The CASA tool

Preparing an organisation for CASA: what is an organisational assessment?

This section looks at what an organisation is, what an assessment is, and why it is important to carry out an organisational assessment. It might be necessary to work through this section with those participating in the assessment to help them to see the value in what you are doing.
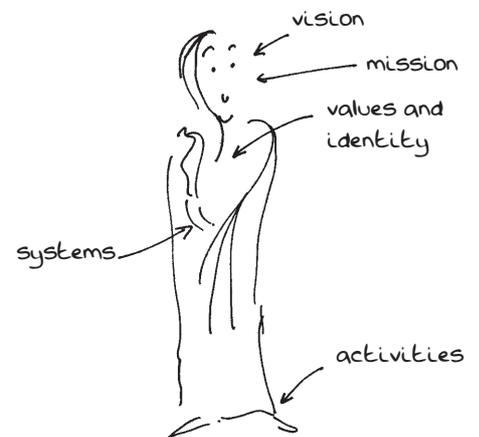
Organisations

An organisation is a group of people working together for a common purpose.

If we are thinking about doing an organisational assessment, it is important to consider what organisations are like.

How do we see organisations?

Comparing organisations to familiar things around us can be useful for understanding how they work and therefore how to improve them. Images are useful because they help us to think about and discuss an organisation in an easy way.

We can compare them, for example, to human bodies. The head reflects the vision and mission of the organisation. The heart reflects its values and identity. The blood supply reflects its systems, and the arms and legs are what the organisation does.

Or we can compare them to trees or plants. The roots reflect the mission, values, identity and vision. The trunk or stem reflects the systems and structures of the organisation. The branches, leaves and fruits reflect what the organisation does and produces.

While there are certain dangers in over-simplifying the reality of what is there, drawing images is a useful way to start thinking about the nature of organisations and how they function.

Tearfund has used images to think about how it functions as an organisation. The structure of the CASA tool has been based on two models: the onion model, and interlocking circles (often described as the elephant).

The onion model

The onion model concept is from INTRAC, and adapted by Bill Crooks

The image of the onion is used to look more in depth at the internal organisation. We can peel away the rings of an onion until we reach the central core. An organisation also has a central core: its vision, mission, values and identity, which are reflected in every other aspect of the organisation. A healthy organisation is clear about what these are. They shape the organisation's vision of society and its purpose in it. This in turn shapes the strategy it should adopt and the tasks to be carried out. The structures and systems, staff and resources needed can then be identified. This image of an onion is a very useful way of seeing if there is consistency between what an organisation believes (the core) and the way it functions (the outer layers).

Vision, mission, values and identity

Strategy

Structures and systems

Human resources

Capital and financial resources
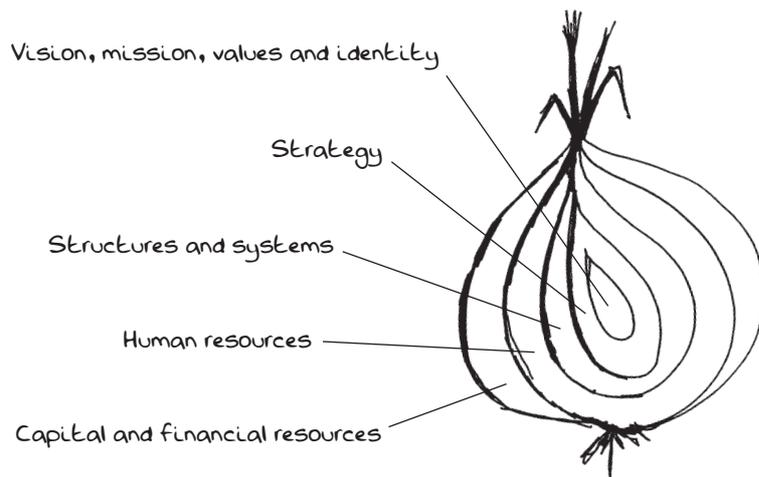
Interlocking circles/elephant

Source of the interlocking circles diagram: INTRAC

Three interlocking circles show how the three main parts of an organisation interact and support each other. An elephant can also be drawn to show these parts. The circles represent:

INTERNAL ORGANISATION This defines what the organisation wants to be. It is expressed through its vision, mission, values and identity. It is hoped that these are reflected in the strategies, systems and structures of the organisation. Using the elephant image, the head of the elephant represents this central part of the organisation.

INTERNAL ORGANISATION

EXTERNAL LINKAGES

PROJECTS
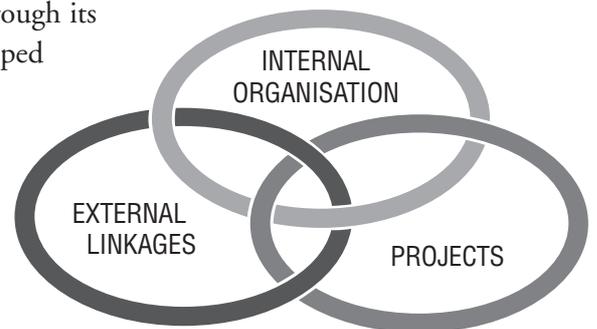
LINKAGES These focus on how the organisation relates to others. They are important in capacity building: strengthening the informal and formal relationships with other organisations and groups of people, such as networks or alliances, churches, donors and government bodies or departments, in order to gain additional resources and support. The elephant's trunk represents the way in which the organisation relates to others.

PROJECTS These relate to what the organisation actually does, how well it performs, and how much impact it is having on those it is trying to serve. The projects can be very varied: from providing services to mobilising communities and local organisations for social transformation. It is critically important that the projects are consistent with the organisation's overall mission and vision. The body of the elephant and its legs represents the organisation's different projects or programmes.

Internal organisation

Projects

External links
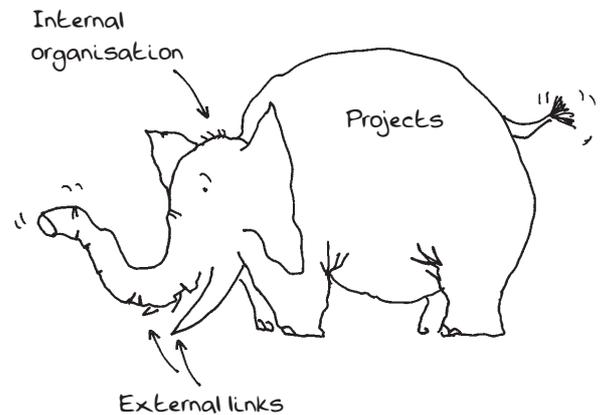
An organisation does not exist in a vacuum. It exists in the context of the culture, traditions and history of the people it is serving. There may also be other factors to take into account, such as situations of prolonged civil conflict.

The three modules of CASA look at these three elements of organisations in order to identify how healthy an organisation is and what improvements can be made.

Characteristics of a good organisation

What is a good organisation? Think about an organisation you have worked for that provided a good experience. What made it good? What could have made it better?

There are many ways to describe and define a good organisation. Here are some ideas:

- clear purpose for where it wants to go
- clear plans for how it wants to achieve its vision
- strong values that shape the work and culture of the organisation
- projects that are effective and follow good practice
- strong leadership
- clear lines of decision-making and accountability
- good systems of financial control and administration
- good relationships with other organisations
- openness to learn to reflect and a desire to improve.

Pressures organisations face

Organisations face different types of pressures. Some of these pressures are external. Sometimes little can be done about them and you have to learn to adapt and be flexible in order to cope with them.

The external pressures might include:

■ political changes that make it hard for Christian NGOs to operate

■ disasters that demand that the type and nature of your work has to change

■ decrease in funding from donors.

The internal pressures might include:

■ lack of skills and expertise among key staff

■ high turnover of staff

■ high workloads and pressures of deadlines

■ lack of funding to cover all needs.

Which of these pressures are relevant to your organisation? Can you think of other pressures? How can you address them?

It might be that these pressures can be managed within your organisation as it is at the moment. On the other hand, sometimes an organisational assessment is needed to help all of the staff stop and work together to identify the problems and develop solutions.
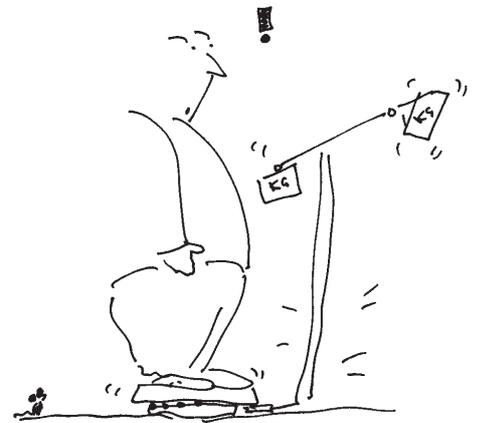
Assessment

We all make assessments every day of our lives. We do not necessarily call them assessments, but we all want to know how we are doing, looking, and feeling about ourselves.

The need to assess something comes from a range of motives. They could include concern about personal appearance, personal development and improvement in skills, or getting the best value for money.

An organisation is a group of people working together for a common purpose. Every organisation has a culture and a unique way of working. Like human beings it has a complex range of functions and characteristics that all interact to achieve the desired goals.

The decision to assess an organisation should be part of nurturing and developing it so that it can be strengthened and enhanced to achieve its full potential. Like human beings, organisations go through cycles of change, so it is important to be aware of the needs of an organisation at different stages of its development. Organisational assessments are about enabling the organisation to stay healthy and relevant to the people it is seeking to serve.

Questions for discussion
- Make a list of all the different ways you assess yourself during the week.
- What is your motive for assessing yourself in this way?
- What are the similarities between an assessment of yourself and an assessment of an organisation?
- Make a list of all the ways that you assess your organisation.

Why assess your organisation?

Most organisations assess themselves all the time: sometimes formally through financial accounts or completed project reports, sometimes informally such as by the level of staff morale.

One view is that most organisations, as they get older, go through **different stages of development** in the same way as human beings. Some people would say that all organisations go through five main stages: birth, childhood, adolescence, maturity, death or rebirth.

Each of these stages reflects **different styles** of leadership, organisational culture and ways of working. The transition between these different stages can be difficult and painful, as well as liberating and exciting as new opportunities unfold.

Organisations working with vulnerable and marginalised people face an increasing number of pressures from different sources, such as governmental guidelines.

Partnerships with **donors** are often demanding and adjustments need to be made to meet their requirements. Working alongside other organisations can provide opportunities for sharing resources, which requires careful planning.

The **political and social influences** at national, regional and global level may demand new responses and changes within the organisation. These types of change are happening at an increasingly fast pace, especially in the area of information technology.

So what does this all mean?

Change is inevitable whether we accept it or not. Therefore, an organisational assessment is a useful way of having a look at where your organisation is now, in order to plan and prepare for the future.

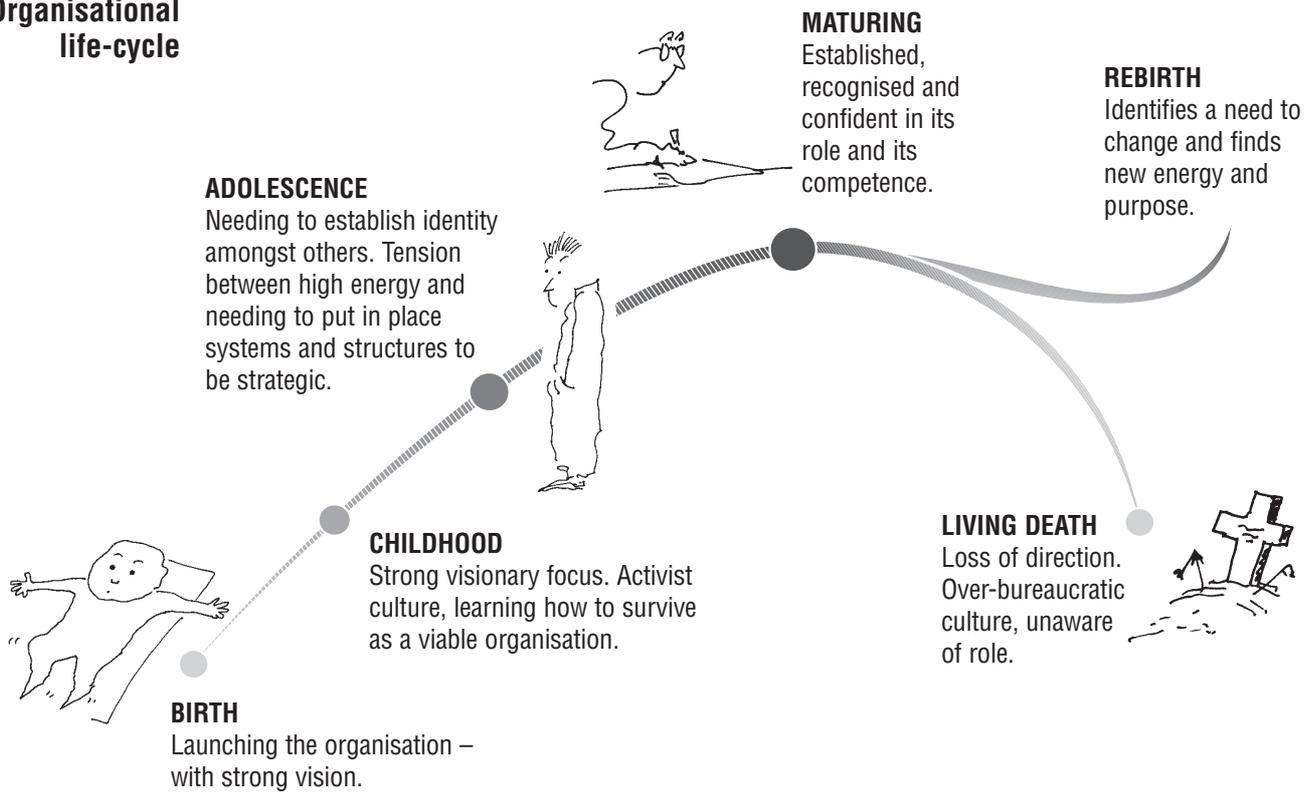It can be useful to think about an organisational assessment in the following ways:

A MIRROR giving you an opportunity to look at yourself more closely

AN AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH giving you an overview and a fresh perspective of things only normally seen on the ground

A HEALTH CHECK WITH THE DOCTOR giving you an opportunity to know the state of your health and what you might need to do to improve.

Organisational life-cycle

MATURING
Established, recognised and confident in its role and its competence.

REBIRTH
Identifies a need to change and finds new energy and purpose.

ADOLESCENCE
Needing to establish identity amongst others. Tension between high energy and needing to put in place systems and structures to be strategic.

CHILDHOOD
Strong visionary focus. Activist culture, learning how to survive as a viable organisation.

LIVING DEATH
Loss of direction. Over-bureaucratic culture, unaware of role.

BIRTH
Launching the organisation – with strong vision.

Questions for discussion

- Using the growth chart above, at what stage of the cycle would you place your organisation and why?

- What are some of the main pressures on your organisation at the moment? And what challenges will you face in the next five years?

- In what ways do you assess your organisation formally and informally?

- How could an organisational assessment that covers most aspects of organisational life be useful?

Principles of Appreciative Enquiry

At this point you might like to use Appreciative Enquiry to encourage the organisation to view the assessment positively. The principles of Appreciative Enquiry are:

STAGE	PRINCIPLE	ACTION
1	Discovering what is good about the organisation	Brainstorm
2	Dreaming about the future potential of the organisation	Explore vision
3	Identifying the gaps and what needs to be strengthened or built on	CASA
4	Developing a capacity building plan	CASA action plan

After working through the first two stages, you can move on to the CASA modules.

Format of the CASA modules

Each section of the modules is divided into seven stages. It is important that you familiarise yourself with these stages before you start the process. You will need to give the participants a brief overview of the stages before they start to work through the modules. You will then need to explain how to do each stage as you go along.

It is important to work through all of the stages to get the most out of the assessment.

Stage 1
DISCUSSION STARTER

This encourages participants to think about an aspect of the organisation in a creative and interesting way, so that the scoring exercises reflect their perspective of the organisation at the time. Further details are given in each module section because the discussion starter is different every time.

Stage 2
QUESTIONNAIRE

HANDOUT

Each participant is given a copy of the QUESTIONNAIRE. The questionnaire contains numbered indicators which relate to the key areas for the module. Each key area is supported by at least four indicators. In the questionnaire the indicators are all mixed up. The participants complete the questionnaire on their own, giving each indicator a score of:

1 if they feel the indicator is **rarely** a feature of the organisation

2 if they feel the indicator is **occasionally** the case

3 if they feel the indicator is **often** a feature of the organisation

4 if they feel the indicator **always** reflects the organisation.

The questionnaire should take 10–15 minutes to complete.

Example of Questionnaire

Indicator

Numbers to transfer to Summary Score Sheet

Stage 3
SUMMARY
SCORE SHEET

HANDOUT

This is where the indicators in the QUESTIONNAIRE are matched with the key areas. Each participant is given a copy of the SUMMARY SCORE SHEET, which contains a number of small KEY AREA TABLES. Each table represents one key area. The participants transfer their scores for each indicator to the corresponding box. When all the boxes have been filled in, the participants add up the scores in each table and write the total in the relevant box.

As some key areas have more indicators than others, it is important to find an average score for each key area so that the key area scores can be compared. The total score in each key area table should be divided by the number of indicators for that key area.

The average score should fall between **1** and **4**. If the average is not a whole number, then it should be rounded to the nearest whole number. So, for example, an average score of **2.5** should be rounded up to **3**, and a score of **2.4** should be rounded down to **2**.

Example of
Key Area Table
from Summary
Score Sheet

STRATEGY		
3	Organisational plans	4
7	Evaluation	2
24	Staff awareness	3
26	Strategy relevance	3
28	Involvement of stakeholders	1
	Total	13
(To find average, divide total by 5 and round to nearest whole number)	**AVERAGE**	3

Key area

Score to transfer to Plenary Score Sheet
(ie: the total 13, divided by 5, equals 2.6 and is therefore rounded up to 3)

The participants should be ready to share their average scores with the whole group.

If some participants finish before others, encourage them to share their results with others who have finished, and to look at which indicators for each key area give high and low scores and the reasons for this.

Stage 4
PLENARY SCORING

A scoring table is copied onto a large sheet of paper so that everyone can see it.

The PLENARY SCORING TABLE shown below is for Section 1 of Module 1 – Mission and values. For the other sections, this table should be adapted by writing in the relevant key areas.

In turn, each of the participants calls out their average scores for each key area. If you have access to stickers, place one sticker per participant in the relevant box. If you do not have stickers, mark each score with a marker pen. The example below shows where a mark is placed if a participant has a score of **2** for the key area 'Mission'.

Example of Plenary Scoring Table

INTERNAL ORGANISATION: MISSION AND VALUES				
KEY AREAS	**1** RARELY	**2** OCCASIONALLY	**3** OFTEN	**4** ALWAYS
Mission		✗		
Strategy				
Christian distinctiveness				

When all the participants have given their scores, there should be the same number of stickers or marks in each row as participants.

Stage 5
ANALYSIS

The group analyses the patterns of the scores on the PLENARY SCORING TABLE. The aim of the analysis is to identify what the main strengths and weaknesses of the organisation are. The reasons for any differences of opinion should be discussed.

The participants should look at areas of consistent scoring and what they say about the organisation.

Example of completed Plenary Scoring Table for ten participants

INTERNAL ORGANISATION: MISSION AND VALUES				
KEY AREAS	**1** RARELY	**2** OCCASIONALLY	**3** OFTEN	**4** ALWAYS
Mission	✗✗✗✗	✗✗✗✗✗	✗	
Strategy		✗✗	✗✗✗✗✗	✗✗✗
Christian distinctiveness		✗	✗✗✗	✗✗✗✗✗✗
Compassion	✗✗✗✗✗	✗✗✗✗	✗	
Non-discrimination	✗✗✗	✗✗✗✗✗✗	✗	

This organisation is strongest in strategy and Christian distinctiveness. What might be the cause of this?

This organisation is weakest in its mission, compassion and non-discrimination. What might be the cause of this?

It is also helpful to know what particular aspects of the weak key areas need improving. This is done by analysing the differences in scores between the indicators for the weak key areas.

An INDICATOR TABLE for each weak key area should be drawn onto a large sheet of paper. Participants should refer back to their SUMMARY SCORE SHEETS and call out their scores for each indicator. One mark or sticker per participant should be placed in the relevant box.

The indicator table below is for the strategy key area in Section 1 of Module 1 – Mission and values. This table should be adapted for other weak key areas that you identify.

The participants should look at areas of consistent scoring and what they say about the organisation. The reasons for any differences of opinion should be discussed.

Example of Indicator Table for ten participants

INDICATORS FOR STRATEGY KEY AREA	RARELY	OCCASIONALLY	OFTEN	ALWAYS
Organisational plans	XXXXXX	XX		XX
Evaluation	XXX	XXXXX		XX
Staff awareness		XXXXX	XXXXX	
Strategy relevance	XXXX			XXXXXX
Involvement of stakeholders		XXXXXXX	XXX	

This organisation appears to have a relevant strategy. Why do some people think that the organisation does not have a relevant strategy?

This organisation is weakest in planning. What might be the reasons for this?

Stage 6
RANKING PRIORITIES FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

From the analysis, select the three weakest areas in which capacity should be built. The participants discuss how these areas will be addressed and what resources will be needed.

Stage 7
ACTION PLANNING

This is the most important part of the process and should not be rushed. The action planning enables participants to set a plan for how they will address the weak areas they have prioritised. A key aspect of this is establishing who takes responsibility for making sure this happens and when. A sample action plan is given on page 31. An action plan template is given at the end of each module section, which can be photocopied and filled in.

EXAMPLE

KEY AREA	INDICATOR	DEFINITION	AVERAGE SCORE	COMMENTS	ACTION REQUIRED	BY WHOM	BY WHEN
Christian distinctive-ness	14 Time for prayer	The organisation sets aside regular time for prayer	2	Staff do not pray together regularly for the work of the organisation	Agree a time when all staff meet together to pray Organise a day of prayer and fasting	Director Director	Immediately August 2003
Strategy	24 Staff awareness	Staff can explain the organisation's strategies and how these relate to their work	1	Not all staff can explain what the strategies are	Hold a meeting for all staff where the leadership explains the organisation's strategies	Director	September 2003
Non-discrimination	27 Staff training	The organisation provides training in non-discrimination to all staff	2	No training given	Identify a suitable training course and trainer Invite all staff requiring training to a workshop	Personnel manager Personnel manager	September 2003 November 2003