

## TOOL

# UNDERSTANDING ORGANIZATIONS

### 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**?

### WHEN

It can be helpful to take a look at each other's organizations when you meet up for the first time when you meet up for the first time on a **partner identification trip**.

Also, it is a good idea to **design projects** based on a good understanding of each other's organizations and make sure the three sides of the change triangle to work together in your 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

Below are described two ways to start a dialogue to understand organizations better. The exercises can be made each on their own or following each other.

» Just like the Change triangle, the three circle model shows that there is a connection between the activities you do, your organizational identity and capacity and the relationships you have to outside actors. In a well-functioning organization, the three circles work together and reinforce each other.

There are many other ways at looking at organizations. These are just examples that you can use as an inspiration to do your own analysis and come up with ideas for organizational development.

### THE THREE CIRCLE MODEL

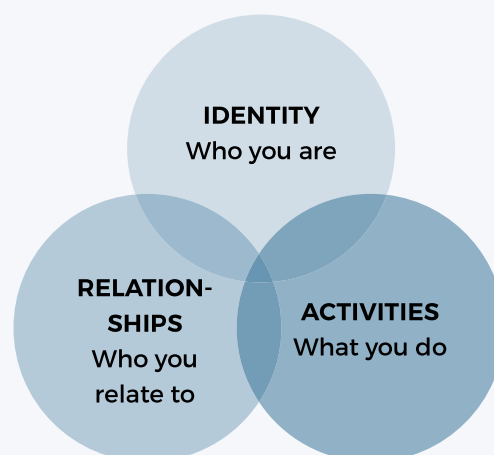
The **three circle model** describes an organization by three overlapping circles that represent the organizations identity, activities and relationships to the outside world.

The three circles are surrounded by the context, that affect the organization and which the organization wants to influence and change.

The model can help us to see the relationship between different parts of an organization – and gets us to analyze what is working well and what could improve.

One way of working with the model is to draw three circles; What you are, what you do and who you work with.

### THE THREE CIRCLE MODEL



Ask yourselves the following questions for each circle and note down responses on post its. Place the post its and move them around to where it makes sense in the circles.

Use the three circle model as a starting point for a dialogue about the organization.

**Identity – what you are**

This circle relates to the organization’s purpose and vision, the formal policies and programs as well as the culture of values of the people in the organization. It also has to do with structures and systems within the organization such as decision making structures and procedures for doing things. The human and financial resources within the organization are also part of this circle. Ask yourselves:

- Why does our organization exist? What is our purpose?
- What are the different departments and programs in our organization?
- What are the values and culture of people in our organization?
- What are the human resources? How do we understand and value volunteers? How is the balance and the relationship between men and women in our organization?
- What financial resources do we have?
- How does this circle link with the two other circles? Do they overlap and support each other?

**Activities – what you do**

The activities that you do – and their results are also important for understanding an organization. Ask yourselves:

- What activities are we doing? With whom?
- How are volunteers part of our activities?
- Are we making a difference? Are we doing the right things?
- How does this circle link with the two other circles? Do they overlap and support each other?

**Relationships – who you work with and who you try to influence**

This circle has to do with the relationships between your organization and other actors in society. It can be difficult to bring about change on your own, and it is a

good idea to work with or influence other civil society organizations, the state or other actors.

Ask yourselves:

- Who do we work together with? How?
- What actors influence us? How?
- Who would we like to influence? How?
- How does this circle link with the two other circles? Do they overlap and support each other?

**Context**

The three circles are surrounded by the context, that affect the organization and which the organization wants to influence and change.

Ask yourselves:

- How is our organization affected by the context?
- To what extent is our organization able to bring about the change we would like to see?

**ORGANOGRAM**

**The organogram or organization chart** is a classic way to get an overview of the different parts of an organization and the relationships between them. If you do it together in the partnership, it is a good way to understand the organizational structures and start a conversation of how each organization works.

An organogram shows the relationships from the board to the daily management, from directors to various departments, between staff and volunteers, and between volunteers. Depending on the organization, the structure can be hierarchical, flat or something else.

Start out by mapping out the structure on a big flip-chart paper. As you go along, talk about:

- What is the role of each part of the organization?
- What is the relationship between different parts?
- Who has authority in the organization? How are decisions made and communicated?
- Where is your project group located – and how are you related to the other parts of the organization?