

## TOOL

# THE ONION SKIN MODEL

### WHY

There are many ways of looking at organizations and many ways of working with organizational development. The first step to support organizational change is to **understand the organizations** you work with. And perhaps the best way to support organizational change is to help an organization to **understand itself better**?

The onion skin model is good for showing that effective organizational change is based on coherence between the different layers. The model also illustrates that an organization can struggle with problems that are deep rooted, even though the outside layers look fine.

It is helpful to use the onion skin model in relation with the **Three Circles model**. You can use the onion skin model to look more in detail at the internal organizational identity and capacity (the circle: Identity: What you are).

The onion skin model can then help you to **see the relationship between different layers of an organization** – and start a conversation about **how to make sure that changes in one layer of the organization connect to the rest**.

### WHEN

It can be helpful to take a deep look at each other's organizations when you **design projects** together, so you make sure you have the capacity to do the project.

And it is essential to start any **organizational development process** by taking a good, deep look at the organization in question and develop your understanding of it as you go along.

### HOW

The Onion Skin model is developed by INTRAC. It shows organizations as having a number of layers. You can picture an onion which grows in layers of skin from the core outwards.

In organizational terms you can think of the core of the organization as the **identity and purpose** of the organization – the worldview and vision for change.

The next layer is the **values, culture and policies** of the organization – the ideas of how the organization wants to bring about change.

Following these come layers of **relationships and competences in the organization**, the **administration and procedures** as well as **the physical and financial resources**.

You can work through the different layers and assess how well you are doing in each layer. Based on your assessment you can decide if there are any issues you want to take action on.

Look at how issues are related and find out what the root cause of any problems are. If you decide you want to change something, make sure you consider how to make sure that changes in one layer of the organization connect to the rest.

**The identity and purpose of the organization** can be described as the fundamental reason, why the organization exists. This can be very clear from the beginning, but as the organization grows it can become more difficult to get a shared vision. It can also be that the political, social and cultural context in which the organization is working is changing – and this may mean changed expectations, trends or demands on the organization.

- Why does the organization exist? Do you have a clear purpose and vision for your work? Do you have a shared understanding in the whole organization?
- How is your organization affected by changes in the context, expectations from the target group or new trends in the area you work in? Do you have a strategy for dealing with these changes?

If the identity and the purpose of the organization is challenged it may be a good idea to take a look at the organizational vision, do an analysis of how to deal with challenges and create strategies to guide the work.

**Values, culture and policies of the organization** include the norms, principles and values that people use to take daily decisions in the organization. Some of these values are conscious and others are just ‘the way things are’.

- What values guide the organization?
- What is the working culture in the organization?
- Do the values and the culture support you in achieving your purpose? Are you satisfied with how things are?

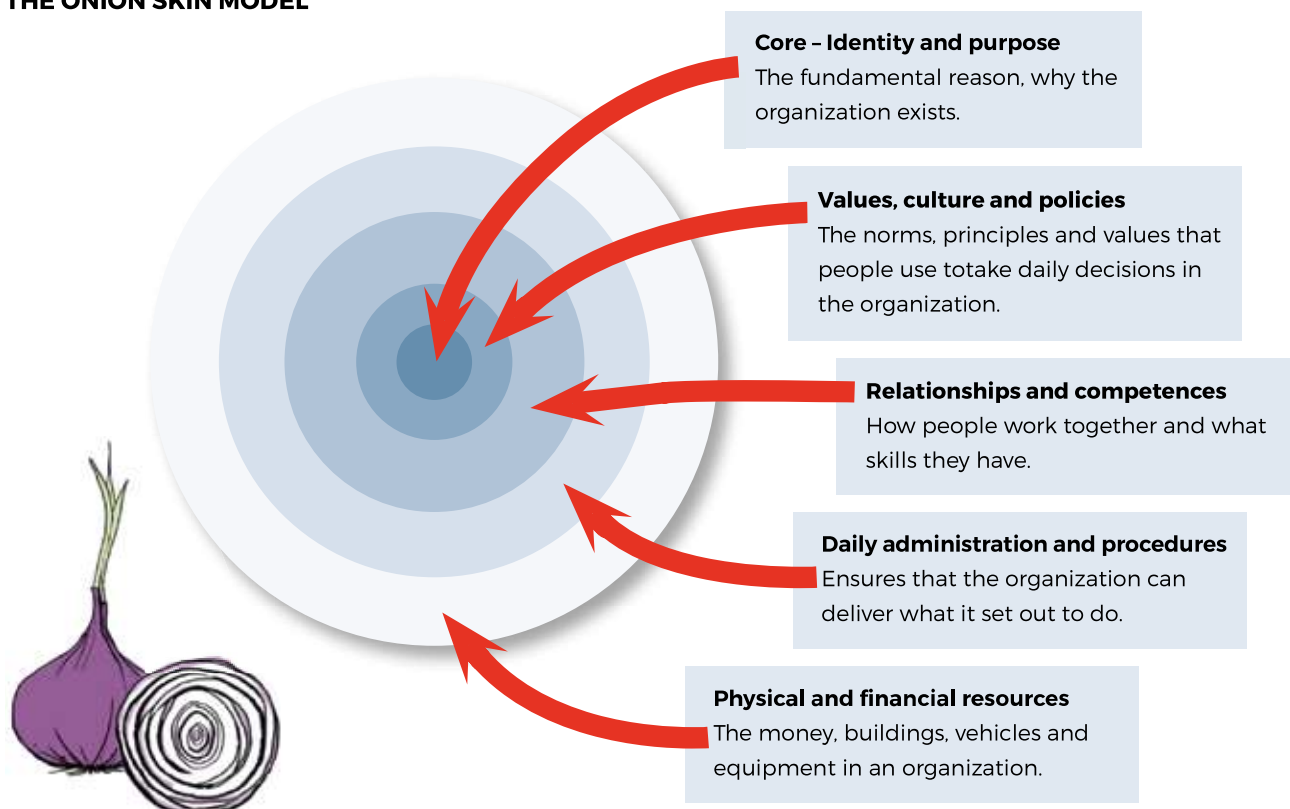
At this level, you can work to *clarify values and principles in the organization, develop policies e.g. a volunteer policy or create a democratic constitution.*

Relationships and competences is all about how people work together and what skills they have. It is also a good idea to look at the roles and relationships between people.

- Do people have the right skills in the organization to achieve what you set out to do? Are there skills you’d like to develop or get from outside?
- To what extent do people feel supported? How is the environment for learning in the organization?
- How are the relations between people? Do they get along with each other? Is there something you can do to solve disagreements or help people to work better together?

Depending on the needs, you can work with *team building, conflict resolution, improving meetings, ensuring that learning and reflection is part of the work routines, improving ways of working together, support to solve tasks, education programs or exchange of experience for management and volunteers to strengthen their skills.*

**THE ONION SKIN MODEL**



### **Daily administration and procedures in the organization.**

The daily administration gives form to an organization and ensures that the organization can deliver what it set out to do.

- How are the working procedures in the organization?  
Are they efficient and support you in achieving the purpose of the organization?
- How are the financial management procedures?  
Are they efficient and live up to the standards you want?
- How do you monitor and evaluate progress in your projects? How do you support organizational learning?

At this level it can be a good idea to work to *establish better working procedures e.g. effective communication procedures, structures for financial management or a system for monitoring, evaluation and learning.*

**Physical and financial resources** has to do with the money, buildings, vehicles and equipment in an organization. This is often the most visible image of the organization.

- What is your organization able to do with the financial and physical means that are available? Is there a need to attract further resources?

DUF supports “people rather than bricks” – and has its focus on the other layers of the organization.