



Innovative educator turns overseas international development thinking on its head with allclear process mapping

ABSTRACT

Enterprise Learning is an organization that facilitates sustainable overseas development projects worldwide. Working with NGOs (Non Government Organizations), Universities and local communities, David Smith, the organization's independent Consultant, brings a cutting-edge approach to project management with allclear – the process mapping tool from Proquis.

FULL CASE STUDY

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Enterprise Learning is an organization that facilitates sustainable overseas development projects worldwide. Working with NGOs (Non Government Organizations), Universities and local communities, David Smith, the organization's independent Consultant, brings a cutting-edge approach to project management from initiation of the ideas, planning and resourcing, through to execution and completion. His approach and views are radical and underpinning the success of his work is an equally innovative process mapping tool: allclear from Proquis.

Interestingly, although David Smith is leading the field in his approach to educating project teams he is not an academic, having left school at 15 years of age to work in the UK Post Office. He remained with the Post Office for 40 years, leaving the organization as a Senior Operations Manager with an in-depth and practical knowledge of putting processes and strategies into action. On leaving the Post Office he became heavily involved in overseas international development. From his early experiences in this field he soon gained a sense of why education and training being delivered by NGOs / aid agencies, etc, was failing the people it was supposed to help.

"It became clear to me that there was an overemphasis on project and program content and very little, if any, attention given to processes and skills. The approach seemed to follow traditional business practice - all about targets even if we fail to hit them. The focus seemed to be on retrospective reporting but there is little sign of a 'culture' of robust measurement either retrospectively or as part of the ongoing procedure and that is why it is not uncommon to have big conferences to review what went wrong. We also largely ignored input from the people within the countries and communities we were trying to help. This is why many schemes have failed and will continue to fail," says David Smith.

Through the work of Enterprise Learning things are beginning to change with David Smith introducing an understanding of process and of systems thinking so that the communities themselves can begin not just to do things for themselves with the support of the NGOs and various aid agencies but to decide 'how' to do it and have a greater feel for the impact they want to make in their own terms. This is significant because it is the communities themselves that are

beginning to take the lead. This is where the process mapping and flowcharting tool allclear from Proquis is playing a significant role.

David Smith came across allclear through his work with Manchester University, United Kingdom. The university welcomes students from over 180 countries worldwide and is renowned for the quality of its education. The University contracted him as an independent Consultant to look into and develop the workplace program for overseas students. To move the program forward he introduced his process-based enterprise learning methodology utilizing mapping. He needed an easy to use Windows-based software tool that students could also utilize for themselves. Researching the software market led him to Proquis and their product allclear. This has been his process mapping and flowcharting software of choice ever since.

With allclear David Smith is able to open up a dialogue between all the stakeholders in the project, whether it is designed to deliver improvements to agricultural methods or establish a healthcare program.

"We are able to show how not only a systematic but also a systemic approach to all projects is the most effective way of delivering a successful outcome. We can sit down with all the stakeholders to look at how we are going to do the job, what we need to do it, how we will measure progress, and how we'll sustain it once the project is delivered. This could be something physical like a terracing project that makes best use of viable land and water sources through to an AIDs awareness and treatment program. The actual projects will vary, but the process of putting them together is very similar," he says.

The allclear approach is providing a way for stakeholders to improve their learning by moving projects to a level of process where everyone involved is absolutely sure of their purpose, able to think about the strategies and predict outcomes. In simple terms, the software identifies what people will do, what they need and how they will do it to gain the desired outcome. This is where David Smith swaps 'simple' for 'explicit'.

"If you can imagine a scenario where we want to encourage an ultimate situation of self organization you can see that what we need to do is to get people to start talking about improving the issue that faces them. In this scenario we have the community, the internal and external customers and suppliers. There is ample opportunity for confusion so we have to encourage explicitness in all discussion and process flow charting. This then helps to align thinking between each party and then we can focus on the project matching capabilities and resources to each requirement. This helps gain maximum value from the project, whether it is a person's time or cash investment," he says.

allclear's user friendly mapping and symbols encourage thorough understanding among the entire project team. Moreover, because the software uses international symbols, everyone can discuss the project in their own language. This encourages other people to join in through a proper understanding of the job and it also helps develop standardized methods of performing tasks. David Smith says this is an important part of any project.

"It's not about creating standards; it's about standardizing how things are done. It establishes a positive culture of 'let's do it this way' that people can readily understand and adopt as best practice. This optimizes the capabilities of the team and brings the project under review, introducing on-going measurement as the job progresses so that adjustments can be made to be sure the desired outcome is achieved," he says.

David Smith adds that the tight management of projects enabled by allclear is also encouraging 'system thinking' where each organization can begin to see how they fit into the bigger picture within a region. This enables individual charities to visualize how they can have best impact through collaborating with other organizations rather than all of them competing in particular spheres.

“By collaborating rather than competing we can get organizations to take a synthetic thinking approach to tackling issues. This is a much more powerful way of dealing with problems and challenges. allclear assists with this by helping to develop a very detailed action plan. With the software we can identify the things that need doing and access the information required to get them done. This in turn helps pass down the responsibility to the community who are then in a strong position then to take charge of the destiny of the project and have real ownership,” concludes David Smith.