Feedback Systems for Social Purpose Organisations
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Keystone works with organisations to generate powerful feedback systems based on how their constituents perceive their work.

Feedback improves performance

Feedback from the people and organisations directly involved in an organisation's work can hugely improve performance, for three main reasons:

- Primary constituents know how well an organisation is meeting their real priorities. This is great data on actual performance, pinpointing areas for improvement.
- Feedback helps build open and accountable relationships between organisations and their constituents. This is a key enabling factor for most work, and feedback allows it to be measured and managed.
- Feedback empowers primary constituents by making sure that their voices are heard, which may be a development goal in itself.

A note on terms:
We use the term 'constituents' to mean the people and organisations directly involved in an organisation's work. They are 'constituent of' the change processes envisioned by the organisation, for instance including partners and policy makers. We define 'primary constituents' as the people meant to benefit most from an organisation's work, sometimes known as beneficiaries.

The Feedback Chain
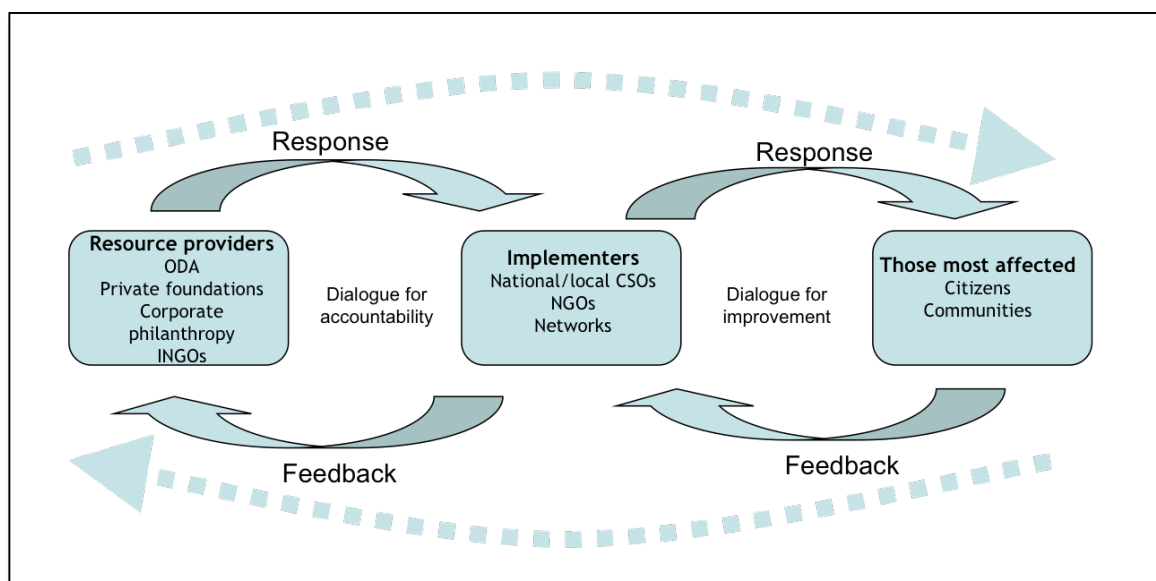
The emerging field of feedback systems

A number of organisations are pioneering new approaches to feedback in social purpose organisations, adapting insights from the business world of 'customer satisfaction'.

Constituents are asked for their feedback on (i) the value they have gained from an organisation or activity, and (ii) the relationship they have with the organisation. Mixed research methods are used to generate quantitative and qualitative data. The quantitative data can be summarised so that performance can be benchmarked against other organisations and tracked over time. Benchmarking provides a strong incentive for improvement: it shows what is possible. Moreover, no one wants to stay low in the class! Feedback is also reported back to those who provided it, enabling learning and improvement on the ground, and strengthening relationships.

Leading examples

Macro level:

Center for Effective Philanthropy www.effectivephilanthropy.org	Grant recipient perceptions of US foundations
Humanitarian Response Index www.daraint.org	OECD government funding for humanitarian response

Micro level:

Measuring Empowerment http://quality.bond.org.uk	Performance management in a social movement in Bangladesh
Listen First www.listenfirst.org	Feedback pilot in Concern Worldwide

There have been some impressive results. For instance, the "Measuring Empowerment" case reconciles donors' need for performance reports with constituents' need to carry out activities that meet their real priorities. The system combines accountability with learning, and helps build more effective relationships.

Keystone's experience

Keystone specialises in working with social purpose organisations to develop feedback systems that work for them. We also help organisations build wider "Impact Planning, Assessment and Learning" systems.

We are currently developing pilots with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Oxfam International, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, a wide range of grantmakers in Southern and Eastern Africa, a group of international networks, and many others, from ratings organisations to donors to implementing organisations.

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Examples of our work, including sample feedback reports, are available from our website.

Keystone's approach

We work with organisations to tailor feedback systems that fit with their existing approaches and priorities. This can be at a number of levels, including feedback from grant-recipients to grant-makers, or feedback from local communities to implementing organisations.

Wherever possible, we develop comparative data sets. We identify a number of similar organisations or operational units, and generate data for all of them, so that each can compare their performance to their peers. This has proved extremely valuable for ensuring that feedback data is put to work.

We are keenly aware of the risks that feedback could damage relationships or misrepresent constituents' views. An ethical framework guides our work, which helps to ensure that feedback systems are genuinely developmental. Our key ethical practices include:

- Respondents' involvement in designing feedback questions and methods.
- Survey design sensitive to power differences within respondent groups, affirming the least powerful.
- Anonymity of all individual respondents, and of benchmarking data.
- Reporting findings back to respondents.

Major steps in developing a feedback system

1. Agree goals with all key constituents
2. Design research methods and questions
3. Collect data
4. Analyse data
5. Validate and discuss data with respondents
6. Prepare and share report(s)
7. Repeat

We work closely with commissioning organisations to adapt the process to their circumstances. We also expect to work with an advisory group of respondents to guide the research through these steps.

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Typically, designing and implementing a feedback system takes 3 – 6 months from start to finish.

Benefits of implementing feedback systems

Organisations gain significant benefits from implementing feedback systems:

- Gain new insights about the impact of work on constituents. This can be benchmarked against the performance of peer organisations.
- Renew and strengthen relationships with all constituents on the basis of independent data.
- Empower primary constituents by amplifying their voices. Encourage them to be more confident and influential, modelling wider 'good governance' aims.
- Create a 'constituent-focused' culture in the organization.
- Create opportunities for mutual learning to improve approaches and strategies.
- Strengthen legitimacy as a result of visible efforts to be more accountable to constituents.

Why work with Keystone?

1. We bring learning on feedback systems from across the development sector. For instance, we bring draft surveys to work from and expertise on research methods, along with our ethical framework. We also feed new learning back into the sector.
2. As an independent organisation, we ensure respondents' anonymity. This enhances the quality of the feedback data and the credibility of the entire process.
3. We steward feedback data from across the sector. Working within carefully controlled guidelines, this creates a large data set for benchmarking performance. This has the potential to become an important asset for our sector.

We are a nonprofit organisation ourselves, with deep experience in the field of international development and accountability. We bring a powerful commitment to delivering high quality professional services and helping social purpose organisations work better.