When Process Matters: The Potential Implications of Organisational Learning for Peacebuilding Success

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WHEN PROCESS MATTERS: THE POTENTIAL IMPLICATIONS OF ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING FOR PEACEBUILDING SUCCESS

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Abstract

Despite considerable attention given to professionalising methods and analysing best practices, peacebuilding organisations (i.e. any organisation aiming to impact the causes of peace) continue to have difficulty understanding and demonstrating their collective and individual impact. This article argues that this is in part due to the barriers they encounter in organisational learning. To impact the causes of peace, peacebuilding organisations have to learn what works in each conflict context. To improve their chances at learning, peacebuilding organisations have to measure and understand their successes and failures. As a result, this article argues, peacebuilding organisations' learning processes have an important role in determining their capacity to identify and influence the causes of peace in countries emerging from violent conflict.

Introduction

The number of actors involved in international peacebuilding efforts has grown steadily over the past 15 years. Organisations previously involved only in humanitarian, development, peacekeeping, and conflict resolution activities now count peacebuilding as an important area of expertise, arguing that they have a crucial role to play in reducing the risk that states will 'erupt into or return to war' (Barnett *et al* 2007:37). As the field of peacebuilding has grown, methods and best practices have been developed to increase its professionalism. While these methods and best practices include common standards and metrics, they also reflect a general acceptance that peacebuilding activities must be aligned with the particular needs and capacities of each country and respond to the changing conflict dynamics (Resource Pack 2004). This alignment, or 'conflict sensitivity', requires a peacebuilding organisation to understand the conflict dynamics, understand the relationship between its activities and the context, and adjust its activities in response to new information about the relationship between its activity and the context (Resource Pack 2004). In other words, *how* an organisation relates to its context is believed to have a significant impact on the outcome of that organisation's work: process determines product. The potential importance of *process* has important implications for the degree of 'learning' required of peacebuilding organisations in relation to their peacebuilding aims. In fact, this article

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argues that while other methods to improve peacebuilding practice (e.g. conflict analysis, strategic coordination, planning, and evaluation) may be necessary to improve peacebuilding practice, they are insufficient without high levels of organisational learning.

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Although the potential influence of organisational learning on the outcome of peacebuilding activities has been acknowledged by several authors (Church & Rogers 2006; Church & Shouldice 2003; Resource Pack 2004), it is a relatively unexplored area of research. This article argues that this is a significant oversight. It also argues that the barriers to organisational learning may constitute barriers to effective peacebuilding, or at least to the effective implementation of peacebuilding best practices.

For the purpose of this article, 'peacebuilding organisation' refers to an external organisation – whether initially founded to implement humanitarian, development, political, security, conflict resolution, human rights, or even peacebuilding programming – that 'adopts goals and objectives' intended impact the causes of peace (OECD-DAC 2007:8). While indigenous and local peacebuilding organisations have potentially very important roles to play, they face learning challenges that are different from those faced by external organisations and are thus beyond the scope of this article. The concept of peacebuilding employed here also covers 'statebuilding' efforts, or 'the construction of legitimate, effective government institutions', as part of a 'larger effort to create the conditions for durable peace and human development in countries that are just emerging from war' (Paris & Sisk 2008:1).

This article first identifies the relationship between organisational learning and conflict sensitivity and goes on to outline the primary characteristics of and barriers to organisational learning as found in organisational theory. Finally, it discusses the potential relationship between barriers to organisational learning and barriers to improved peacebuilding practice.

Organisational Learning and Peacebuilding

While learning is considered important for all organisations, it is particularly critical for peacebuilding organisations for several reasons. First, present and future interventions should be informed by lessons learned from past interventions. Second, such organisations need to assess how relevant their assumptions about the causes of peace are to each new country and its changing dynamics. Third, they should link their efforts with complementary initiatives, which requires them to know about other the other initiatives and how to align with them. Fourth, peacebuilding organisations need to learn whether their routines and cultures, which guide organisational learning, facilitate the desired impact on the causes of peace.

Defining organisational learning

Organisational learning is about identifying, and acting to correct, misalignment between an organisation's aims and the outcomes of its activities in relation to those aims.[1] It does not just refer to the intake and processing of information; action based on that information to accomplish the organisation's goals is also necessary. Argyris states:

> This distinction is important because it implies that discovering problems and inventing solutions are necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for organisational learning (Argyris 1992:62)

The literature on organisational learning distinguishes between two levels of learning and two degrees (or loops) of learning. Lise Morje Howard describes 'first-level learning' in a discussion of organisational learning and UN peacekeeping:

> This type of organisational learning is not based on learning discrete, concrete 'rules of the game,' because the game is constantly changing. When the UN learns on the ground, it acquires the ability to adapt to the changing contexts of civil wars – the organisation engages with its environment and invents mechanisms to understand it (2008:19).

'Second-level learning', on the other hand, which 'entails learning not within, but between missions'

> can be defined as change in the organisation's overall means, structures, and goals, in response to new understandings of problems and their causes. An important indicator of second-level learning, which also provides a link between the first and second levels, is improvement in the preconditions for first-level learning (Morje Howard 2008:19-20).

Double-loop learning occurs when individuals within an organisation openly and honestly examine the underlying assumptions and behaviours that may have caused gaps between the intended and actual outcome of the organisation's actions (Argyris 1992:68). It is distinguished from single-loop learning in which no significant questioning of underlying assumptions or behaviours is necessary.

Learning and conflict sensitivity

While all organisations should be sensitive to their positive or negative impact on violent conflict (Anderson 1999), peacebuilding organisations are expected to be conflict-sensitive in relation to their peacebuilding aims (OECD-DAC 2007:8). Conflict sensitivity is the ability of an organisation to: understand the context in which it operates; understand the interaction between its intervention and the context; and and act upon the understanding of this interaction in order to avoid negative impacts and maximise positive impacts (Resource Pack 2004:1.1). For example, an organisation implementing a disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programme aims to be conflict-sensitive not simply to prevent its activities from exacerbating the conflict, but also to improve the likelihood that its DDR activities will target needs and capacities that will contribute to eventual peace. To be conflict-sensitive in relation to peacebuilding aims, an organisation must understand whether its actions achieve its desired outcomes on the conflict environment and, in the case of misalignment between intentions and outcomes, alter its actions to increase the likelihood that they will have the intended outcomes. In other words, conflict sensitivity and organisational learning in relation to peacebuilding aims are synonymous.

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Assessing theories of change about the causes of peace

For organisations to increase their conflict sensitivity, they need to investigate their assumptions about the causes of peace in the country. The 'causes of peace' refers to norms, behaviours and institutions that are likely to create momentum for sustainable peace in a particular country. Peace is a state of equilibrium that can be arrived at along multiple paths. Each country's war-to-peace transition is unique, determined by the

conditions created by its history, its capacity and the interplay between the various actors and organisations (national and international) exercising influence during the transition. To guide their interventions, organisations engaging fully or marginally in peacebuilding have developed implicit and explicit hypotheses about the factors that drive and cause peace, or theories of change. A theory of change describes the mechanisms that the intervening organisation believes will generate the desired change (Church & Shouldice 2003:33). Such theories of change 'more often than not reflect unexamined assumptions and deeply rooted organisational mandates rather than "best practices" born from empirical analysis' (Barnett *et al* 2007:53). For example, an organisation may support free and fair elections in line with its 'theory of change' that the elections will lead to representative governance and ultimately to sustainable peace. Nonetheless, elections can also lead to increased conflict and violence, as exemplified by Burundi's 1993 elections that marked the beginning of over a decade of war. To increase the probability that peacebuilding activities will create momentum toward peace in a particular country, their theories of change should be 'uncovered, assessed and tested' (Church & Rogers 2006; Church & Shouldice 2003; OECD-DAC Guidelines 2007:8). If organisations do not examine the relevance of their underlying theories of change about the causes of peace, they are unlikely to learn which actions are most appropriate for the particular conflict dynamics; and if they do not learn, they are unlikely to improve their impact on the causes of peace.

It may also be important for organisations to 'uncover, assess and test' their theories of change because they reflect a liberal peace agenda that aims to replicate the institutions of the modern state: rule of law, markets and liberal democracy (Barnett *et al* 2007:36). While not all peacebuilding activities focus on the establishment of a liberal peace, it provides the general normative and institutional framework for the type of state and society that many peacebuilders think they are helping to create. While the promotion of rule of law, markets and liberal democracy is not inherently wrong and can certainly be beneficial, their wholesale application to countries emerging from conflict can have unintended effects. The application of this 'maximalist' agenda to weak states can actually lead to greater conflict and instability (Paris 2004; Suhrke 2006). Moreover, the imposition of Western norms and institutions can stifle national peacebuilding capacity and thus reduce a country's capacity to sustain peace. In Afghanistan, the perceived imposition of a Western agenda increased resistance to the reconstruction efforts, with Afghan critics asking

> how can we be in the driver's seat when, in fact, the map is produced in New York, Bonn and London, the fuel bill is paid for at pledging conferences in Tokyo and Berlin, and foreign experts are doing back-seat driving? (Suhrke 2008:1305)

In another example, a police reform project in Bosnia-Herzegovina, which sought to create multi-ethnic police forces to serve as the 'daily manifestation of the state and the rule of law in civilians' lives', actually undermined 'the basic functions of the police to the point that the institution is now in a parlous state' (Celador 2005:367, 373).

In failing to question the fit between the liberal peace agenda and the needs, capacities and perceptions of a given state and society, international peacebuilding organisations tend to assume they can predict and control the outcome of state formation and social change processes. This assumption ignores important findings in the statebuilding, democratisation, and social change literature: war-to-peace transitions are inherently unstable and do not follow a predictable trajectory (Diamond 1999; Mann 1993; Reuschemeyer 2005; Snyder & Mansfield 2007). While externally engineered social change has delivered the desired results – in Turkey, Thailand and Japan, for instance – they were 'endogenous initiatives and the policy process remained under national control' (Suhrke

2008:1294). Comprehensive international post-conflict peacebuilding efforts have rarely achieved the same degree of internal legitimacy or buy-in (Suhrke 2008:1294).

Because of the potential mismatch between theories of change that are framed by the liberal peace agenda and the actual needs and capacities of the country emerging from conflict, it is particularly important for organisations to assess their theories of change (OECD-DAC 2007), and adapt them accordingly. By examining the relationship between their theories of change and the needs, capacities and perceptions of the state and society emerging from conflict, peacebuilding organisations increase the likelihood that they will catalyse a peaceful war-to-peace transition. Because the ultimate purpose of peacebuilding is ownership of the results by the state and society emerging from conflict, this dialectic between external peacebuilding organisations and the state and society in which they intervene is particularly important. Discovery of the intended outcome on the war-to-peace transition, however, requires a high degree of organisational learning, including incentives for staff to question their underlying assumptions and adapt their activities accordingly (i.e. double-loop learning). Nonetheless, existing organisational learning literature offers little by way of tools for and approaches to double-loop learning.

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Creating coherence, one linkage at a time

Strategic coherence among the peacebuilding organisations that intervene in a given country is also considered to be crucial for effective peacebuilding (Jones 2002). For external actors to help a war-torn country make the difficult transition from war to peace, a coherent international effort that pursues a common strategy is deemed to be more productive than a fragmented one that pursues multiple, possibly contradictory, strategies. According to Dan Smith (2004:27), the trick is to combine the different peacebuilding activities (or the *peacebuilding palette*) together 'in ways that are specific to the country, region and conflict in question, for greater effect – like mixing paint'. With the right mixture, the aggregate whole becomes greater than the sum of the parts.

'If "coherence" is the aim, then "coordination" is the activity through which coherence is pursued' (De Coning 2007:8). In fact, the United Nations Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) uses various forms of coordination to support the development of 'integrated strategies for post-conflict peacebuilding and recovery' (General Assembly Resolution 2005:98). While the PBC is mandated to convene actors, marshal resources, propose an integrated strategy and provide recommendations and information to improve the coordination of all relevant actors within and outside the UN, it is not mandated to enforce coordination or coherence (General Assembly 2005). The successful development and implementation of a strategy depends on the willingness of each participating organisation to work with other actors to assemble a common effort. In fact, linkages between individual peacebuilding activities may be just as important to achieving an aggregate impact as is coordination or strategic coherence.

In its extensive study of peacebuilding success, the Reflecting on Peace Practice (RPP) project determined that linking individual projects for 'cumulative effectiveness' is a crucial factor (OECD-DAC 2007:40). The project also found that activities that aimed to engage many *more* people in actions to promote peace were most effective if they also engaged individuals or small groups with leverage, the *key* people (Anderson & Olson 2003:48-49). Peacebuilding activities were most effective when they had an impact at both the individual and personal

level and at the socio-political level (Anderson & Olson 2003:48-49). Work in any one area (more people, few people, at personal or socio-political level) was insufficient to build momentum for significant change in favour of peace. Building on this work, a recent OECD-DAC report on the evaluation of conflict prevention and peacebuilding identified 'linkages' as a criterion by which these activities should be evaluated (OECD-DAC 2007:40).

For example, the success of a DDR programme is judged not only in terms of how an activity is completed, but also by the linkages between activities that enable the output of one project to become the input of the next project at the next level of change – personal, interpersonal, structural, or cultural (Lederach 2003:27). A DDR programme often aims to alter the behaviour of a former combatant (personal change), change the way individuals in society relate to former combatants (interpersonal change), create new jobs for former combatants (structural change), and, ideally, support the development of a culture that rejects the use of violence to solve problems and win respect (cultural change). If it fits with the needs and capacities of the country, the success of one type of change is likely to reinforce the next type of change. Yet because one organisation cannot implement the wide variety of DDR programming required, linkages between various activities, and thus organisations, are required. In response to this need, the UN has developed 'Integrated DDR Standards' that set out the necessary steps for DDR and recommend coordination arrangements to ensure complementarity (IDDRS 2007).

While coordination can facilitate linkages, it cannot enforce them. Donor governments, the UN and other multilateral organisations and NGOs are wary of giving their autonomy over to collective efforts that may prevent them from fulfilling their mandate. The culture, routines, and accountability structures within each of these organisations generally favour the fulfilment of the organisation's individual mandate over collective action (Campbell 2008). Even within the UN, where the Special Representative of the Secretary General has the authority to coordinate the entire UN system in a given country, he or she cannot enforce collaboration or coherence:

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> Although the authority of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General over United Nations field activities has been clearly set out, the reality is that various parts of the system operate under different rules and regulations. Meeting those obligations presents practical obstacles for joint planning and programming (General Assembly 2007:44).

Strategic coherence and formal or informal coordination may be necessary – but not sufficient – for organisations to positively impact the causes of peace. The contribution of each peacebuilding activity to a larger strategy or coordinated effort depends on how it is linked to other activities and assembles an aggregate contribution. These linkages require the development of selective strategies to target specific causes of peace, in addition to (or possibly instead of) an overarching peacebuilding strategy for the entire country.

The creation of linkages depends on the sensitivity of each organisation to the conflict dynamics, the causes of peace, and the actions of other international and national actors, and that requires organisational learning. Furthermore, creating worthwhile linkages depends on the willingness and ability of each peacebuilding organisation to link with other such organisations, and adapt its successes in activities and approach to their capacities and aims. The adaptation should ideally occur during initial planning and

implementation, because conflict dynamics change and new opportunities for linkages appear. However, organisational learning and conflict sensitivity are insufficient in themselves: also required is a willingness to buy into an intended impact that is beyond the capacity of any one organisation. Competition for funding, turf battles and a general focus on output over outcome can discourage peacebuilding organisations from collaborating or linking their activities. Better peacebuilding practice may require changes in the organisational culture and routines of organisations, and in those of their donors, to encourage greater collaboration (Campbell and Kaspersen 2008).

Organisational culture and routines

The peacebuilding field is made up of many organisations founded to implement other types of programming. It is also inclusive. Peacebuilding is characterised by 'a multiplicity of interdependent elements and actions that contribute to the constructive transformation of the conflict' (Lederach 1997:67). This includes efforts to provide security; establish the socio-economic foundations of long-term peace; establish the political framework of long-term peace; and facilitate reconciliation and reinforce the rule of law (Smith 2004:10). To fulfil this multitude of tasks, organisations that traditionally implemented development, humanitarian, security, human rights or conflict resolution activities now also aim to impact the causes of peace. Each organisation with that aim defines its contribution to peacebuilding largely in terms of its core mandate, capacity and standard type of intervention (Barnett *et al* 2007). There is a risk, therefore, that these organisations will implement peacebuilding activities in the same way they approach their development, humanitarian, human rights, or conflict resolution programmes. All such organisations are challenged to adapt their organisational routines, culture and incentives to support their peacebuilding aims. For example, a development organisation may reward staff for achieving economic outcomes regardless of the impact of the outcomes on the causes of peace. Such an organisation should assess which organisational processes are likely to influence positively the causes of peace and adapt its organisational culture and routines to them. This requires that it learn from its past and question whether its organisational culture and systems are appropriate.

Organisational learning and peacebuilding success

The above analysis has provided four arguments as to why organisational learning is likely to be a factor in determining the success of peacebuilding efforts. First, at the most basic level, second-level learning encourages the transmission of lessons from one intervention to the next. Second, all peacebuilding activities are grounded in assumptions about the likely causes of peace, and peacebuilding organisations should question the relevance of these assumptions to the needs, perceptions and capacities of the society emerging from violent conflict. Because there is 'relatively little knowledge regarding what causes peace or what the paths to peace are' (Barnett et al 2007:45), the war-to-peace trajectory has to be discovered anew in each country. Most literature on peacebuilding practice recommends that peacebuilding organisations use conflict analysis to help align their programmes with the needs, capacities and dynamics of each country (Anderson & Olson 2003; Church & Rogers 2006; Paffenholz & Reychler 2007; Resource Pack 2004). Yet if peacebuilding organisations do not also question the applicability of their theory of change and working assumptions

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to the context – both during the initial programme design and while monitoring its implementation – they may blunt their effectiveness by introducing pre-packaged and mismatched programmes. Such questioning ideally takes the form of double-loop learning: the organisation develops openness to critiquing and testing its assumptions and values, and to taking risks (Argyris 1992:68-69; Resource Pack 2004:5:3). For example, there is evidence that economic liberalisation in the absence of strong institutions may exacerbate conflict (Paris 2004), and equally that liberalisation has been essential to peace and prosperity in modern states (Dahl 1998). As a result, a development organisation that promotes economic liberalisation would ideally engage in double-loop learning to discover the fit of its approach to the context, and give its staff incentives to look afresh at economic development in conflict contexts.

Third, because peace cannot be built through solo efforts, research suggests that successful peacebuilding organisations create linkages between their activities to form an aggregate contribution (OECD-DAC 2007; Anderson & Olson 2003). While formal or informal coordination may facilitate linkages and the development of a strategy, each organisation should respond to changes in the conflict dynamics and identify and exploit opportunities for linkages with other peacebuilding actors. Through this sensitivity to conflict dynamics and the efforts of national and international actors, organisations can collaborate to create and sustain the momentum towards peace. Such linkages require a considerable degree of first-level organisational learning.

Fourth, an organisation that engages in peacebuilding but was designed to fulfil other mandates needs to change its organisational culture and routines, motivating its staff to understand and assess the impact of its activities on the likely causes of peace (Resource Pack 2004:5). Learning what works, and what doesn't, should be integrated into their routines so that it can be replicated in other interventions, as second-level learning.

Finally, organisational learning and impact assessment are interdependent. Organisational learning requires incremental impact assessment, or information about the alignment between intention and outcome. Better incremental impact assessment, in turn, requires increased organisational learning, or action to correct misalignment between intention and outcome. While understanding the impact of peacebuilding activities is challenging, it is nonetheless possible to attain through the measurement of *transfer* (Church & Shouldice 2003:25-28). According to Herbert Kelman (1995), 'If interventions are to make a difference, there needs to be transfer of knowledge, attitude change and resources to people beyond those directly participating in the project.' *Transfer* goes hand-in-hand with *linkages*, as linkages dictate the direction of the desired transfer. Together, linkages and transfer enable peacebuilding organisations to measure the incremental contribution of their activities toward the causes of peace in a given country. Specifically:

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- Potential linkages can be determined by evaluating how each organisation's capacity, theories of change and working assumptions fit with those of other actors and with the needs and perceptions of the society emerging from conflict (Church & Rogers 2006; Church & Shouldice 2003; OECD-DAC 2007). During planning and implementation, these potential linkages can be seen as windows of opportunity.

- *Transfer* measures the impact of each linkage and indicates the momentum created toward the causes of peace. Transfer can be measured by outlining the hypothesised

causal chain of the theory of change, after it has been tested against the context (Paffenholz & Reychler 2005), and assessing the degree to which the impact is transferred according to the predicted causal chain, as well as the degree to which it aligns with new opportunities that were not predicted.

There seems to be a potentially important relationship between an organisation's learning capacity and its capacity to identify and target the causes of peace. Paradoxically, however, while organisational learning is important for organisations to understand the context, adapt to changes and understand their impact, it is also especially challenging because of degree of organisational learning required for measuring impact. The achievement of peacebuilding aims may thus be more difficult than the achievement of other aims (development or humanitarian that are easier to measure and quantify, and thus to learn from.

Challenges of Organisational Learning and Implications for Peacebuilding Success

If organisational learning is so important for improved peacebuilding practice, then why do many peacebuilding organisations fail to learn? 'Too many peacebuilding programmes fail to make changes, enrich learning, or both' (Church & Rogers 2006:5). Dan Smith (2004:15) suggests that peacebuilding organisations may not be able to respond to the numerous demands placed on them, and calls for research into the organisational challenges that they face. Examination of literature on organisational learning shows that Smith makes an important point: the barriers to organisational learning may be significant obstacles to improved peacebuilding success, or at least to effective conflict analysis, strategic coordination, planning, evaluation and other methods intended to improve peacebuilding success.

Organisational routines guide learning. Organisations learn 'by encoding inferences from history into routines that guide behaviour' (Levitt & March 1988). Routines are the rules, 'procedures, technologies, beliefs, and cultures [that] are conserved through systems of socialisation and control'. Action in organisations therefore 'involves matching procedures to situations more than it does calculating choices'. Because learning is based on 'interpretations of the past more than anticipations of the future' (Levitt & March 1988:320-326), peacebuilding organisations are likely to apply old solutions to new problems, whether or not they fit. Routines shape behaviour in organisations, which means that organisational learning is limited to aspects of experience that are translatable into routines. The routines – and the individuals who observe success and translate it – largely determine, and limit, what an organisation can learn. Individuals make numerous mistakes in their attempts to interpret and draw lessons from history, leading to 'systematic biases in interpretation'. As a result, an organisation's best practices may

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be difficult to capture fully, translate into routines and replicate. Because of the complexity of conflict environments, and the unique nature of each conflict, it is even more likely that interpretations of peacebuilding success that are integrated into the routines of peacebuilding organisations will be flawed. Even when a lesson is learned, it may not be the right lesson. Organisations are often taught the same lessons repeatedly, and learn only the lessons they can easily translate into the language of pre-existing routines.

The role of routines in organisational learning poses particular challenges for peacebuilding organisations because they were largely designed to implement other types of programmes (such as development, humanitarian, human rights or conflict resolution). These organisations will have difficulty encoding lessons learned about peacebuilding impact into routines that were designed to support and reward other types of programming. While routines can adapt incrementally, adaptation requires some proof of necessity, which calls for assessment of success or failure (Levitt & March 1988:333; Feldman 2003; Resource Pack 2004:5). Because of the difficulty of assessing the impact of peacebuilding efforts, there is evidence that many peacebuilding organisations are weak on the need to change or adapt routines and organisational culture to improve peacebuilding practice, and thus less incentive to change the routines or improve peacebuilding practice.

Organisations also learn in relation to targets. Organisational behaviour depends on the relation between the outcomes they observe and the aspirations, or targets, they have for those outcomes (Levitt & March 1998:320). An organisation therefore learns what it defines and measures as successful. Measuring success in peacebuilding is particularly challenging because of the large number of factors that contribute to success, the unique circumstances of each conflict environment and the high degree of conflict sensitivity and organisational learning required to measure incremental success.

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While organisational learning increases a peacebuilding organisation's capacity to measure success, an improved capacity to measure success is essential for organisational learning. Consequently, better assessment of incremental impact on the causes of peace is likely to be critical in improving peacebuilding practice.

Double-loop learning – when individuals interrogate the assumptions and behaviours that may have led to gaps between intended and actual outcomes of an organisation's actions – has an important role in helping peacebuilding organisations re-assess and adapt their theories of change to the context of the conflict. Double-loop learning is also important once a peacebuilding programme is under way, in helping staff to question whether the theory of change is delivering the intended results, and whether and how it should be restructured, changed or completely revised. The importance of double-loop learning in questioning theories of change reinforces the argument of this article: improved peacebuilding practice is likely to require a high degree of organisational learning. This is particularly so for organisations which were designed to implement other types of activities, because they are 'imprinted' with the cognitive, normative and regulative structures of their original mandate (Scott 1995:115). By questioning the underlying assumptions of the organisation and its staff in a process of double-loop learning, leaders can mobilise their organisations to adapt their routines and cultures to achieve greater peacebuilding success.

Conclusion

This article has argued that organisational learning is likely to play an important role in determining peacebuilding success. While conflict analysis, strategic coordination, planning and evaluation may be necessary to improve peacebuilding practice, they are insufficient without organisational learning. Increased learning by peacebuilding organisations is also important simply because peacebuilding is a developing field (Church & Rogers 2006). The more that is learned about which factors lead to success, and the more this learning is integrated into the routines of peacebuilding organisations, the more likely it is that success

will be achieved. Improved organisational learning, in turn, depends on improved monitoring and evaluation of incremental impact on the causes of peace.

Because an organisation's learning process is likely to be an important determinant of its ability to identify and target the causes of peace, the barriers to organisational learning may also be barriers to peacebuilding success. Perfect learning organisations are rare in any field, and particularly so in peacebuilding because it throws up additional barriers to learning: the challenge of measuring impact on the causes of peace; a tendency toward external accountability; high staff turnover, and a focus on output rather than outcome. The implications for future efforts to improve peacebuilding practice are significant: the learning structures of peacebuilding organisations may be among the greatest barriers to the achievement of their aims. Better peacebuilding practice demands greater efforts not only to understand the complex causes of peace, but also to improve the ability of peacebuilding organisations to understand these causes and act on that understanding.

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Endnote

[1] Adapted from definition by Argyris (1992:67): 'Learning is defined as occurring under two conditions. First, learning occurs when an organisation achieves what it intended; that is, there is a match between its design for action and the actuality or outcome. Second, learning occurs when a mismatch between intentions and outcomes is identified and corrected; that is, a mismatch is turned into a match.'

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