

Global Mentoring Initiative’s mission is to contribute to improved practices by adaptive and collaborative organisations, where people find meaning and can develop their full potential. We believe that everyone has their own unique talents and that there is always the possibility to move from good to great. Our consultancy and advisory services are value-based and driven by meaningful purpose. Our core experience is in international cooperation, particularly in crisis-situations caused by conflict or natural disaster. But we know that many people, in other sectors of work and life, today face greater uncertainty and aspire to meaningful work and more personal and professional development.

The purpose of ‘**GMI Insights**’ is to share some of our learning from our collaborations. We also want to convey the importance of a *holistic or systems-perspective*. While most people work on specific issues, we have learned that over-specialisation may be most effective for certain types of work – but becomes counterproductive in the face of the many complexities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We need to zoom in on the relevant detail and task-at-hand, but also zoom out and not lose sight of what is taking place in the bigger landscape.

At GMI we believe that, to be effective in today’s world, your action needs to

- Be strategic and have a ‘best fit’ with the particular context
- Be informed by a deep insight in that context, while keeping an eye on the wider landscape
- Be well designed, often as a multi-stakeholder process, drawing on locally available capacities
- Be pursued with dynamic steering, making adaptations when needed
- Operate with a reflective mind-set, practising rapid learning, periodic strategic reviews and regular evaluation
- Be carried by staff and teams that have multiple skills, take active responsibility and are highly motivated, because they are inspired by a positive purpose, strong values and an enabling work atmosphere
- Be undertaken in collaboration or coalition, perhaps even in partnership, with other actors, as most challenges are too big to be tackled by one agency alone
- Feed into comparative learning and realistic policy, which in turns translates into better practice
- Demonstrate global citizenship and social and environmental responsibility.

## THEMATIC GOOD PRACTICES

**Conflict-sensitivity:** Whether you’re a business or an aid organisation, bringing in or extracting valuable goods and services in an environment where there are tensions and conflicts, carries a risk of exacerbating them or creating new ones. Preventing and correcting that, and reducing the existing antagonisms, is the fundamental responsibility to ‘*act with conflict sensitivity*’. From recent work in Myanmar and Libya, we want to highlight these insights:

- *Staff managing organisational resources* (HR, finance, procurement and logistics) influence programmatic decisions. Involve them in trainings and conflict-sensitivity programme reviews;
- Conflict-sensitive ways of working cannot be considered on a single-agency basis only. there is a cumulative effect of different organisations intervening in the same socio-economic and socio-political environment. They can reinforce or undermine each other, so a *coordinated approach* is required;
- Organisational and donor *incentives and disincentives*, such as the pressure to spend or deliver ‘results’, influence whether conflict-sensitivity considerations is part of operational decisions.

See also [GMI notes](#)

- *Strategic and collective conflict-sensitivity, illustrated through the Rohingya response* (2018)
- *Developmental approaches in contested states: extreme caution required* (2018)

**Evaluation:** Evaluations can be a powerful opportunity to reflect on whether an ongoing programme needs adaptation, and for more broader organisational learning. Recent evaluation work, in Bangladesh, Western Sarah, Mali and Myanmar/Thailand confirms some of our insights:

- Many evaluations come at the ‘end’ of an intervention. But *periodic real time reviews* are more useful in complex and volatile situations, and for long-term engagements such as human rights work, peacebuilding or the promotion of disciplined behaviour among armed groups;
- Most evaluations focus on the action of one agency. But evaluations with a *‘systems’ perspective* are more appropriate where meaningful results depend on the actions of many agencies;
- Effective organisational learning requires a *culture of evaluative thinking*: the regular constructive but also critical reflection on what we are doing and what we must learn from it.

See also GMI notes

- *Evaluative Thinking: Beyond monitoring and evaluation (2016)*
- *Beyond Knowledge Management: Key enablers for the learning organisation (2016)*
- *Real-time Review or Evaluation: Tips for Terms of Reference (2019)*

**Equitable partnerships:** GMI remains an influential voice on the topic of *localisation* which focuses on the roles and relationships between international and local/national agencies and crisis-affected people. The ‘*Seven Dimensions*’ framework we developed in 2017 for the Start Network, that captures the most important aspects of those relationships, is influential and being drawn upon - from the Netherlands to the Pacific. We are engaged in multiple conversations with colleagues from international and local/national organisations, through conferences, through e.g. the Charter4Change and the Alliance for Empowering Partnerships (*A4EP*) and many individual contacts. One recent mandate allowed us to explore donor perspectives on civil society peacebuilding partnerships. Some of our general insights:

- Stronger participation of crisis-affected populations and a more prominent role of local/national organisations are not a mere operational issue. They are rapidly becoming a *strategic one, in a new world order* where there is less tolerance for still very Western-dominated international humanitarian actors coming in and taking over;
- The heightened focus on ‘risk’ in the relief sector, has created an atmosphere and mindset in which our perceptions and decisions are shaped by negative framing, suspicion and deficit thinking. We must start using *risk-benefit matrices* and introduce the notion of ‘*risk reward*’ into our vocabulary: the benefits achieved from daring to take some risk. And *counterbalance our heavy oversight- and compliance requirements with trust building practices*;
- Even within the existing concerns and constraints, *bilateral donors of relief aid can exercise significant influence* to ensure that the interaction between international and local/national agencies in crisis-situations is truly complementary and leaves the latter stronger.

Read more in our GMI notes

- *Bring Humanity and Dignity back in the Relief Industry (2019)*
- *Prepared-for-Partnership? Trust and distrust in international cooperation (2019)*
- *Localisation and Globalisation. The conversation gets serious (2019)*
- *Position Paper Grand Bargain – Equal partners, not only passengers (2019) (www.a4ep.net)*
- *New IASC Structure and Working Methods (2019) (www.a4ep.net)*

**Skills-for-partnering:** Many complex challenges in today’s world can only be handled collaboratively. Partnerships are based on the recognition that everyone contributes something important. The willingness and ability to partner is at the heart of the ‘localisation’ question. But we also find ourselves in the midst of a fascinating partnering experiences, with a grant making Foundation and a Network that manages a pooled fund. They both work in close relationship with their partners or members. Some of our insights about partnering:

- All partnerships are an *ongoing dance of converging and diverging interests*, that need to be handled with consciousness, responsibility and mutual accountability. Partnership Agreements need to find the right wording to capture that convergence, while also maintaining enough autonomy of each partner, and guarding against conflict of interest.

- Irrespective of the paperwork, partnerships are lived in ways of discussing and decision-making that are different from those within entities acting independently. Mindsets and behaviours, at all levels of governance and collaboration, need to be *fit-for-partnering*.

See a general GMI reflection on partnership dynamics

- *Challenges in Partnership Governance: Some attention points and tips (2019)*

**Preventing sexual abuse, exploitation, harassment (PSEAH):** This long-standing problem emerged as a significant issue in the aid world in 2002, and again in 2018, and across the world in 2006 with the #MeToo campaign. GMI has the in-house experience and expertise from years of practical work on this sensitive topic, from continued membership of the PSEAH task team within the Interagency Standing Committee and participation in its new results group on ‘*accountability and inclusion*’. In late 2018, we conducted an assessment and mapping of organisational practices of international and national/local actors regarding PSEA, in the context of a large programme funded by the UK government in Myanmar. Currently we are advising a standard setting body with members from private security companies, states and civil society organisations. Some generally relevant insights are:

- Following several recent scandals, this issue has overwhelmingly been addressed with more detailed and rigorous policies and procedures. This focuses on don’ts and the threat of sanctions. It needs to be complemented by *active reinforcement of positive values* and a conscious organisational culture that promotes overall respectful behaviour. This also addresses other negative behaviours such as bullying, intimidation and humiliation;
- *Broad organisational ownership* of PSEAH commitments are a must. Wide consultation is required, even if the tone and actions of senior management are crucial shapers of the culture of an organisation;
- The conscious culture need change at system-wide level, organisational, operational and strategic levels.

See our GMI note

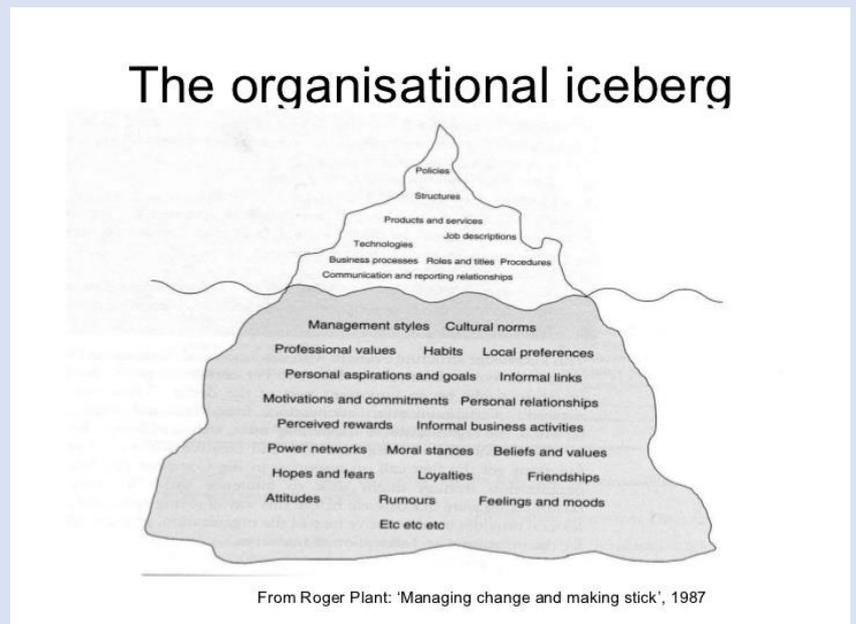
- *Rules and Values: Develop both! (2019)*

## INDIVIDUAL, TEAM, AND ORGANISATIONAL PERFORMANCE AND POTENTIAL

### Organisational life above and below the surface:

Working with conflict-sensitivity, making the most of evaluations, having partnering competencies, creating and sustaining a value-driven organisational culture that is respectful and accountable, are all functions of organisational life. Typically, these are allocated to internal and external thematic experts.

Who connects the dots between all these functional and thematic specialisations? Who ensures overall organisational coherence and alignment, leading to overall greater organisational performance? There are no machine algorithms for this: this is about people willing and able to collaborate for a common purpose.



This cannot be achieved at the formal level of job descriptions and procedures: Mindsets and organisational culture, that express themselves in everyday behaviours, are deeper drivers of performance: They shape people's sense of commitment, relationships and collaborations: within and between organisations, and between organisations and with external stakeholders.

**Beyond formalities: Positive relationships and stimulating work environments:** There is a succinct expression in French: "*Savoir faire et savoir être*": be good at your task but also at the interpersonal relationships. Here self-awareness, emotional intelligence and cross-cultural competencies come in. GMI already had significant in-house experience in the facilitation of group work, leadership development and training on the non-technical competencies that make someone a trusted adviser. We now further expanded our competencies to *help you achieve your fuller potential*, with three practical repertoires:

- the *Human Potential Framework from Being at Full Potential*, where individual, team and/or organisational assessments become the basis for guided insight, discovery and broader coaching
- *Organisational and Relationship Systems Coaching (ORSC)*
- *Partnership Brokering*

All of these allow us to look into what is happening below the surface, and intentionally work with it to create the conditions for positive developments.

We are not only bringing these insights into our thematic work, but also coaching teams and e.g. Chairs of Boards. Our coming offer is a two-day experiential learning event on team dynamics. Participants will gain the ability to see and name what is influencing the group dynamic and atmosphere and develop their personal competencies to exercise a positive influence when needed. It will first be on offer in Geneva. Some of our insights can be found in following **GMI notes**:

- *Effective and Accountable Boards of Trustees. Some pointers (2018)*
- *Expand your Power: An invitation to reflection (2019)*
- *When did your Team Last Discuss Decision-Making? (2019)*

**Adaptive projects, agile organisations?** In our fast-paced, rapidly changing and less predictable 21<sup>st</sup> century, old-style hierarchical command-and-control organisations are often less fit-for-purpose. There are already fascinating experiences with different organisational styles and ways of working and organising, certainly in the private sector. Recently, we co-facilitated conversations at the Business Agility Conference in Vienna. More on that in our coming brief and next GMI Insights edition!

## CONCERNED CITIZENS & PLANETARY INHABITANTS

Like you, we are often concentrated on specific tasks. Yet we cannot ignore the worrying trends all around us. We too are concerned about the problematic psychological and political impacts of social media, the manipulation of public opinion with fake news and the lack of reasoned public deliberation, the questioning of democracy in our home societies, and the rise of 'democratic autocrats'. As concerned citizens and peacebuilders, we reflect on the political and societal stresses caused by the Brexit vote in the UK, which poses questions about the meaning and practice of 'democracy' far beyond its borders.

See our **GMI note** *Bougainville to Brexit: Peacebuilding help with referendum pains (2019)*

We are delighted to be part of a group coaching several staff of a supermarket in London. The first to introduce plastic-free products in the UK, it seeks to operate from '*heart-in-business*' principles – creating and sustaining a positive environment that encourages employees to take active co-responsibility and to grow as individuals and professionals. This is part of the *B-Corp movement*: business as a force for good in society. But we must do more to reduce our personal environmental footprint! One step is using Ecosia as search engine, the profits of which plant trees!  
(Find out more at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecosia>)

### Intrigued or Inspired? Contact us:

Smruti Patel: [spatel@gmentor.org](mailto:spatel@gmentor.org); Koenraad Van Brabant: [kvanbrabant@gmentor.org](mailto:kvanbrabant@gmentor.org)

Our websites: [www.gmentor.org](http://www.gmentor.org) (see 'Resources' for the papers mentioned) & [www.navigation360.org](http://www.navigation360.org)