as a small scale, local NGO. As Mkombozi has become more established and developed a greater understanding of the issues surrounding child vulnerability, it has moved into advocacy; challenging the policies and attitudes that cause children to become vulnerable in the first place. This has entailed a significant shift within many levels of the organisation that has and continues to create resistance amongst staff and stakeholders. Sources of resistance can be identified at the following levels:

Leadership: The Management Board has clarity on where they see Mkombozi going, but have not been clear on how the organisation needs to behave in order to produce those outcomes.

Dissonance: A dissonance exists amongst many staff who feel like they joined one kind of organisation under one set of rules only to have the rules changed about the identity of the organisation. What the Management Board experienced as a natural and logical evolution of the original vision has been experienced by some staff as having the “rug pulled out” from under their feet.

Avoidance: There has been avoidance within the organisation of the very thing needed to allow growth and improved effectiveness. The tension stems from Mkombozi making the shift from a “pioneer” organisation (where everything was done as a “family” and based on “trust”) to the more “rational” phase (where policies and systems underpin the delivery of service and practice). There continues to be a resistance within the organisation to losing these family spirit and systemising the processes and policies within the organisation.

Cultural shift: As Mkombozi challenges the traditional paradigms of how CSOs work, there has been an increasing demand for professionalism by staff which few staff have encountered in previous workplaces. As such, staff struggle with the expectations placed on them and with the cultural shift within Mkombozi.

Identity: There has been a lack of shared identity within the organisation. Wheatley explains that “we must honour the fact that everyone requires the freedom to author their own life” (Wheatley & Rogers, 2005, p. 86). Looking at resistance through the lens of living systems “is not resistance or sabotage or stupidity... it’s the fact that people need to be creatively involved in how the work gets done” (Wheatley & Rogers, 2005, p. 87). This has not happened sufficiently within Mkombozi and so we see fragmentation in the vision / identity - some staff see the organisation as an “old style” service provider and others see the organisation as an “innovative challenger” of the status quo that models new ways of being with children and young people.

In addition to the operational shift towards doing more than providing services to street children, there is also a shift in the expectations demanded of people working within the organisation. Mkombozi has become highly value driven and recruitment, promotion and reward systems have started to be tied to the way that individuals uphold and promote the organisational values in their day-to-day practice. This demands a commitment from staff to buy-in to Mkombozi’s vision “of a world where all children and youth are prioritised and can access the opportunities to become well rounded, inquiring and productive people who are working towards a more just and democratic society.” Significantly, there are profound implications for individuals in terms of modelling social justice and democratic practices.

In recent years, Mkombozi has been using an OD practice to build the consciousness of individuals within the organisation, so that, in turn, Mkombozi becomes better equipped to model the changes it is trying to bring about in society. We are convinced that the genuine empowerment of individuals is the underlying principle for undertaking activities in support of the development of others. This means building their inner capacities to recognise and work consciously with their values, vision, commitment and power, so they can be agents of change who empower the development of others.

To date, we have spent considerable time focussing on the organisation’s values and identity in order to manage the change in the organisation more consciously, but we nonetheless still feel that there are important misalignments within the organisation that hinder the process of individual empowerment and a genuine shift in identity and practice within Mkombozi.

Given that an organisation is like a system where “a change in one element can transform all the others” (Morgan, 1997, p. 254), we need to understand how “each element simultaneously combines the maintenance of itself with the maintenance of the others” (Morgan, 1997, p. 254). Mkombozi has begun to undertake multi-faceted interventions that will build upon and complement each other in helping to move Mkombozi forward in achieving its core purpose of “helping vulnerable children and youth to grow in mind, body and spirit and to build a more caring society for all.” Fundamentally, these interventions should serve to address the current misalignments between what Mkombozi wants to be (its envisaged future) and what is happening (current operating practices). These various interventions would enable Mkombozi to examine what is happening inside the organisation through “new eyes” (Wheatley & Rogers, 2005, p. 83).

THE CHALLENGE:

Although Mkombozi has a clear mission, little emphasis has been placed on painting a picture of what it looks like. When Mkombozi claims in its mission that “we believe that we can promote social justice through participation and collaboration. We capture local potential through learning and reflection and act as a catalyst for holistic development”, the leadership must actually create an image of this future. They need to create a “collective perspective on the future” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 129) and keep this big picture in view so that “people have a clear sense of what this future looks like when everyone has added their piece” (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 131).

There are 2 key elements to this process. One is unpacking and communicating Mkombozi's mission / core purpose so as to "humanise" it, help staff unite around it and feel their contributions to building that world. The second element is creating Mkombozi's desired future through the articulation of a "BHAG" (a Big Hairy Audacious Goal) which is "clear and compelling and serves as a unifying focal point of effort" (Collins & Porras, 2000, p. 94). Importantly, the BHAG "engages people - it reaches out and grabs them in the gut. It is tangible, energising, highly focused. People 'get it' right away, it takes little or no explanation" (ibid). (Mkombozi's BHAG is the "change vision" statement presented on page 1 of this paper.)

The key to continuing the process lies in communicating both the core purpose and the envisaged future (or BHAG) in a consistent and energising fashion as recommended by Kotter (1995). To date, neither the core purpose or the envisaged future have been communicated clearly, consistently, nor in a range of electronic, print and face-to-face forums so that these messages really live throughout Mkombozi. Importantly, Mkombozi would benefit from investing in the development of a strategy on how to communicate this change process to the organisation and beyond. This strategy needs to ensure a balance between face-to-face and virtual communication, such that: new staff and volunteers are effectively oriented to the team way of working; wider elements of the change process are understood; and finally, the core purpose and BHAG are constantly referenced during the recruitment process so that we recruit people who "fit" the expectations of the organisation.

As a result of Mkombozi's mission and our tendency to see ourselves as a family, we have historically been dismayed when people do not fit in the organisation or are unable to commit to Mkombozi's values. However, Collins and Porras (2000) illustrate that in the most visionary companies "you're either in or you're out. It's almost cult-like" (p. 122) and these organisations are notable for the fervently held ideology, indoctrination, tightness of fit and elitism that they possess (ibid). Given the shift in identity that Mkombozi is currently undergoing and the determination to model the transformative society that we wish to build, it is important that leadership and staff realise it will not be an environment into which all fit. It is thus important for Mkombozi to be more explicit about the fact that our mission is political (because it challenges the status quo) and, as such, to acknowledge that it will alienate people within and outside the organisation. Specifically, recruitment and reward processes need to be aligned to this "cult-like" environment with an emphasis on screening of new applicants to ascertain a "fit" (ibid).

This culture will only perpetuate itself if we enable others to act. Leadership at Mkombozi needs to increasingly focus on setting clear standards (modelling the way), expecting the best, paying attention and personalising recognition (Kouzes & Posner, 2002, p. 317). Over the years, fragmentation has developed between the leadership, operational and support staff, and also between functional areas (that have manifested as discreet projects because of donor demands). Mkombozi as an organisation claims that it empowers people, but the systems of governance and programmatic structuring actually dis-empowers people. Leadership must become increasingly distributed throughout the organisation by means of a team-based way of working - that is, people are members of multiple teams (of their choosing) and each team sets its own targets and activities in line with Mkombozi's strategic objectives. Over the next few years, we anticipate teams taking control of their budgets.

The anticipation is that this new way of working will enable individuals throughout the organisation to volunteer to take on leadership responsibilities, irrespective of their positional power. Mkombozi must also achieve clarity around the new roles and function of the Director, the Management Board, Trustees and Change Coalition team given this new team based approach. To clearly demonstrate and communicate the elimination of misalignment between the old structure and new ways of working, Mkombozi needs to spend time visualising and expressing these structural changes in a new "organogram".

Overall, these changes mean that staff will have to realign their personal expectations of Mkombozi (Strebel, 1996). The expectations which individuals had of the organisation when they first signed up have changed, and as the organisation becomes more "cult-like" and demanding of its staff, there is a need for individuals to also align their expectations and hopes. The leadership should help staff to understand and express their expectations - what they thought when they first joined up, how things are changing, and what they are being asked to do differently. Importantly, staff should be encouraged to identify the support that they need in order to do things differently, and the leadership must offer that support. This, and other processes, will help individuals at Mkombozi to build greater self-understanding.

CONCLUSION:

The success of this change process is contingent on the leadership modelling calmness and enthusiasm about the changes and facilitating teams to focus on small and incremental successes. At root, the leadership must look beyond "the tyranny of the OR" and look to the "genius of the AND" (Collins & Porras, 2000, p. 44). We don't choose EITHER family spirit OR professionalism - we can have both. We can be an organisation that innovates and breaks new ground for the operation of Tanzanian NGOs. We can have a staff that is self-motivated and takes pride in our work. We can challenge the traditional organisational hierarchy so that everyone within Mkombozi is a "leader". The key to achieving these things, and our overall change vision, is to systematically and thoughtfully unearth the current operating practices that do not support the change vision and to eliminate them.

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