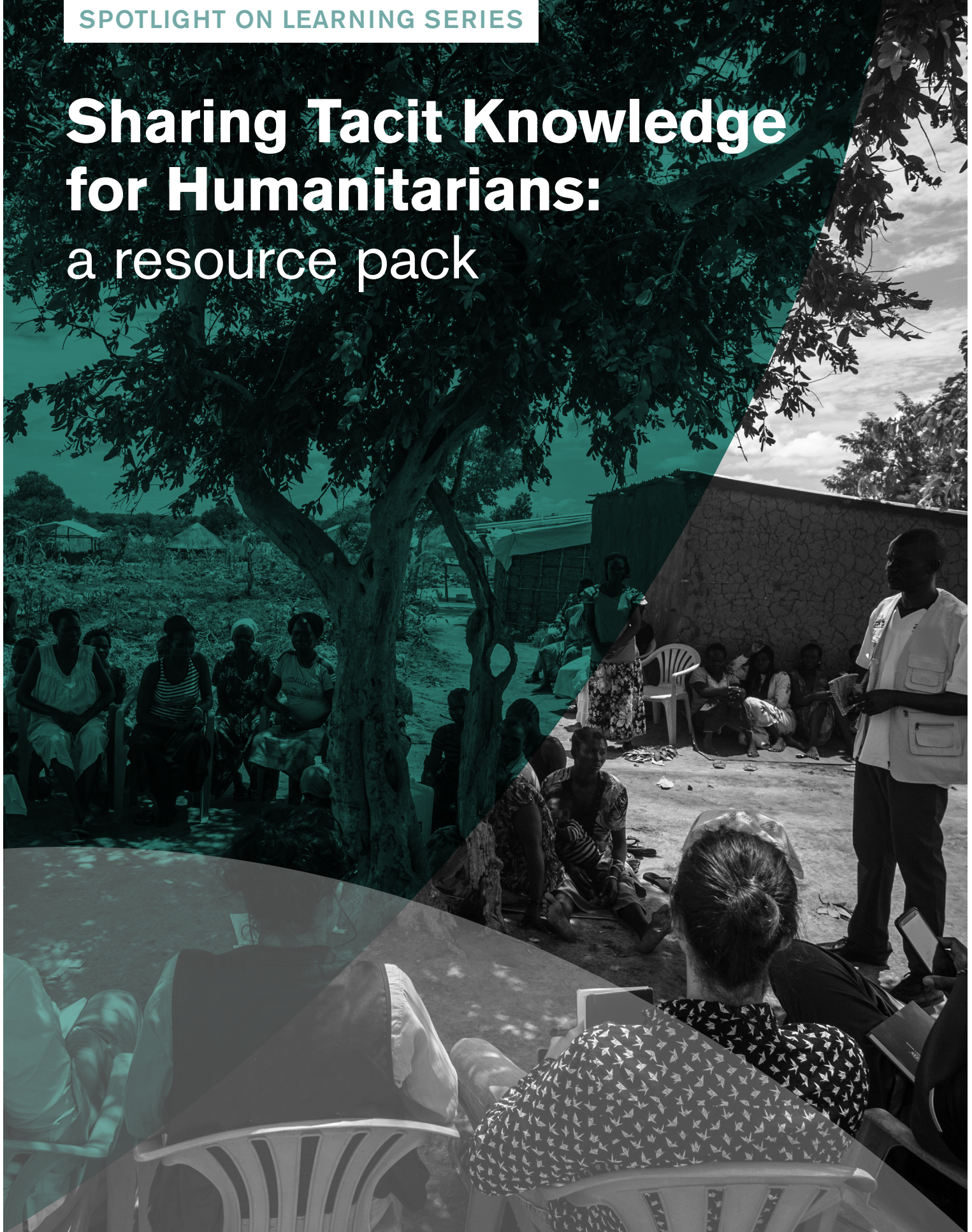


SPOTLIGHT ON LEARNING SERIES

Sharing Tacit Knowledge for Humanitarians: a resource pack



ACTION LEARNING

5 ALNAP
1997 - 2022

ALNAP is a global network of NGOs, UN agencies, members of the Red Cross/Crescent Movement, donors, academics, networks and consultants dedicated to learning how to improve the response to humanitarian crises.

www.alnap.org

About the authors

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Technical contributions

The authors would like to acknowledge the technical contribution of the project Steering Group who guided the development and piloting of the resource pack. The members are: Heng Aik Cheng (Mercy Malaysia, Malaysia), Joseph Gyandi (CRUDAN, Nigeria), Nagwa Konda (NRRDO, South Sudan), Barkat Ullah Maruf (Independent Consultant, Bangladesh), Sudhanshu Singh (Alliance for Empowerment Partnerships and Humanitarian Aid International, India), and Md. Mujibul Haque Munir (COAST, Bangladesh), as well as ALNAP's secretariat under Jennifer Doherty's supervision.

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**For feedback or questions about this resource,
please email us at actionlearning@alnap.org**

About the resource pack

Frontline humanitarian staff and local organisations possess important knowledge, yet it is rarely shared extensively or fully utilised within and between organisations (ALNAP, 2003). Much of the knowledge held by frontline staff comes from their daily experiences when implementing projects with communities. This type of social learning that does not rely on written documentation is called 'tacit knowledge'. This learning is particularly strong among staff working in local and national organisations that interact closely with communities over time.

Yet within the humanitarian system, the recognition and sharing of this tacit knowledge has been limited due to a traditional focus on documented knowledge and on supporting the learning of international NGOs and headquarters staff (ALNAP, 2003; Tanner, 2016). To maximise the use of this knowledge within and across organisations in the humanitarian system, individuals and organisations need to understand the role of tacit learning and support the creation of enabling learning environments. This resource pack was developed in conjunction with local humanitarian organisations to provide a supportive framework for tacit learning that both individuals and organisations can use to more effectively capture and share learning.

How this resource pack was developed

In 2021, ALNAP began working with a steering group drawn from local organisations in different crisis-affected countries and a consultancy group, The Research People (TRP). The aim was to develop this resource pack to support individuals to effectively capture, share and value tacit knowledge. This resource pack was developed in a participatory evidence-based manner, using a mapping of gaps in existing approaches¹ and the guidance of a steering group of humanitarian experts from Bangladesh, India, Malaysia, Nigeria and South Sudan.² An iterative design process was used to gain Steering Group inputs at multiple stages of the project. The pack includes a tacit knowledge framework and five resources that can be used together or separately. It contains resources designed for use by individuals and also as part of an organisational learning process.

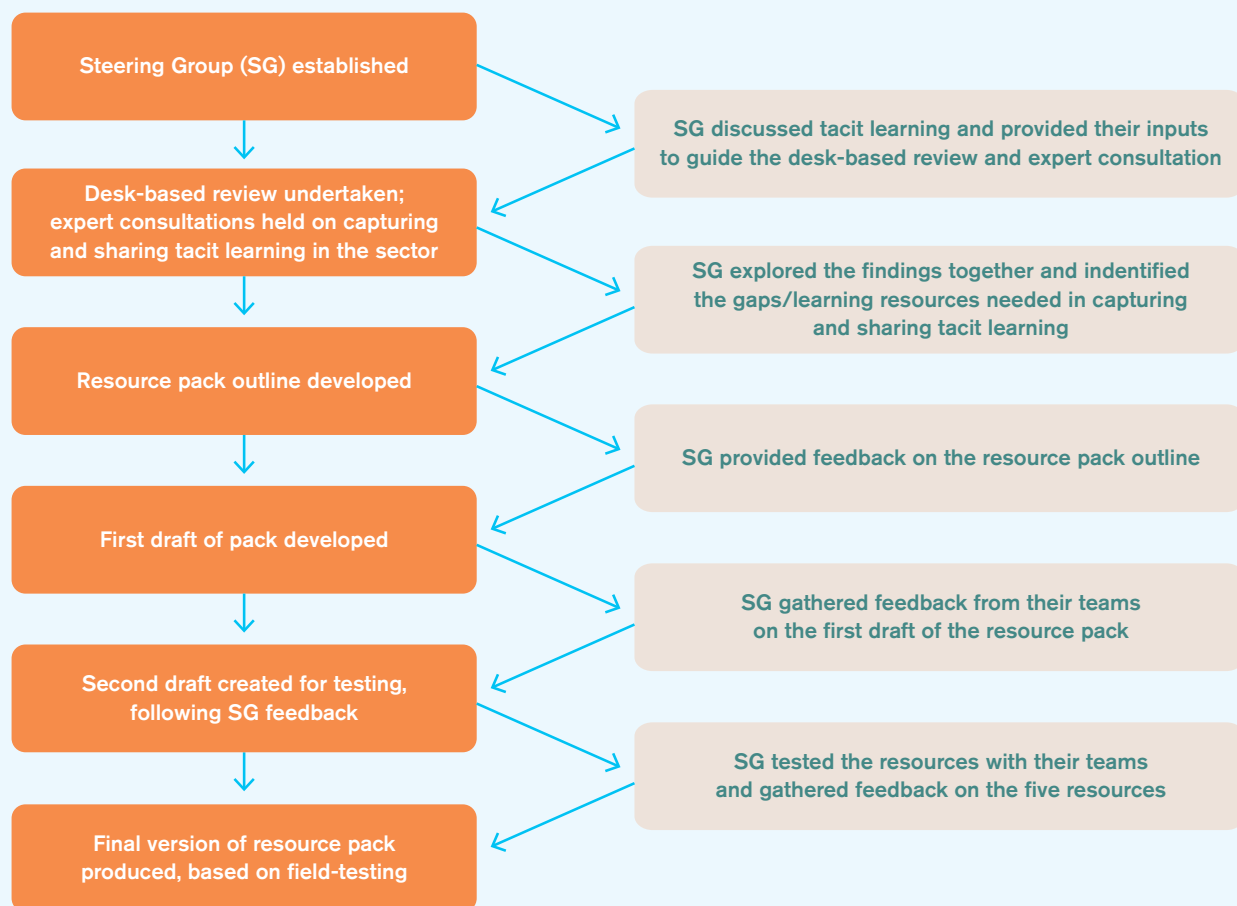
The Steering Group helped to guide the design of the pack and to pilot the resources to make sure that these were fit for purpose in their humanitarian contexts. The Steering Group inputs were particularly key in shaping five key aspects of this resource:

- 1. It highlights the concept of tacit knowledge as a valuable resource.** While many Steering Group members recognised the importance of frontline knowledge, a consistent way to refer to it and highlight its presence was lacking. While 'tacit knowledge' may not be an intuitive phrase for many people, introducing the concept into discussion was seen as valuable in itself in that it shone a light on the knowledge held by frontline staff.
- 2. It recognises the existing range of tools available for capturing and sharing tacit learning.** The Steering Group thought the creation of a new tool for capturing and sharing learning was not necessary. Several tools were already known to them. Instead, they wanted to create a *framework* that brought best practice together in a succinct way and that stimulated reflection and discussion on how to improve tacit learning within organisations. The checklists and resources in this pack are therefore deliberately not prescriptive but allow for approaches to be tailored to different individual, organisational and contextual needs.
- 3. It focuses on both individual learning and creating enabling learning environments within organisations.** While it is important for frontline individuals to feel empowered to learn and to share their knowledge, the Steering Group explained that learning opportunities would not be maximised unless the broader organisational hierarchy is supportive of the process and values the learning of their frontline staff. Different resources within the pack, therefore, target different people across the organisation.
- 4. It highlights the importance of community knowledge.** The Steering Group consistently highlighted community knowledge as a source of frontline learning. While the resource pack explores the capturing and sharing of tacit knowledge across the broad range of organisational processes, some of the different resources specifically refer to the importance of valuing community insights as part of an organisation's learning strategy.
- 5. It can be used by multiple types of humanitarian organisation.** While representatives of national organisations guided the development of this pack, the Steering Group was keen for the resources not to be seen as only for use by national organisations – all organisations, whether local or international, can strengthen their sharing and use of tacit learning to improve humanitarian action. It is important for all humanitarian organisations to value the knowledge that their (or their partners') frontline staff hold and to create enabling environments for learning.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the Steering Group members were engaged throughout all stages of the resource pack development. These were:

1. understanding needs and priorities when capturing tacit learning;
2. designing the resource pack;
3. testing it in different contexts; and
4. providing feedback on how the resource pack was used in introducing, identifying, capturing and sharing tacit knowledge.

THE PARTICIPATORY PROCESS FOR DEVELOPING THE RESOURCE PACK



What is in this resource pack?

SECTION 1

SECTION 2

What is tacit knowledge?

Often, frontline humanitarian workers hold highly important knowledge that is not written down, such as the best way to negotiate or communicate with a specific community, or understanding the unwritten social norms of a specific group or population. This information, or 'tacit knowledge', is vital for relevant, effective and appropriate responses.

JUMP TO...

Tacit knowledge is not always passed on from one person to another. For example, a colleague has been working in a community and has learned about the gender differences in health-seeking behaviour. This information is not written down and has yet to be incorporated into the humanitarian organisation's response programming. However, the colleague is about to move to another organisation and that vital information could be lost, and would have to be learned over again by the person who replaces them. Sharing the colleague's tacit knowledge would ensure that information is preserved and used to guide decision-making and deliver more effective humanitarian responses.

Tacit knowledge is knowledge that is acquired through day-to-day work, practical experience and observation and is not written down. Such social learning happens all the time. We are continually learning from our work, our peers and the communities we work with. While explicit knowledge tells you 'what', tacit knowledge is more about the 'how' of doing something in certain contexts. The 'how' can be primarily gained from experience, which can be difficult to articulate in the form of rules, guidelines, manuals or principles.

This resource pack will help you to think about how to capture and share this vitally important information. Have you ever wished you had a better handover with a departing staff member or recognised that the knowledge in a colleague's head could be more helpful for improving your daily work than the information provided in a donor report? If so, read on.

Key terms in this guide

Tacit knowledge: The unwritten or undocumented form of knowledge and skills that a person acquires through observation and practical experience.

Explicit knowledge: Knowledge that is produced as a result of a formal process of sharing learning that can be in a documented form, usually found in reports, manuals, videos and guidelines.

Knowledge transfer: The process of sharing or disseminating knowledge within an organisation, across organisations or communities.

Why is tacit knowledge important?

Tacit knowledge can derive from experiences of a wide range of human behaviours, social interactions and relationships. Capturing this knowledge can enable an in-depth understanding of the affected communities we are working with. The contextual tacit knowledge gained through working directly with communities plays an important role in delivering effective humanitarian responses. Learning from communities can guide strategic decision-making and service delivery in humanitarian settings. Contextual knowledge can be nuanced and difficult to translate to documents or other explicit forms of knowledge – underscoring the vital importance of the frontline workers and local humanitarian organisations that hold it.

Using this resource pack

Humanitarian frontline workers, project/programme managers and senior managers, and those in Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL) can use this resource pack to identify and incorporate tacit knowledge into their everyday practice, project management and organisational culture. The resource pack is designed to help you and your organisation to initiate individual and organisational thinking and discussions on tacit knowledge.

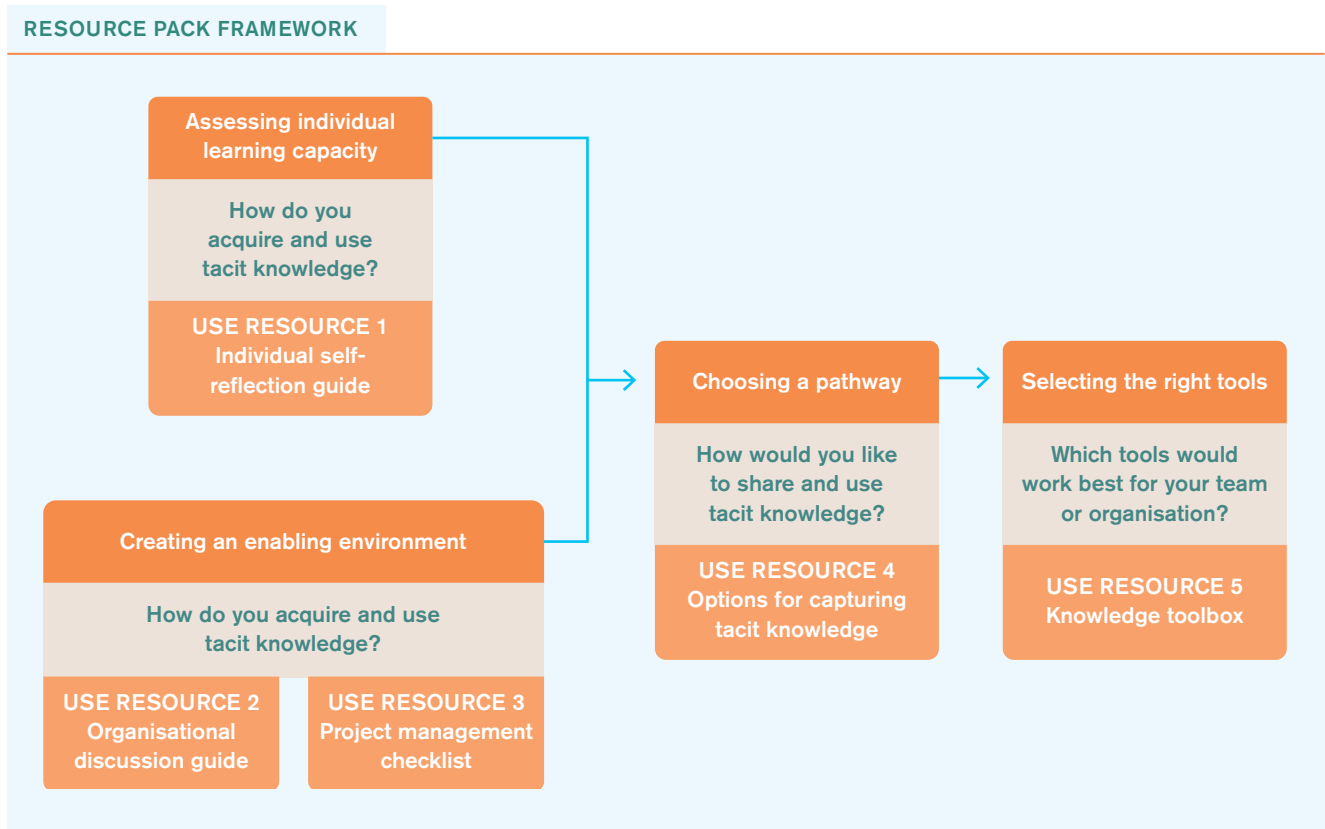
Each tool begins with a summary of purpose and who should use it. For example, the individual self-reflection guide is for humanitarian frontline workers and mid-level management to think about what and how they want to learn, and/or about the tacit knowledge they want to share and how.

The resources can be used **separately, in combinations of resources, or collectively as a whole resource pack**. Deciding this will depend on the user and their learning objectives. The resource pack can be used at any point for individual use and learning. At organisational level, for programme and senior managers, it can be useful when reviewing organisational development to promote a learning culture; developing or reviewing monitoring, evaluation and learning processes; and when setting up a programme and thinking about how the team will capture and share tacit knowledge acquired across a project cycle.

If using the resource pack for the first time, it would be more appropriate to do so in slow-onset or protracted crises, or in resilience contexts, rather than in sudden-onset crises. Slow-onset or protracted crises offer more space for reflection and discussion around tacit knowledge than emergency contexts. However, it is anticipated that through use of the resource pack, best practices for sharing tacit knowledge will be adopted and integrated into individual and organisational behaviour, and that this can filter into all humanitarian settings, including emergencies.

Resource pack framework

The resource pack is built on a framework of four key questions for individuals and organisations. The framework aims to guide you and your organisation on the journey of identifying, capturing and using tacit knowledge. To respond to these questions, the resource pack offers five resources that can be used individually or collectively.



1. How do you acquire and use tacit knowledge?

The first question of the framework helps you to identify the existing and future learning needs of frontline humanitarian workers. By using [Resource 1: Individual self-reflection guide](#), you can review and reflect on your individual learning capacities and needs, and what type of knowledge you might want to prioritise. The resource provides key questions to guide you to think about the best ways to acquire and share tacit knowledge.

Example 1

Emmanuel works on a cholera prevention programme in northern Nigeria and is leaving his role. He used section 2 of the individual assessment (Resource 1) to guide his thinking about what knowledge he needed to share, with whom and how, before he left. He identified that it was important to share with his team members his knowledge on effective ways to work with communities to de-stigmatise cholera. He then used Resources 4 and 5 to decide how to share his knowledge.

2. How can you create an enabling environment to optimise the use of tacit knowledge?

This second question guides you and your organisation to reflect on the key organisational factors that create an enabling environment for valuing, sharing and using tacit knowledge. [Resource 2: Guided organisational discussion](#) guides managers to assess how far their organisation is creating an enabling environment for learning.

Example 2a

Munir holds a senior management position in COAST, a leading national humanitarian organisation in Bangladesh. Within the organisation, tacit knowledge was not a well-known term, even though tacit knowledge is widely practised among team members. Munir used the guided organisational discussion (Resource 2) to generate team discussion on COAST's current learning environment, and how far tacit knowledge is valued, captured and shared. The resource enabled Munir to facilitate constructive and reflective discussions with colleagues on how the organisation captures and uses tacit knowledge, allowing them to pinpoint where they believe tacit knowledge should be incorporated, such as in the project inception phase and monitoring and evaluation systems and processes.

Project and MEAL managers can use [Resource 3: Project management checklist](#) to integrate and capture tacit knowledge across the project management cycle.

Example 2b

Fatima is the learning and development manager in a local humanitarian organisation in Yemen. She wanted to bring discussions about tacit knowledge to the organisational annual planning meeting. She used the organisational assessment resource to discuss with senior management and programme managers how they can create an enabling environment for learning. The resource helped Fatima and her organisation to identify areas that they want to develop more. She worked with project managers to use the project management checklist, across the project management cycle, to make sure that key tacit knowledge generated by the project is captured.

3. How would you like to share and use tacit knowledge?

The third question allows you to explore the different options for capturing and managing tacit knowledge for individual, team or organisational needs. [Resource 4: Options for capturing tacit knowledge](#) offers you a set of questions that can guide you in selecting the best option for capturing and sharing tacit knowledge. Based on your responses you may choose to:

- A. maintain tacit knowledge in its undocumented form
- B. transfer tacit knowledge into documented knowledge
- C. take a blended approach using tacit knowledge in both documented and tacit forms

Example 3

Neha is a programme officer of a WASH programme in India. She learned important ways to assess, communicate and engage affected communities when installing WASH solutions in their areas. She plans to share this knowledge with another WASH project that will start in the same region and work with the same community. She used the guiding questions from Resource 4 to help her decide which was the most appropriate way to share her tacit knowledge. She decided on a blended approach, both to document the learning as far as possible, but also to share her knowledge verbally, so that the cultural nuances were not lost.

4. Which tools would work best for your team or organisation?

The fourth question guides you to identify the most appropriate tool to capture the tacit knowledge you have identified. You can use [Resource 5: Tacit knowledge toolbox](#) to review and select a tool, or set of tools that are most appropriate to share the identified tacit knowledge.

Example 4

Following on from example 3, Neha decided to organise a small-scale Community of Practice (CoP). A CoP gives the space to share experiences and reflections on a specific topic or thematic area. In this case, it offers a good platform to share and receive reflections and knowledge on communicating with communities when designing WASH interventions. The CoP included Neha, her team members and the new project team members. Neha plans to expand this CoP to include WASH sector-wide organisations in her region.

Tip box:

Remember that individuals or organisations can use one or more of the resources, jumping steps, going back or repeating previous steps to reflect, re-evaluate and re-develop their learning across the learning process if necessary.

Resources

This section contains five resources to support you to acquire and share tacit learning, some of which you can use as an individual and some as part of an organisational process. You can use a single resource or combine multiple ones depending on your learning needs and priorities.

JUMP TO...

Resource 1

Individual self-reflection guide – acquiring and sharing tacit knowledge

INTRODUCTION	This resource offers a set of questions to help you think about your learning needs. The questions guide you to reflect on what you would like to learn and how to do this. They also help you to assess what undocumented knowledge and learning you have and enable you to consider how to share that.
WHO IS IT FOR?	This resource is for frontline humanitarian workers or mid-level managers but it could be used by any staff member to reflect on what they would like to learn or share.
HOW TO USE IT?	<p>You can use this guide individually, as a team or organisation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Use the following questions to reflect on your knowledge.▪ Write down answers and share them with your team or line manager – or keep them as a guide for further discussion.▪ You can use both sections or one section, depending on your knowledge needs and capacities.▪ Use the answers from this assessment to identify key learning.▪ Move on to Resources 4 and 5 to help you further to decide how to capture and share tacit knowledge. <p>TIP: Resource 4: Options on capturing tacit learning may help you in answering some of question 3!</p>
OUTPUT	At the end of this assessment, you will have identified the knowledge you want to acquire or share, and you will have started to think about how to do this.

Section 1 Acquiring tacit knowledge

Acquiring tacit knowledge from other team members

- What do you want to learn that is not easy to learn from a book or a training session?
- Who has the knowledge you want to know? (e.g. team members, senior manager, partners)
- What do you need to help you gain that knowledge? (e.g. time, budget, line management support)
- Have you discussed this with your line manager or team members?
- How do you like to learn – by reading, on-the-job experience, through discussing with peers?

Section 2 Identifying and sharing tacit knowledge

Identifying tacit knowledge

- What knowledge do you have that is most useful for your team or organisation but that is not currently written down?
- Why do you think this knowledge should be shared?
- Who would benefit the most from this knowledge? (e.g. team members, partners, senior management)

- How do you prefer to share knowledge with others? (e.g. writing learning notes, in discussion, giving presentations, practically demonstrating what you are doing)
- In what ways do you think others would prefer to receive the knowledge?
- How much time can you dedicate to sharing this knowledge?

Exploring the best way to share tacit knowledge

- Can the knowledge you hold be documented?

If yes:

- What is the best way to document it? (e.g. writing, podcast, video)
- Is it feasible and practical to document it?
- What kind of resources would you need to document it? (e.g. team member assistance, peer support, video recorder)

If no:

- Would it be possible to share in an unwritten form? (e.g. team meetings, community of practice, mentorship)

You can use [Resource 4: Options on capturing tacit knowledge](#) and [Resource 5: Tacit knowledge toolbox](#) to identify the way forward.

Resource 2

Organisational discussion guide on tacit knowledge

INTRODUCTION	This resource guides humanitarian organisations to review and assess how they identify, incorporate and use tacit knowledge, as part of their organisational learning culture. The resource helps organisations to identify and prompt conversations to create or strengthen the enabling environment for learning ³ and to encourage the trust ⁴ needed to maximise the use of tacit knowledge, particularly among frontline or project-level teams.
WHO IS IT FOR?	This resource is for humanitarian knowledge and development staff and senior management.
HOW TO USE IT?	<p>Organisations can use these questions to facilitate discussions and reflection on tacit knowledge within the organisation and on how their organisation can create a tacit knowledge-enabling environment. The questions are there as conversation starters. In answering them, you and your team are expected to reflect on the current situation and then consider how you could strengthen different areas. The questions can guide organisations to identify gaps and ways to address these.</p> <p>The resource can be used periodically to review progress towards incorporating, capturing and valuing tacit knowledge within the organisation.</p>
OUTPUT	An understanding of the extent to which the organisation creates an enabling environment to share knowledge, along with identifying the areas that should be developed.

Section 1 Strategy and policy

- Does your organisation have a policy or strategy on learning or knowledge management?

If no:

- Have you considered creating one? What steps could you take to create one?
- Go to section 2 of this resource.

If yes:

- Does this policy include reference to knowledge drawn from the community, experiences and expertise of frontline practitioners (tacit knowledge) within the organisation?
- Does this policy or strategy help you to capture and use tacit knowledge within your organisation?
- How can you change or strengthen your policies and strategies?

Section 2 Operations and procedures

- To what extent does your organisation value and promote tacit knowledge when assessing organisational knowledge needs?
- How do you identify what knowledge is important?

- What types of knowledge do you value or focus on – formal external training, internal knowledge from projects (e.g. donor reports), staff experiences (e.g. interactions with communities)?
- How do you currently incorporate undocumented knowledge from frontline staff and affected communities into decision-making?
- What resources (financial or human) do you allocate (e.g. staff, time, budget) to promote and share tacit knowledge among different departments and teams?
- What worked and what did not work in sharing tacit knowledge?
- How can you change or strengthen your operations or procedures?

Section 3 Creating an enabling environment

- How does the leadership create space within the organisation for supporting tacit knowledge?
- How do you or others build trust among all staff members?
- To what extent is tacit knowledge valued and shared across the organisation regardless of seniority or hierarchy? How far can frontline and project staff and junior staff influence the learning agenda of the organisation?
- How can the organisation overcome cultural or language barriers when promoting tacit knowledge-sharing among the team members?
- How can you strengthen the enabling environment for your organisation?

Additional resources

[CHS Alliance – Learning and Development Framework](#)

[Oxfam – Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The toolkit for emergency response](#)

Resource 3

Project management checklist

INTRODUCTION	<p>The checklist prompts humanitarian project managers to think about when and how they capture and share tacit knowledge across the project cycle.</p> <p>The checklist provides project and MEAL managers with ways to capture and share tacit knowledge. It considers (1) what project team members need to learn at the beginning of the project to implement it effectively; and (2) how they can learn from the implementation and evaluation of the project to help in future projects.</p>
WHO IS IT FOR?	<p>This resource is for humanitarian project managers and MEAL managers.</p>
HOW TO USE IT?	<p>Go through the bullet points, using them as a checklist at critical points in the project: set-up and planning, implementation and closure.</p> <p>The resource can be adapted to your context and needs.</p> <p>TIP: If time and resources are limited, think about small ways to increase the focus on tacit knowledge for the team. For instance, do short check-ins and discussions at each stage or add a question to a meeting/check-in point so the team does not forget about the tacit knowledge they are gaining.</p>
OUTPUT	<p>The checklist includes key considerations or actions for the user to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ develop project learning objectives▪ identify key knowledge generation by the project and how to capture it▪ integrate capturing tacit knowledge with MEAL plans▪ review learning objectives

Section 1 Project set-up and planning

Before the project starts, it is useful to consider...

A. Team knowledge needs

- Your team members' characteristics, knowledge preferences and needs.
- The extent to which this knowledge can be provided through training and guidelines.
- Other potential learning routes (e.g. mentoring, on-the-job training, CoPs).

B. Capturing tacit knowledge from the project

- Developing project learning objectives and plans to capture project tacit knowledge, ensuring incorporation into MEAL frameworks and plans.
- Discussing with your team how to communicate, share and receive tacit knowledge from the communities you work with.
- Planning what resources are needed to capture tacit knowledge generated from project implementation (time allocation, financial resources, equipment, etc).
- Integrating discussions and reflections on tacit knowledge into MEAL plans and project check-in points.

Section 2 Project implementation

During the project implementation, it is useful to consider..

- Drawing out tacit knowledge from the team in project meetings and reviews (e.g. capturing knowledge that the team may or may not have documented).
- Providing a space for staff to talk about what they heard and learned in the project implementation (e.g. reflective sessions, team meetings).
- Reflecting with the team on what they have learned from working with crisis-affected communities.
- Discussing with the team how to capture knowledge that they are acquiring through the project activities and which is not written down in reports.
- Scheduling quarterly knowledge meetings with your team members to reflect on team members' insights, knowledge, identifying emerging knowledge needs or challenges.

Section 3 Capturing tacit knowledge in project closing

During the project closure and evaluation, it is useful to consider..

- Discussing progress towards the project's learning objectives – consider knowledge beyond just the indicators collected for reporting requirements.
- Discussing the project knowledge generated from crisis-affected communities, and how to capture this.
- Sharing the project knowledge with other projects, within the organisation or with the wider sector.

Resource 4

Options for capturing and sharing tacit knowledge

INTRODUCTION	<p>This resource helps you to consider the options for capturing and sharing tacit knowledge.</p> <p>There are different ways of capturing tacit knowledge, with no 'one-size-fits-all' solution. You could consider keeping the knowledge in an undocumented form, documenting it or using a blended form. The knowledge that you want to capture and share will vary, so this resource provides you with some guiding suggestions to help you make decisions.</p>
WHO IS IT FOR?	<p>This resource is for frontline humanitarian workers, learning and development specialists, and project managers. But it could be used by any staff member who wants to capture or share knowledge.</p>
HOW TO USE IT?	<p>Follow the four steps:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Identify what knowledge you would like to capture and share.2. Answer the questions on type, use, audience and resources available.3. Review the criteria for each option to see what is best for your situation.4. Use Resource 5: Tacit knowledge toolbox for potential options.
OUTPUT	<p>The answers to the questions along with the criteria in each option will guide you towards deciding the most appropriate way to capture tacit knowledge. You can use Resource 5 to consider which tool or tools to use.</p>

Step 1

Identify an area of tacit knowledge that you would like to capture.

(You can use [Resource 1: Individual assessment](#) to help identify this.)

Step 2

Answer these questions:

- What type of knowledge do you want to capture?
 - soft skills (e.g. leadership, negotiation, communication skills)
 - technical information (e.g. how to build a latrine)
 - contextual project knowledge on the culture, social norms and politics of the context
- What is the intended use of the knowledge? (e.g. for staff handover, to capture project learning, to share with another project in a different geographical location).
- Who is the primary audience for this knowledge and how do they like to learn (e.g. reading, listening, discussing)?
- What resources and how much time can you allocate to capturing and sharing this knowledge?

Step 3

Review the following criteria of the different options to make a decision.

	TACIT FORM	BLENDED FORM	DOCUMENTED FORM
	Consider capturing and sharing knowledge in tacit form when:	Consider using a blended form (tacit and documented) when:	Choose a documented form when:
Type of knowledge	You want to capture and share soft skills and competencies (negotiation, leadership, problem-solving), or project knowledge on local customs, social norms and behaviours.	You are capturing and sharing technical or project knowledge with nuanced elements that get lost in reports, guides or operating procedures (such as how to be culturally or politically sensitive to the community you are working in). The blended form can also be useful in capturing field visits and project reflections – sharing knowledge and capturing it in note form.	You want to capture and share technical or soft skills and programming (such as WASH or education), project results or overviews.
Intended use	You want to provide staff or others with project-specific contextual knowledge on how to do something with or for an affected community (e.g. to discuss cultural or social practices, or to reflect together on examples of successes and challenges to draw out lessons learned).	It is important that the audience understands the nuance of a particular area of knowledge and has a record of this knowledge	You want to share knowledge across projects or locations, with a large number of staff, or when uniformity of practice is desired or required (such as standard operating procedures), and when it is useful to have a reference for how to do something, use a system, or a procedure.
Audience	The audience prefers to learn by doing, has literacy challenges, or is new to a given context and therefore nuances can be explained clearly.	The audience has time pressures whereby it is important to support them in gaining the knowledge, rather than reading many reports and guides. However, the record or document acts as a useful reference (e.g. during staff handovers).	The audience would benefit from having the knowledge in a written or recorded (audio or video) form – so they can use this when implementing an action or following a process.
Time and resource	Time and resources are available for the audience to absorb knowledge through reflective practices and discussions, observations or shadowing the knowledge-holder.	Time and resources are available both to record the knowledge and to capture or share through interactive means (online or face-to-face).	Time and resources vary depending on intended use and audience. A short report or organisation-wide email can be low-resource and cost-effective, whereas a sector-wide guide can be expensive and resource-heavy.
Summary	Keeping knowledge in a tacit form is very useful for capturing and sharing context-specific knowledge and for explaining the nuances of specific experiences that could be lost when shared in other forms. It is very helpful for project learning, inductions, handovers and on-the-job training. It can be used to capture and share knowledge immediately or over time.	Capturing and sharing tacit knowledge in blended form can work well in many instances. It can be especially useful for capturing reflective learning or review sessions, staff handovers, where detailed or nuanced information can be exchanged with the main points recorded for later reference. It can be used to capture and share knowledge immediately or over time.	Capturing and sharing tacit knowledge in documented form tends to work well with more generalised learning or technical skill transfer. It can be used to capture and share knowledge immediately or to maintain a record or reference over a long period of time.

Step 4

Once you have identified the most appropriate options for your needs and within your resources, go to Resource 5 to consider the tacit knowledge tools you could use.

Resource 5

Tacit knowledge toolbox

<p>INTRODUCTION</p>	<p>This resource provides you with an overview of different tools to capture tacit knowledge. It is categorised by the options described in Resource 4 (tacit, blended and documented).</p> <p>The tools are also vertically organised by resources needed (time, budget and technical capacity). The fewest resources needed are at the top, whereas those requiring more are at the bottom. Each tool includes a usage summary, the resources needed to use it, when to use it, tool variations and link(s) to additional resources or detailed guides.</p> <p>NOTE: Not all the resources listed here focus specifically on humanitarian responses, however the techniques described can be usefully applied in humanitarian settings.⁵</p>
<p>WHO IS IT FOR?</p>	<p>This resource is for all staff members, particularly frontline humanitarian workers and project managers.</p> <p>The resource options below differ in terms of the resources required. Therefore senior management sign-off and support may be needed to implement the more resource-intensive tools.</p>
<p>HOW TO USE IT?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Do you know what tacit knowledge you want to capture and in what form? If not, use Resource 4 to help you think through your needs and what form might be most appropriate. ▪ Review the toolbox and think about which tool(s) are the most appropriate for your needs within the time and budget available. ▪ All options are listed in the tacit knowledge toolbox table below and more details of each approach are provided on the following pages. ▪ You may need to discuss options with your team or senior management to get sign-off or the budget to implement some of the tools. ▪ These guides and suggestions are a starting point, and can be adapted to your context, time and resources. ▪ This is not an exhaustive list, so feel free to search for other guides online, using this toolbox as inspiration. You may also have your own ideas that will work much better in your operating context.
<p>OUTPUT</p>	<p>A tool or tools are selected for capturing and sharing knowledge.</p>

TACIT KNOWLEDGE TOOLBOX		
<p>Option 1 Share knowledge in tacit form</p>	<p>Option 2 Blended tacit and documented knowledge</p>	<p>Option 3 Document knowledge</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Reflection sessions ▪ Action learning ▪ Peer-to-peer support ▪ Mentoring and coaching ▪ On-the-job training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ After action reviews/specific milestone learning sessions ▪ Storytelling ▪ Most significant changes ▪ Communities of Practice (CoPs) ▪ Staff exchange/secondment ▪ Retreats ▪ Learning or scientific weeks/days 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Lessons learned ▪ Case studies ▪ Mapping and social network analysis ▪ Repositories, archives and libraries

Option 1 Share knowledge in tacit form

Reflection sessions

- **Description:** Where a facilitator or chair guides a group through discussion to reflect on practice or a particular situation. Reflections can be integrated in team meetings.
- **Resources needed:** Typically low financial resources are required; however time is needed, and resources increase with the size and complexity of the reflection sessions (such as sector-wide sessions).
- **Works well with:** Groups of 4 to 8 people with small hierarchical differences and peers.
- **Variations:** Can be a small group of individuals, organisational or sector-wide.

Additional resource/guidance

[Reflection Methods Practical Guide for Trainers and Facilitators, WUR](#)

Action learning

- **Description:** An approach to problem-solving that involves transferring tacit reflections and learning into action.
- **Resources needed:** Low to medium resources for the time allocation needed.
- **Works well with:** Small groups of peers (4 to 5 people) where there is similar power status and the ability to meet (face-to-face or online) at least once a month.
- **Variations:** Incorporated into team meetings, reviews or handovers.

Additional resource/guidance

[Action Learning for Frontline Humanitarians: a resource pack, ALNAP](#)

Peer-to-peer support

- **Description:** A knowledge exchange between peers, of the same level of hierarchy.
- **Resources needed:** The financial investment varies depending on whether travel is needed or not. It does require time for peers to support each other.
- **Works well with:** Staff members of similar power status and without hierarchical barriers.
- **Variations:** It can be conducted through learning platforms, in-person or virtual meetings, or through intranets and similar platforms depending

on where the peers are located. It can be implemented within an organisation or between different organisations depending on the desired peer-to-peer learning outcomes.

Additional resource/guidance

[A guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning, Effective Institutions Platform](#)

See an example

[Peer-Learning Exercise \(Humanitarian Evaluation Capacities\), ALNAP](#)

Mentoring and coaching

- **Description:** A mentor or coach is someone who contributes to the learning process by asking critical questions.
- **Resources needed:** This varies according to the time value and seniority of the participants.
- **Works well with:** Individual providing guidance and learning for staff members at all levels of the organisation.
- **Variations:** Both mentors and coaches will ask questions, but mentors can give scenarios or options for what can be the right answer, while coaches tend not to give answers themselves.

Additional resource/guidance

[Coaching toolkit, CHS Alliance](#)

On-the-job training

- **Description:** Practitioners get the opportunity to learn through observation.
- **Resources needed:** This varies depending on the type and location of the training.
- **Works well with:** Contexts where people are seeking to understand processes and dynamics.
- **Variations:** It can be unstructured, structured with learning objectives, or semi-structured.

Additional resource/guidance:

[On-the-Job Training for Effective Employee Development, The Balance Careers](#)

Option 2 Blended tacit and documented knowledge

After action reviews/specific milestone learning sessions

- **Description:** A process of discussing what went well and what did not in a project or action. The discussion is as important as the documented report or minutes. Works well with capturing knowledge after key milestones, e.g. end of phase 1 of project implementation.
- **Resources needed:** Few resources are needed.
- **Variations:** Can be a small group of individuals, organisational or sector-wide.

Additional resource/guidance

[After action review guidance, USAID and KDMD](#)

[The 'After Action Review' chapter in the Knowledge Management Toolkit, SDC](#)

Storytelling

- **Description:** Develop impactful stories through structuring and narrating project progress or impact in a story.
- **Resources needed:** Low to medium resources needed.
- **Works well with:** Knowledge from project final stages, where undocumented progress and outcomes can be visualised and narrated.
- **Variations:** It varies according to the need and resources. Stories can be recorded on audio or video.

Additional resource/guidance

[Stories, Better Evaluation](#)

[Story Telling: Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques, SDC](#)

See an example

[Capturing and Sharing through Digital Storytelling, USAID Learning Lab](#)

Most significant changes

- **Description:** Similar to storytelling, the process involves the collection of most significant change (MSC) stories from key stakeholders in a project. A representative panel is then used to select the most significant stories and verify them.
- **Resources needed:** Resource needs vary depending on the need for an external consultant, and the efforts to collect the stories.

- **Works well with:** Capturing and learning from communities about changes that have taken place in a systematic way.
- **Variations:** It can be small, medium or a large-scale exercise.

Additional resource/guidance

[The 'Most Significant Change' \(MSC\) Technique: A Guide to Its Use, Davies and Dart](#)

Communities of Practice (CoPs)

- **Description:** A group of humanitarians who share a common interest in a topic or a theme, and who meet regularly to develop and share knowledge around a topic.
- **Resources needed:** This varies depending on the size of the CoP. They can be across an organisation or sector and therefore some dedicated resource is needed. Or they can be across one office and little resource is needed.
- **Works well with:** Situations when knowledge is about a particular theme (e.g. WASH programming, resilience).
- **Variations:** CoP structures can vary; it can be 3 or 4 people or hundreds involved. CoPs can be virtual, face-to-face or blended, facilitated by specific platforms and dedicated HR or managed informally. They can be internal or across organisations.

Additional resource/guidance

[Creating a Community of Practice for Disaster Resilience, W. J. D. Barbon](#)

Staff exchange / secondment

- **Description:** The temporary assignment and transfer of a staff member or an employee from an organisation to a fellow/partner department, or organisation.
- **Resources needed:** Medium to high resources are needed.
- **Works well with:** Contexts where teams or organisations need new technical or management expertise (e.g. establishing a new Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse (PSEA) process, or cash assistance scheme).
- **Variations:** The duration, location and terms of staff exchange varies.

See an example

[Staff on loan from the Red Cross and Red Crescent](#)

Retreats

- **Description:** Unstructured or semi-structured team gatherings, outside the workspace. Sometimes using an external or internal facilitator to support teams to learn and reflect together.
- **Resources needed:** This varies according to the location and number of attendees. Usually, medium to high resources are needed.
- **Works well with:** Capturing knowledge on key milestones (e.g. for annual planning or strategy development).
- **Variations:** Can be a small project team, or organisation-wide retreat.

Learning or scientific weeks/days

- **Description:** A meeting, usually once a year, to discuss and reflect on documented knowledge and evidence on a thematic area.
- **Resources needed:** This varies depending on the location, venues and duration. Online technical days can be implemented with low resources, but still requires high organisational time and preparation.
- **Works well with:** Organisations with focus on specific themes.
- **Variations:** Can be a one-day event, or longer.

See an example

[Scientific Days, MSF](#)

Option 3 Document knowledge

Lessons learned

- **Description:** A record of what was learned from positive and negative experiences of implementing a project.
- **Resources needed:** Resources vary depending on the area and scale of learning. Usually, low financial resources, but it can take time to document learning.
- **Works well with:** Capturing knowledge at the end of a project or a programme.
- **Variations:** It can be in a short, medium or long format.

Additional resource/guidance

[Lessons Learnt, Better Evaluation](#)

[Knowledge Management Toolkit for the Crisis Prevention and Recovery Practice Area, UNDP \(p. 27\)](#)

Good practices

- **Description:** A method of structuring and documenting a knowledge process, conditions, prerequisites, actors and outcomes around a specific practice that contributes to the best outcomes in a specific context.
- **Resources needed:** It varies depending on the area and scale of learning. Usually, low to medium resources are needed.
- **Works well with:** Capturing knowledge from a new approach or programme which can be supported by evidence of good outcomes. It usually reflects the positive side of a practice.
- **Variations:** It can be in a short, medium or long format.

Additional resource/guidance

[The 'Good Practice' chapter in the Knowledge Management Toolkit, SDC](#)

See an example

[Good Practice Guide: embedding inclusion of older people and people with disabilities in humanitarian policy and practice, GENDEP](#)

Case studies

- **Description:** In-depth examination of a case or a unit. It can be useful in examining how different elements fit together. It often uses qualitative and quantitative data.

- **Resources needed:** Resources vary depending on who captures the case study and how.
- **Works well with:** Capturing knowledge on programme process, and how a context influences programme implementation.
- **Variations:** Can be incorporated into MEAL plans.

Additional resource/guidance

[Case study, Better evaluation](#) – this provides an overview of different types of case studies and links to other resources.

Mapping and social network analysis

- **Description:** The process of transferring tacit knowledge on relationships and engagement among stakeholders into a visual or documented illustration.
- **Resources needed:** Medium-high resources. (It requires some expertise or a trained facilitator on social network analysis.)
- **Works well with:** Capturing knowledge on community relations, social norms or interactions.
- **Variations:** It can be a small, medium or large-scale exercise.

Additional resource/guidance

[Social Network Analysis Handbook \(IRC\)](#)

Repositories, archives and libraries

- **Description:** The process of organising and arranging undocumented tacit data into documented written or audio-visual materials that can be categorised in a library, repository or archive.
- **Resources needed:** This is time-intensive and can have financial resource implications, depending on what platform data is being filed in.
- **Works well with:** Capturing knowledge from a process or a cycle (e.g. SOPs, how to engage communities, etc.).
- **Variations:** It can be a small, medium or large-scale form, and mainly online.

See examples

[HELP Library, ALNAP](#)

[Data repository, HDX](#)

[Research & evaluation archive, BRAC](#)

Links to Resource 5 tools

Action learning: ALNAP (2022) **Action Learning for Frontline Humanitarians: a resource pack.** www.alnap.org/node/84821

After action reviews:

- USAID (n.d.) **After-Action Review Guidance.** www.alnap.org/help-library/after-action-review-guidance
- The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2009) **Knowledge Management Toolkit.** <https://usaideallearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/SDC-KM-Toolkit.pdf>

Case studies: Better Evaluation (n.d.) **Case Studies.** www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/case_study

Coaching: Core Humanitarian Standards Alliance (2018) **Coaching Toolkit.** https://d1h79zlgfft2zs.cloudfront.net/uploads/2019/07/Coaching_Toolkit.pdf

Community of practice: Barbon, W.J.D. (2018) **Creating a Community of Practice for Disaster Resilience.** <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/creating-community-practice-disaster-resilience>

Good practice: Akerkar S. and Bhardwaj R. (2018) **Good Practice Guide: embedding inclusion of older people and people with disabilities in humanitarian policy and practice,** Centre for Development and Emergency Practice. www.alnap.org/help-library/good-practice-guide-embedding-inclusion-of-older-people-and-people-with-disabilities-in

Learning/scientific days: MSF (2020) **Scientific Days.** <https://epicentre.msf.org/en/scientific-days/scientific-day-2020>

Lessons learned:

- Better Evaluation (n.d.) **Lessons Learnt.** www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/lessons_learned
- United Nations Development Programme (2007) **Knowledge Management Toolkit for the Crisis Prevention and Recovery Practice Area.** <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/p%26i%20to%20post.pdf>

Most significant change: Davies R. and Dart J. (2005) **The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique: A Guide to Its Use.** www.alnap.org/help-library/the-most-significant-change-msc-technique-a-guide-to-its-use

On-the-job training: The Balance Career (2021) **What is on the job training?** www.thebalancecareers.com/how-on-the-job-training-brings-you-value-1917941

Peer-to-peer learning:

- Andrews, M. and Manning, N. (2016) **A Guide to Peer-to-Peer Learning.** www.effectiveinstitutions.org/files/The_EIP_P_to_P_Learning_Guide.pdf
- ALNAP (n.d.) **Peer-Learning Exercise (Humanitarian Evaluation Capacities).** www.alnap.org/help-library/peer-learning-exercise-humanitarian-evaluation-capacities

Reflection sessions: Gorgijn F., Ernstman N., Helder J. and Brouwer H. (2018) ‘**Reflection Methods Practical Guide for Trainers and Facilitators**’, Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen University and Research.
<https://edepot.wur.nl/439461>

Repositories, archives and libraries:

- ALNAP (n.d.) **Humanitarian Evaluation Learning and Performance (HELP) Library.** www.alnap.org/help-library
- OCHA (n.d.) The Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX), **Data Depository.** <https://data.humdata.org/dataset>
- BRAC (n.d.) **Research and Evaluation Division (RED) Archive.** <http://dspace.bracu.ac.bd/xmlui/handle/10361/12837>

Social network analysis: International Rescue Committee (2016) **Social Network Analysis Handbook.** www.rescue.org/sites/default/files/document/1263/socialnetworkanalyses-handbook.pdf

Staff secondment: International Committee of the Red Cross (n.d.) **Staff on loan from national societies.** https://careers.icrc.org/content/Staff-on-loan-from-national-societies/?locale=en_GB

Storytelling:

- Better Evaluation (n.d.) **Stories.** www.betterevaluation.org/en/evaluation-options/stories
- The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (2007) **Storytelling Building Bridges Using Narrative Techniques.** www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/die-deza/strategie/155627-geschichten-erzaehlen_EN.pdf
- USAID (2015) **Capturing and Sharing through Digital Storytelling.** <https://usaidlearninglab.org/lab-notes/capturing-and-sharing-through-digital-storytelling>

Endnotes

- 1 TRP undertook a document and literature review of 31 articles, reports and documents on tacit knowledge in humanitarian settings, development contexts and the wider social enterprises. The review included peer-reviewed articles and grey literature. They also held nine technical consultations with knowledge experts, which highlighted how tacit knowledge was not captured or shared across teams and projects, nor included in learning strategies or guidance for humanitarian organisations.
- 2 The project Steering Group guided the development and piloting of the resource pack. The members are: Heng Aik Cheng (Mercy Malaysia, Malaysia), Joseph Gyandi (CRUDAN, Nigeria), Nagwa Konda (NRRDO, South Sudan), Barkat Ullah Maruf (Independent Consultant, Bangladesh), Sudhanshu Singh (Alliance for Empowerment Partnerships and Humanitarian Aid International, India), and Md. Mujibul Haque Munir (COAST, Bangladesh).
- 3 The enabling environment for learning is different from one organisation to another. Leadership and management styles, trust, hierarchy, power dynamics, cultural and language factors contribute to creating or restricting an enabling environment for learning.
- 4 Trust, communication and cultural sensitivity have also been identified as elements for creating enabling environments for learning. See: Holste, J.S. and Fields, D. (2010) 'Trust and tacit knowledge sharing and use' *Journal of Knowledge Management* 14(1) 128–140.
- 5 The selection is based upon tools and suggestions from humanitarian and learning experts and validated by the Steering Group regarding their appropriateness for humanitarian settings.

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- ALNAP (2003) Learning by field level workers: ALNAP review of humanitarian action 2003. London: ALNAP/ODI. (www.alnap.org/help-library/learningby-field-level-workers-alnap-review-of-humanitarian-action-in-2003-fieldlevel).
- CHS Alliance and A Smart. (2017) Building and Organisational Learning and Development Framework. CHS Alliance. (www.chsalliance.org/get-support/resource/learning-and-development-framework).
- Holste, J.S. and Fields, D. (2010) 'Trust and tacit knowledge sharing and use' *Journal of Knowledge Management* 14(1): 128–140.
- Oxfam GB (2007) 'Building Trust in Diverse Teams: The Toolkit for Emergency Response'. (<https://policy-practice.oxfam.org/resources/building-trust-in-diverse-teams-the-toolkit-for-emergency-response-115413>).
- Tanner, L. (2016) 'Knowledge landscape report'. London: Humanitarian Leadership Academy. (www.alnap.org/help-library/draft-landscape-report).

For more information about using action learning in your organisation:

Contact ALNAP at: actionlearning@alnap.org

Related ALNAP publications

- Action Learning & Tacit Knowledge: a mapping of approaches for humanitarian action
- Action Learning for Frontline Humanitarians: a resource pack
- Learning Where it Matters: piloting action learning with frontline humanitarian staff



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