

From Little Things, Big Things Grow

By Birgitte Jallov¹

Under the above motto and within the ‘Magic Training Room’ at the Vietnamese Journalist’s Training Centre (VJTC) in Hanoi, the Fojo Southeast Asian Media Training Network programme met to strengthen the partner institutes’ strategic approaches to income generation, communication and visibility.

The Magic Training Room – a space to co-create and grow

As designated by the programme manager Jaldeep Katwala, the workshop room was a lot more than a space to learn, it was most of all a space to share and to strengthen the bond between the six participating media training institutes and their regional partner. And the three successive workshops held in Hanoi between October 5 and 13 worked to prepare the ground for stronger and more sustainable media training institutes, co-operating and collaborating in a regional network.

Preparing the ground for taking the collaboration to the next level, the programme manager introduced the framework for projects, where two or more institutes work together to develop quality journalism training courses in their respective countries through in ‘a collaborative bidding process’.

The successive workshops therefore also above, beyond and next to all other, were about getting to know each other sufficiently to work together effectively and efficiently, building upon the strengths of each other.

The Appreciative Inquiry approach forms the foundation work methodology and ethic of this programme, and therefore also formed the basis for the design and implementation of the three Hanoi workshops. Appreciative Inquiry basically means that we build on the strengths of each partner, instead of identifying weaknesses and trying to eliminate them. We would much rather empower and build on what already is.

Furthermore, as the model illustrates (right) a Discovery Phase, identifying the very best in each participating partner on which to build, as the basis for a Dream phase, where limitations are put aside, to give space for identification of the best possible.

When this is well described, sensed and known, the more realistic Design phase can kick in, using all that is possible from the Dream phase for ‘what might be’, ending up at the Destiny phase collectively experimenting with ‘what can be’. As Jaldeep Katwala, the programme manager, reminded the partners: “From little things, big things grow”.²



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² It is from there the title of this blogpost comes: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6_ndC07C2qw

Working with the continuum of strategic organisational development

The intense days of collaboration did generate a spirit of collaboration, sharing experiences and dreams, listening to each other, proposing possible ways in which partners could build on experiences had by others. At the end of the three workshops, the participants really knew each other and each other's institutes – their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges.



And in terms of content, the three subsequent Hanoi workshops dealt with ways of strengthening the institutes through development of:

- Strategic visions
- Strategic approaches to income-generation and fundraising
- Communication, visibility and marketing strategies.

Recognizing, that the Strategic Plan is 'the mother of strategic management', or said with other words, the core of the strategic plan, is needed for development of a strong business plan, a strong sustainability- and fundraising plan, and it is needed to focus the communication, visibility and marketing strategy.



We therefore started the process with the institutes identifying and discussion in cross-institute groups, the **strategic direction** of each: (i) the vision, (ii) the mission and (iii) the values and principles. Knowing the direction of the institute, a **strategic analysis** of the existing environment, external as well as internal, paves the way to clarity about the gap between the two: what can we build on, to develop into the institute we want to be? And what do we need to do the get there? What will our priority **strategic programmatic areas** be to make this happen?

Each institute had their 'strategy house' developed with the core elements to build on along with the internal and external situation analysis. With the very different realities of the institutes there is a powerful basis for peer-to-peer fertilisation and learning. The institutes cover a wide fan of organisational frameworks and levels of experience as for example:



- **The level of development and size of their organisation** (some have an office with five people in a ministry with no formal mandate and plans; others operate on several floors of major buildings with more than 20 staff, printed strategic plans and business plans in the making);
- **The level of autonomy of the organisation** (some are full, self-managed organisations; others refer to a director based elsewhere in their organisation / Ministry);
- **The activity level** (some have 4 courses a year; others more than 100);
- **The level of exposure** (some have a national perspective only; others operate with international partners, trainers, advisers and supranational perspectives and ambitions.)

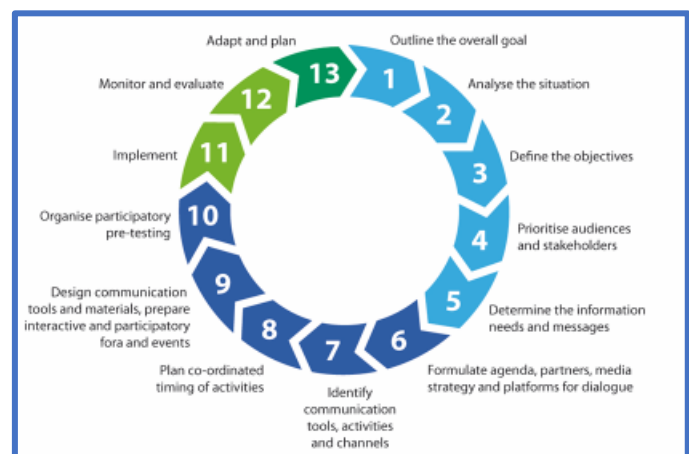
Based on the development of the elements going into a strategic plan, the business plan was taken forward, adding a thorough description of the organisational framework; the products and services; the market analysis and placement of the institute in it; the strategy and roadmap for development and success; communication and sustainability strategies; the financial plans and the budgets with a concrete fundraising plan. This all followed by a framework for monitoring, reporting, and learning from it all.



Communication, Visibility and Marketing Strategy

Whereas the communication strategy is an integrated part in the business plan, it was productive to consider it separately, and the last two days were spent with focusing on crystallizing the elements going into a full communication strategy. A strategy in support of the overall work of the institute, securing visibility for partners and users alike, and securing a clear brand, to ensure that possible funding partners know what they are considering supporting.

Working in groups to build up the framework step-by-step and sharing this in the peer-group, the individual institutes had an opportunity to appropriate new thinking and new tools - and an opportunity to use these themselves, while also having other institutes' reflections and feed-back to their own. In view of the few days available, we managed to get to close to a 360° work process around the most important elements of the communication strategy: steps 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 (see model above).



Besides from getting a very good understanding of the gradual build-up of a strategic approach to any kind of communication and visibility work, including marketing and public relations, we spent a joyful session on developing the core of the corporate presentation, followed by a filmed session with the institutes bringing out their 'elevator pitch'. Fun and very productive!

From little things, big things grow

At the end of each of the two workshops on “Strategic approaches to income-generation and fundraising” and “Communication, visibility and marketing strategies” the partner institutes developed an action plan for how to share the insights gained back home, and how to take the finalisation of the strategic frameworks forward.

Based on very concrete plans, the institutes will finalise the plans by December, where they have to submit these two strategies together with the collaborative project proposals to the SEAMTN manager.

These strategies represent building blocks in the work to support the partners of the network to grow and become stronger and more sustainable – and with new high quality course offers with a regional perspective. From little things, big things do grow!

The SouthEast Asia Media Training Network (SEAMTN) programme is managed from Bangkok and operating from the one, regional project partner Southeast Asia Press Alliance’s (SEAPA) Head Office. The Media Training Institute partners in and beneficiaries from the programme are six institutes based in four countries, namely (in alphabetical order):

- **Cambodia**
 - Cambodia Communication Institute – CCI
 - Cambodian Centre for Independent Media – CCIM
- **Lao PDR**
 - Institute of Mass Media, Culture and Tourism – IMCT
- **Myanmar**
 - Myanmar Journalism Institute (MJI)
- **Vietnam**
 - Media Training Centre (MTC)
 - Vietnamese Journalism Training Centre (VJTC)

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