Organizational Resilience for NGOs

A Guidebook by Holis

Holis

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• Visegrad Fund

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Foreword

By John Thackara
Advisory Board at Holis School 2023

Is your organisation ready to cope with the maelstrom of challenges that are upon us? Are you, personally?

Around the world, people are increasingly aware that resilience - the capacity to absorb shocks, and recover from disruptions - is of vital importance for systems and people alike. But how does one become resilient? Resilience is not a product you can buy, like a crash helmet. Resilience is not a service that you can buy from a consultant - even if you had the resources to pay for one.

Resilence, instead, involves caring for your organisation as a living system. It means paying continuous attention to the people, places and contexts where you live and work - and the relationships among them.

None of this means starting from scratch. As an NGO, If you and your organisation have survived until now, it's thanks to myriad support networks - formal, and informal. A lot of your work is nourished by the trust, time, attention, wisdom, experience, and skills that we all contribute in caring for each other. Money is important, but it's not the only driving force. Growing resilience means the nurture of relationships that are already there, as well as cultivating new ones.

But living systems - including social ones, like your organisation - can always be improved. This invaluable book is about practical steps you can take, right now, to help your organisation endure adversity and adapt to constant change: new ways to engage with stakeholders; how best to use social media; routes to new funding sources; practical steps to promote diversity and inclusivity; ways to enable meaningful collaboration among diverse actors; actions to enhance the mental and physical well-being of your staff.

Resilience, in this book, is less about tools and platforms, and more about nurturing trust among people, and strengthening mutual support networks. Built up by collaboration and support over time. Resilience and wellbeing, in the pages that follow, are properties of a social and ecological context in which people, places and living systems are interconnected.
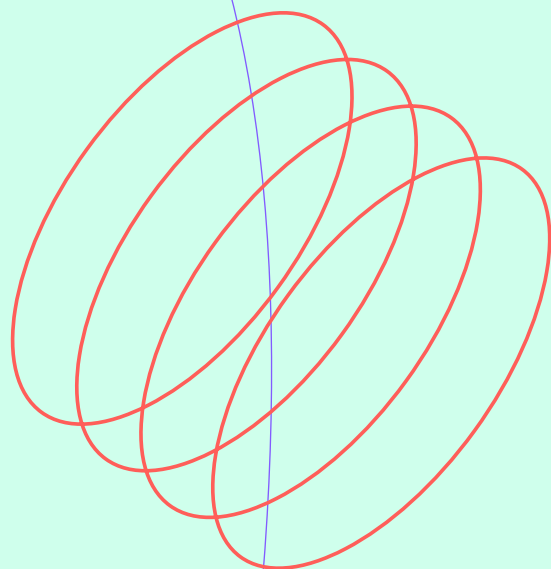
Photo by Ilvio Gallo

Why Resilience Matters for NGOs?

Resilience is a critical aspect of the success of any non-government organization (NGO). It allows NGOs to withstand unexpected challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and continue their essential work. This guidebook is designed to help such people like you dear reader to build resilience of NGOs by providing a comprehensive roadmap for their organizational development. This document's content is the culmination of a year-long research effort undertaken by the Holis School – an interdisciplinary collaborative and learning community – and its representatives and their collaborators.

This guidebook is structured to comprehensively address the core elements essential for establishing a resilient NGO. It not only offers guidance on change management but also underscores the significance of fostering partnerships. Through reading this guidebook, you will discover a wealth of insights, practical tips, and real-world case studies that can be readily applied by **activists**, **designers**, **strategists**, **directors**, **social innovators**, **civic workers**, or dedicated **NGO volunteers**.

Recognizing the unwavering dedication and tireless efforts of NGO workers and volunteers, this guidebook has been specifically crafted to address your distinctive requirements.[1] The document provides readers with a significant advantage in strengthening the resilience of NGOs, amplifying their influence, and nurturing sustainable transformation within communities.

1   Dennis Young and Elizabeth Searing 'Resilience and the Management of Nonprofit Organizations: A New Paradigm"

This guidebook serves as the essential tool for unlocking practical strategies and empowering NGOs, and all those engaged in social innovation, to make a profound and lasting impact.

Holis School & Places to Grow

Holis School and **Places to Grow** are two interrelated projects that epitomize our collective efforts in addressing societal challenges. Holis School fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, exemplified by innovative programs. Meanwhile, Places to Grow bolsters Early Childhood Development through collaboration, with Holis as a crucial partner.

Holis School[2] is a unique and immersive hub for interdisciplinary collaboration. With a focus on practical, real-world solutions, it's part of a network of European summer schools, sharpening soft skills, and actively addresses pressing ecological and social challenges. Our recent focus has been upon supporting Early Childhood Development[3] (ECD) and promoting resilience in the Visegrad region. Previously we have supported a felt factory from the brink of decay through innovative strategies, designing scenarios to empower senior citizens economically and socially, and even contributing to the rebranding of entire regions through the promotion of sustainable food and agricultural products. **This is the Holis way.**

Places to Grow[4] is a catalyst for excellence in early childhood development in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia, committed to strengthening relationships between organizations active in social services, education, advocacy and research. Our mission is to create a collaborative community united by a single vision: to help every child realize their potential to contribute to society in the future. We encourage a culture of co-creation, shared knowledge, experimentation and continuous learning among different organizations, aiming to bring about systemic changes in the ECD sector. Our mission transcends beyond immediate goals, as we are committed to laying a solid foundation for a more equitable and discrimination-free ECD future. Holis, serving as the backbone organization for Places to Grow, plays a pivotal role in this journey.

Together, Holis School and Places to Grow embody shared values, making a lasting impact in the Central Eastern European (CEE) region.

2   https://www.weareholis.org/experiences/building-resilience-of-ngos
3   https://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/what-is-early-childhood-development-a-guide-to-the-science/
4   https://placestogrow.eu/

Approach & Mindset

In this chapter, we delve into the foundational elements that shape our approach at Holis School. These elements encompass the definition of resilience, our custom-designed methodology, and the vital role of collaboration.

Defining Resilience

Resilience, is more than a buzzword; it's a cornerstone. It entails persevering through adversity, maintaining determination, and fostering adaptability at both personal and organizational levels. Our approach to resilience has been carefully shaped by the CEO of Holis School, Justyna Turek as a guiding star for our actions.

Custom-Designed Methodology

Our custom-designed methodology plays a central role in shaping our approach. Fine-tuned to address specific facets of our topics, it serves as a guiding compass, ensuring precision and purpose in our endeavors. The methodology was developed under the expert guidance of Design Lead Paul Lequay.

Collaboration as Lifeblood

Collaboration drives our achievements and offers valuable insights for those navigating their own endeavors, especially in the complex landscape of NGO work. Maxim Dedushkov is the founder of Holis delves into the multifaceted nature of collaboration, how it has been strategically employed, and the power that it holds.

Defining Resilience

By Participants & Challenge Owners of Holis 2023

Resilience refers to the ability of systems or designs to absorb shocks, recover from disruptions, and maintain operational integrity when facing unexpected challenges. Resilient designs are engineered to endure diverse stresses, such as natural disasters, climate shifts, and economic fluctuations while preserving their core functions and structural integrity. Resilience highlights the importance of preparedness, adaptability, redundancy, and flexibility, allowing systems to rebound and maintain effective operations.

In prior discussions with selected NGOs, resilience was defined as navigating life's challenges with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral flexibility, involving traits like adaptability, resourcefulness, cooperation, responsibility, communication, and creative problem-solving. Organizational resilience arises from adaptation, reflection, anticipation, and equipping staff for rapid adaptation and change. Now, after engaging with NGOs,

participants perceive resilience as a collective capacity for individuals and organizations to endure adversity and adapt adeptly. At the individual level, it's about maintaining determination and fostering adaptability, while at the organizational level, it involves evolving and addressing challenges effectively. Contemporary views emphasize unity, adaptability, and the ability to leverage setbacks as valuable learning opportunities.

In summary, both sides - selected NGOs and participants, concluded that resilience, whether in systems, individuals, or organizations, is the enduring capacity to confront adversity, adapt to change, and thrive. Resilience can be perceived differently, both before and after experiencing it, as it transforms setbacks into opportunities for growth. It propels us forward by harnessing the enduring strength of the human spirit and unwavering commitment to achieving greatness.

Resilience is more than a buzzword; it is the driving force that shapes our perspective and empowers us to overcome challenges and unlock new opportunities.

What does this mean for me?

For an NGO worker, resilience is about being prepared to adapt and respond effectively to unexpected challenges. It means resourceful problem-solving and effective communication with the team and partners. It's about taking responsibility and adapting to changing needs. Resilience empowers NGO workers to turn setbacks into learning opportunities, helping them persevere and make a meaningful impact in their mission.

Custom-designed Methodology

Designed by
Paul Lequay – Design Lead

NGO resilience journey

Observe & learn from others

Network with potential partners

Build trust & relationship

Learn from past experience

Strategize on continuous actions

Outwards

Resilient organisation

Inwards

Analyse the impact over time

Create awareness of change in context

Identify and understand your internal challenge

Set a vision

Create a strategic long-term action plan

At Holis School, our journey towards creating resilient organizations has been underpinned by a custom-designed methodology meticulously crafted with the expert guidance of our Design Lead, Paul Lequay. This methodology serves as our guiding compass, ensuring precision and purpose in our actions, and it offers the potential to inspire others embarking on transformative processes. Our methodology speaks to the broader context of modern challenges faced by NGOs and non-profits. The need for change led us to develop the "NGO Resilient Journey" a progressive methodology designed to help organizations prepare for the future and navigate ongoing change.

NGO Resilient Journey supports organisations to build their internal and external capability to inquire, anticipate, cope and adapt to change in a resilient way. The journey gradually takes the participants/ NGO workers to unlearn the existing problem-solving paradigm; and helps to shape a multi-level understanding of strategies to navigate uncertainty and change. Spanning across organisational, system-oriented and temporal dimension, this learning journey offers guidances to establish continuous action for resilience in motion.
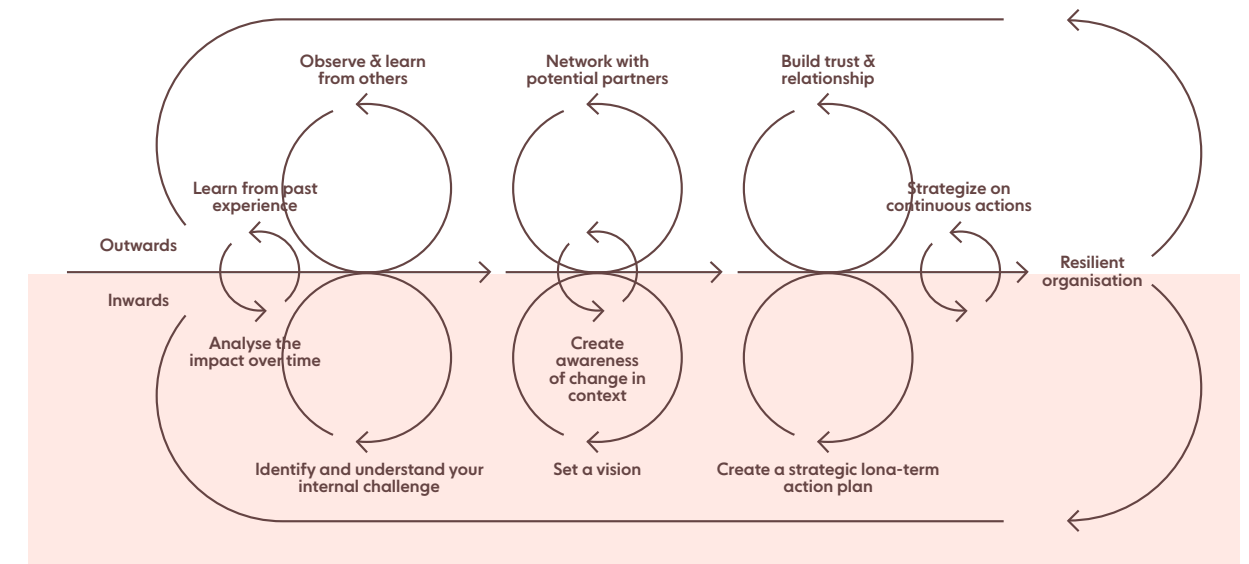
This methodology consists of a continuous process involving nine critical steps. It begins with "Learning from past experiences to analyze the impact over time," followed by "Observing & Learning from others to identify and understand your internal challenges," then "Networking with potential partners to establish a vision and raise awareness of changing contexts." Next, it involves "Building trust and relationships to create a strategic long-term action plan" and culminates in "Strategizing for ongoing actions" to transform into a resilient organization. These actions are crucial to maintain adaptability and operate in a cyclical manner because they are not guaranteed to remain "the same as they were" in an ever-changing world. Additionally, some of these actions may be only visible to external audiences "outwards", while extensive preparation occurs behind the scenes within the operational space of NGOs "inwards".

This approach, successfully adopted by Holis School participants, can be a powerful tool for NGO workers. We recommend taking the following action steps to enhance your work environment:

- **Embrace Resilience:** Recognize the vital role of resilience in achieving future success. Advocate for a shift within your organization from rigid, short-term thinking to a more flexible and resilient approach.

- **Customize for Context:** Adapt the NGO Resilient Journey framework to address your organization's unique challenges. Recognize that each NGO is distinct, and tailor the journey to align with your specific needs and goals.

- **Foster Learning and Collaboration:** Cultivate a culture of continuous learning within your organization, fostering a holistic, forward-thinking mindset. Encourage cross-team collaboration and the exploration of innovative, system-oriented, and future-oriented methodologies. Take proactive steps to embrace these principles and enhance your NGO's impact.

What does this mean for me?

Are you feeling already ready to transform your NGO work environment and lead your organization towards greater resilience? If so, here is how you can effectively present this methodology to your colleagues and stakeholders. Follow these steps:

- **Frame the discussion over the methodology** (within the context of your organization's current challenges and objectives),
- **Communicate the benefits of adopting it** (or at least prototyping and testing it),
- **Share success stories and case studies** (available in chapters 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3)
- **Involve stakeholders** to customize it for your needs and goals, and incorporate their feedback making sure to address any specific concerns.
- **Create a roadmap for implementing the methodology,**
- **Implement the methodology** and ensure that you **measure impacts** and **adapt accordingly.**

Tools that were taken into consideration while creating the methodology are: **Community Canvas,[5] Ecosystem Mapping,[6] Team Canvas,[7] Culture Change Map,[8] Systemic Design Framework,[9] Trends Radar,[10] Future Cone,[11] Impact Matrix[12] and OKR.[13]**

5   https://community-canvas.org/
6   https://ddc.dk/tools/ecosystem-mapping/
7   https://www.theteamcanvas.com/
8   https://www.strategyzer.com/library/the-culture-map-a-systematic-intentional-tool-for-designing-great-company-culture
9   ttps://www.designcouncil.org.uk/our-resources/systemic-design-framework/
10 https://www.venturesight.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ Venturesight-STEEP-RADAR.pdf
11 https://thevoroscope.com/2017/02/24/the-futures-cone-use-and-history/
12 https://toolbox.hyperisland.com/impact-effort-matrix
13 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Objectives_and_key_results

Collaboration as Lifeblood

By Maxim Dedushkov
Founder of Holis

Of course, our failures are a consequence of many factors, but possibly one of the most important is the fact that society operates on the theory that specialization is the key to success, not realizing that specialization precludes comprehensive thinking. (Buckminster Fuller)

"Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards". This quote, often attributed to the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, captures the inherent uncertainty and complexity of life. In our attempts to make sense of the world around us, we often turn to methodologies and models to help us understand and predict what will happen next. However, it's important to recognize that many of these methodologies are simply descriptive models. They are based on observations of past events, and they do an excellent job of explaining what has already happened. But when it comes to predicting the future, these models are often less reliable.

The reason for this is that life is an incredibly complex system. There are so many variables at play, and the interactions between them are often unpredictable. As a result, even the most sophisticated descriptive models can only capture a limited amount of this complexity. This is not to say that descriptive models are useless. Far from it. These models are incredibly valuable tools for understanding the world around us. They can help us make sense of complex data and identify patterns that might not be immediately apparent. But we should be wary of using them as predictive tools. In many cases, we simply don't have enough information to accurately predict what will happen next.

The future is inherently uncertain, and no model can capture all of the variables and interconnections that will influence it.

Photo by Kyrstan Petrucz

It's all about connections. In every aspect of life, the bonds we form play a huge role. Mark Granovetter's insightful paper, "The Strength of Weak Ties", shows that **even distant or casual connections can make a big difference in our lives. But our connections go beyond just people. We also have ties to nature, and to the world around us.** Somewhere along the way, especially in Western culture, it seems we've forgotten these important connections. We've drifted away from both our relationships with each other and our bond with the environment. And now, we're seeing the effects. **Big issues like climate change, inequality, and divisive politics can't be solved with a quick fix or a new model. They're complicated, and they require us to come together. To really address these challenges, we need to get back to basics.** We have to understand and value our connections, both with people and the environment. It's not just about finding a quick solution, but about building and maintaining strong, healthy relationships.

Building on the insights from Provan and Kenis,[14] we see that the synergies created through collaboration make a network far more valuable than the sum of its individual members. This is particularly relevant for NGOs, where access to resources, knowledge, complementary skills, and capacities can significantly enhance the impact of their work. As Camarinha-Matos and Afsarmanesh[15] highlight, these new organizational forms not only provide agility but also foster innovation by bringing together diverse ideas, resources, and technologies to create new value.

The benefits of collaboration are not just theoretical. Scholars such as Isett et al.[16] and Hoberecht et al.[17] have shown that collaborations are effective in addressing complex, wicked problems and are a fertile ground for innovation. This is echoed by Thorgren, Sara, Wincent, and Örtqvist[18] and Gloor,[19] who all agree on the positive impact of collaboration in fostering innovation.

However, as HB Milward et al.[20] caution, cross-sector collaborations are not without their challenges. Achieving consensus, managing complexity, and balancing power are all potential pitfalls that need to be navigated carefully. This brings us back to the importance of connections and relationships.
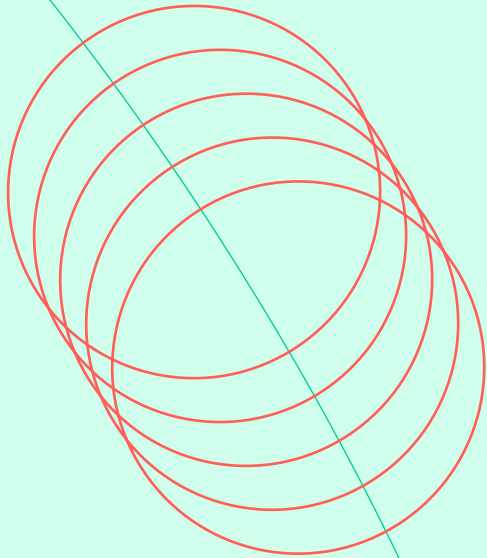
What does this mean for me?

The essence of my message is quite straightforward: it all boils down to the human element. When you engage with your colleagues or potential collaborators, don't merely perceive them as cogs in the organizational machine, but rather as fellow human beings, each with their unique stories and perspectives. Seek out commonalities that can serve as a bridge between your worlds, while also embracing the richness that your differences bring to the table. When you forge meaningful relationships based on shared intentions and motivations, you'll find that everything else naturally falls into place, propelling you towards your collective goals.

14 Provan, Keith G., and Patrick Kenis. 2008. "Modes of Network Governance: Structure, Management, and Effectiveness." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 18 (2). PMRA: 229–52.
15 Camarinha-Matos, M. Luis; Afsarmanesh, Hamideh (2006): "Collaborative Networks Value creation in a knowledge society", Proceedings of Prolamat 2006, IFIP Int. Conf. On Knowledge Enterprise—New Challenges (January 2006).
16 Isett, Kimberley R; Mergel, Ines A; LeRoux, Kelly; Mischen, Pamela A; Rethemeyer, R Karl (2011): "Networks in public administration scholarship: Understanding where we are and where we need to go", Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory, 21(1), pp. i157–i173, www.academia.edu/download/39727512/Isett_et_al_2011_Networks_in_PA.pdf (May 28, 2017).
17 Hoberecht, Susan, Brett Joseph, Jan Spencer, and Nancy Southern. 2011. "Inter-Organizational Networks." OD and Sustainability 43 (4): 23.
18 Thorgren, Sara, Joakim Wincent, and Daniel Örtqvist. 2009/9. "Designing Interorganizational Networks for Innovation: An Empirical Examination of Network Configuration, Formation and Governance." Journal of Engineering and Technology Management 26 (3): 148–66.
19 Gloor, P. A. 2006. Swarm Creativity: Competitive Advantage through Collaborative Innovation Networks. Oxford University Press.
20 Milward, H. Brinton, M. P. A. Gail MacKean, and M. P. A. Ann Casebeer. 2014 "Inter-Organizational Networks".

Assessment

In this chapter, we focus upon the needs of Challenge Owners – these are the NGOs who have worked with Holis as learning organisms. This section delves into the critical examination of their current state through a process of self-assessment of organizations from a wider global perspective.

Challenge owners represent the heart of our assessment of the impact we are making. We highlight three organizations from three different countries within the Visegrad region, revealing their dedication to facing and overcoming the challenges within their respective domains. Their unique challenges inspired us.

Current State: We acknowledge that most of the time, pausing is the simplest but hard to get a moment of reflection and self-assessment, since it's not just about moving forward. Only this allows us to thoroughly examine the present to pave the way for a more resilient and impactful future.

Context of Challenge Owners

At Holis School, we use the term 'challenge owner' to describe a non-profit organization that not only grapples with its internal issues but also partners with us as a 'learning body to drive social innovation forward. This year, we placed our focus on organizations operating in the Early Childhood Development (ECD) sector within the Visegrad Region (a group of four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia). The central concept underscores the importance of these organizations cultivating resilience to effectively fulfill their missions. In this edition, Challenge Owners candidly shared their specific challenges with Holis School participants, with the selection of these NGOs being based on recommendations from grant-giving institutions and the broader community.

CESTA MLADÝCH

Cesta Mladych[21] from Slovakia / Soňa Koreňová & Kristián Berecz

Cesta Mladych, led by two dedicated individuals with support from approximately 20 volunteers, provides afterschool classes, kids' clubs, social and career counseling, support for schools, and advocacy for marginalized Roma communities in the Zachorie region, north of Bratislava. The organisation was born from its passion for supporting marginalized communities, primarily offering voluntary mentoring to Roma youth. They later received support from a private high school and municipality. Financial challenges persist, and they're actively seeking grant opportunities. Their drive stems from a strong belief in their mission, a well-established network, and a reputation for excellence in human rights work, with a core focus on the Zachorie region. Passion keeps the organization going despite financial hurdles.

FÉROVÁ ŠKOLA

Ferova Skola[22] from Czech Republic / Mgr. Helena Pravdová

Led by one leader and collaborating with outside experts, is dedicated to connecting and networking primary schools and kindergartens in the Czech Republic, developing an evaluation tool for identifying inclusion in schools, recognizing and awarding quality inclusion, providing consultation services at all levels, offering teacher training, implementing prevention programs for children and collaborating with other NGOs and organizations. The organization is currently working with 22 kindergartens, mainly in the Vyškov region. Their main challenges include project completion and securing future funding, with a focus on increasing their visibility and impact. They have separated from a larger organization to pursue their mission. A leader is the driving force behind this organization, providing the motivation and dedication that keeps it going.

#NoBadKid

#NoBadKid[23] from Hungary / Andrea Gruber

Known as Pressley Ridge Hungary Foundation (PRHU), has been a pivotal entity in Central and Eastern Europe, affiliated with the US non-profit Pressley Ridge, since 2003. Their mission centers on helping children and youth with challenging behaviors remain in their homes, schools, and communities through a range of services. PRHU's core activities include enhancing educational services, promoting innovation in education, fostering inclusion, and providing training and consultation. PRHU is in the process of summarizing its two decades of experience and results to create a well-defined model for strategic growth. Their major challenge is transitioning from a small NGO to a well-established service center with sustainable resources, necessitating a clear plan and effective storytelling.

Common challenges faced by NGOs worldwide and in the field of Early Childhood Development (ECD), specific challenges for NGOs in the Visegrad Region may vary based on local and regional dynamics. However, some common challenges faced by ECD NGOs include **funding shortages, policy advocacy, staffing, and capacity building, data collection and assessment, quality assurance, cultural sensitivity, and community outreach.**

21   https://cesta-mladych.webnode.sk/

22   http://www.ferovaskola.cz/uvod

23   https://nobadkid.org/

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Expert on Assessment, Co-founder of Change Pilots and Next Agents

"Put on your oxygen mask before assisting others"
- every airline before taking off the plane

In the ever-evolving landscape of NGOs and non-profit organizations worldwide, the need for resilience and adaptability has never been more pronounced. These organizations are the backbone of social change, their tireless efforts dedicated to making the world a better place. However, they often face a set of common challenges and daily struggles that require careful consideration.

Global NGO Challenges - NGOs worldwide encounter common hurdles. Fundraising, is a relentless task due to fierce competition for grants and donations. Bureaucracy, with complex regulations and reporting requirements, drains time and resources, hindering effectiveness. Evolving global issues like public health crises, climate change, and social justice challenges require adaptation, making it a perpetual struggle to stay relevant. NGOs face challenges in operational flexibility, short-term focus, resource limitations, and navigating change, common to organizations worldwide.

1. 2. 3. 4.

The Essence of Self-Assessment - acknowledging these challenges is only the first step. The heart of resilience lies in a moment of reflection that is often simpler in theory than in practice. The chaotic nature of daily operations and the urgency of addressing societal issues make it challenging for organizations to pause and thoroughly examine their present state. However, it is during these moments of pause and self-assessment that the foundation for a more resilient and impactful future is laid. Organizations can identify their strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for growth. They can realign their strategies, refine their operations, and reinvigorate their missions.

NGO-Self-Assessment

Organizational resilience is influenced by multiple factors, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach, the self-assessment process for each NGO may vary. Starting to introduce these 6 critical questions marks a pivotal moment in the life of an NGO. It's an opportunity to pause, reflect, and dive into a comprehensive evaluation of the organization's current state, its mission, and its impact. These questions are more than mere enquiries; they are a compass guiding through the complexities of the nonprofit world. By addressing them (ideally in teams), NGOs can unlock a pathway to understanding where they stand, what they've achieved, and where they aim to go. This introspection forms the foundation for growth, adaptability, and continued success in meeting the ever-evolving needs of those NGOs serve and making a tangible difference in the world. Some of the critical questions that can be helpful to structure NGO self-assessment, that you dear reader can suggest, include the following:

1. Are our initiatives STILL aligned with our mission and the evolving needs of our beneficiaries?

2. Are we making the best use of our resources, both human and financial?

3. Are we effectively communicating our message and engaging our stakeholders?

4. What steps are we taking to address the challenges of both the present and the future?

5. Are our efforts delivering meaningful results in line with our mission and the changing needs of those we serve?

6. Is our organization actively promoting diversity and inclusivity, ensuring that various voices are heard in our decision-making?

What does this mean for me?

For an NGO worker, this means that the self-assessment process equips you with the essential questions to begin investigating your organization. It's a crucial step, especially after adopting a methodology like the NGO Resilient Journey, because it helps you understand your organization's current state, including its resources, before diving into the process of generating ideas and making changes. There are many different assessments methods and tools, it's good to start small, and keep it as a habit once two years.

For organizations keen to delve even deeper into this practice, the reference to ISO standards for management presents an invaluable and all-encompassing framework. Check ISO 9001[24] and ISO 22316.[25]

Examples of NGOs that publicly share their self-assessments and evaluations public: Amnesty International, Oxfam, WWF, Transparency International, CARE International, Charity: Water, GiveDirectly, BRAC or Kiva

24 https://www.iso.org/iso-9001-quality-management.html
25 https://www.iso.org/standard/50053.html

Unveiling Resilience in Action

In this chapter, we explore the practical aspects of NGO resilience. Before implementing actions, it's vital to observe how others have addressed similar challenges. Here, we shine a light on the unwavering commitment to progress, deep empathy for the NGOs, and the intuition of our participants.

Through three engaging case studies - we explore the challenges encountered, the strategies employed, and the lessons gained. These instances, which emerged during Holis School, provide an up-close view of the core of resilience, demonstrating organizations' capacity to not merely withstand adversity but to adapt, grow, and flourish.

This part aims to inspire and educate, illustrating that resilience is more than a concept; it's a dynamic force that propels individuals and organizations to overcome the most formidable obstacles. These stories provide concrete evidence that with dedication, unity, and adaptability, greatness can be achieved even in the most daunting circumstances.

https://www.weareholis.org/experiences/building-resilience-of-ngos

Build-A-Role

By Team Lolis

Addressing the Challenge - Build-A-Role

Tailored to NoBadKid, an organization grappling with financial instability and an identity crisis amid operational disruptions, Build-A-Role is a prototype solution. Extensive research revealed that internal imbalances within NoBadKid were hindering its growth. It became evident that roles and expectations were often unclear, and the director's overloaded responsibilities made delegation challenging, necessitating a transition from centralized to distributed leadership.

Build-A-Role

The "Build-A-Role" concept draws inspiration from the hands-on approach of Build-A-Bear Workshops.[26] In this model, employees actively participate in crafting their roles within the organization. The core of this system revolves around "Task Tokens," which categorize tasks based on their complexity and importance. The implementation of Build-A-Role takes place in three distinct phases: Workload Assessment, Test Trials & Full Implementation.

Potential Impact

Build-A-Role rejuvenates NoBadKid's resilience, aligning tasks with strengths and interests to boost engagement and task completion. Sharing responsibilities encourages collaboration, adaptability, and compromise. It paves the way for a more resilient and empowered organization, vital for NGOs navigating unforeseeable challenges.

A Novel Approach

Build-A-Role proposes a novel leadership and task delegation model, decentralizing responsibilities and empowering team members. In an unpredictable NGO environment, models like Build-A-Role offer flexibility for organizational adaptation. Initiatives such as Build-A-Role extend beyond the scope of NGOs. They represent a broader trend within organizations, one that moves away from traditional command-and-control structures in favor of embracing more flexible and adaptable roles and cultures.

26   https://www.buildabear.co.uk/

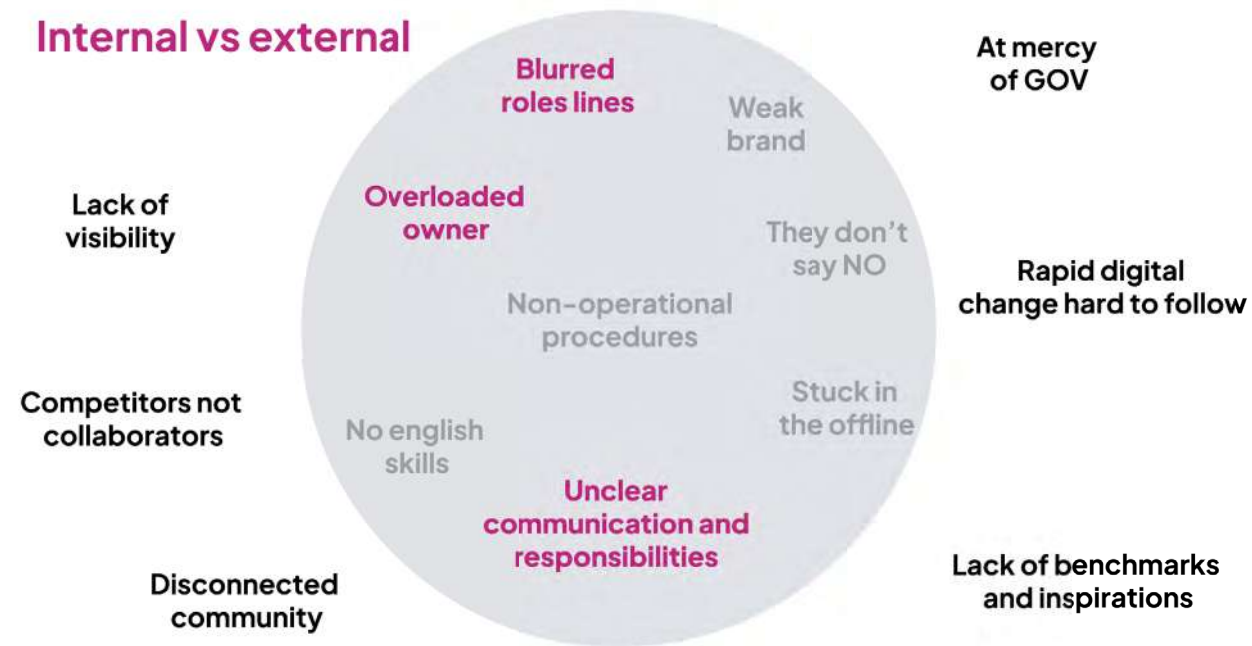
"I hear from my employees that there are undescribed expectations." - which is her comment of the way how NoBadKid works

Andrea Gruber, director of NoBadKid

"For me resilience connected with the work that we've done in Holis involves empowering communities, reducing risks, promoting sustainability, advocating for policy changes, and collaborating across sectors"

Agata Gancarczyk, Team Lolis

Internal vs external

- Blurred roles lines
- Weak brand
- At mercy of GOV
- Lack of visibility
- Overloaded owner
- They don't say NO
- Rapid digital change hard to follow
- Non-operational procedures
- Competitors not collaborators
- No english skills
- Stuck in the offline
- Unclear communication and responsibilities
- Disconnected community
- Lack of benchmarks and inspirations

Now   Then

Build–a–role

> **I keep hearing from my employees that I have undescribed expectations.**
>
> Andrea Gruber

For smooth integration, Build-A-Role's implementation unfolds in three distinct phases:

Workload Assessment: The first step involves creating a comprehensive list of tasks, identifying areas where delegation is possible and beneficial. This step offers clear insight into workloads across the organisation and is the first step toward balancing tasks.

Test Trial: Team members have the opportunity to test-drive specific tasks before full implementation. This trial period allows them to assess their comfort and capability in handling new responsibilities, providing a controlled space for adjustment.

Implementation: Once tasks have been tested and team members' performance evaluated, team members can proactively choose tasks from the Task Gallery, signalling their commitment to absorbing these responsibilities into a long-term workflow.

What does this mean for me?

For an NGO worker, this case study demonstrates the importance of innovation and adaptability in addressing common challenges. You can apply this example by considering more flexible role definitions and structured task delegation within your organization. Emphasize team empowerment, gradual transformation, and resilience-building strategies to enhance your NGO's effectiveness in an ever-changing landscape.

Authors: Piotr Stanisławski, Marvin Davis, Kornelia Błoch, Agata Gancarczyk, Izaskun Pérez and Enikő Barbarics.
Team Facilitator: Henryk Stawicki
Junior Facilitator: Lilla Török

Read more about this solution on
https://www.weareholis.org/blog/build-a-role-by-lolis
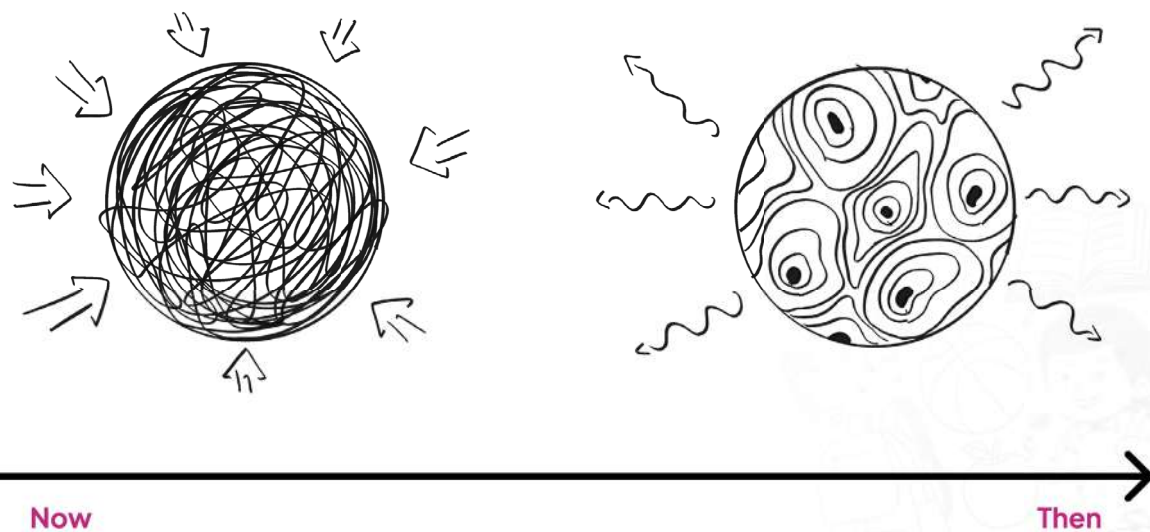
The Knowmads

By Team Dancing Dupetky

Empowering Community Resilience & Autonomy

Crafted specifically for the Cesta Mladych organization, grappling with the challenge of capacity and financing, Knowmads represents a unique prototype solution. The team delved into the wealth of knowledge within Cesta Mladych, paving the way for a long-term commitment.

The Knowmads

The central idea of Knowmads is to create a self-sustaining and autonomous community network within Cesta Mladych, focused on empowering the marginalized Roma community. It transforms the concept of funding from a narrow monetary perspective into a comprehensive system of reliable resources. The core concept revolves around network marketing and peer-to-peer support. Knowmads shifts the role of Cesta Mladych from being mere tutors to effective networkers, fostering community growth and self-reliance by harnessing the wealth of skills and expertise within the Roma community.

Potential Impact

Knowmads has the potential to empower the Roma community by challenging stereotypes and fostering self-reliance. It shifts the narrative from dependence on external funding to celebrating the community's culture, skills, and resources. This network-based approach enables the Roma community to access diverse skills, mentorship, and more, while promoting understanding and connectivity beyond geographic boundaries.

A Novel Approach

Knowmads builds upon the fact that the people closest to the problem have the best insights into the possible solutions. This is sometimes called Human Centred Design but we prefer to call it Humanity Centred Design. Knowmads introduces a fresh approach focused on building resilience, independence, and a shift in mindset. It equips Cesta Mladych with the tools and resources to navigate challenges independently, freeing them from reliance on traditional funding models. By promoting community growth and presenting Roma children as valuable contributors, this initiative transforms Cesta Mladych into a networking hub that challenges stigmas and celebrates untapped potential.

"My 'aha' moments came when I realized that we could grow our community by sharing knowledge and empower our students to become tutors in specific areas of expertise"

Soňa Koreňová, co-founder of Cesta Mladych

"The strength of your NGO is the network around it"

Soňa Koreňová, co-founder of Cesta Mladych

"My biggest take-away from the team work is having witnessed the coming together of a design strategy that takes into account people, contexts, sustainable growth and resilience, thus leading me to realize that contemporary design has a duty to embrace the act of creating in 360°"

Viviana Calvagno, Team Dancing Dupetky

Roadmap
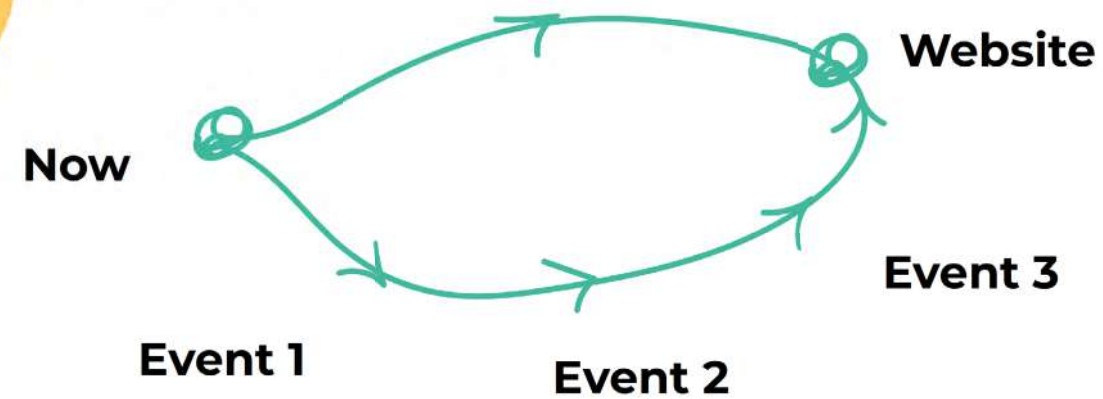
> Know where you want to go and make sure the right people know about it.
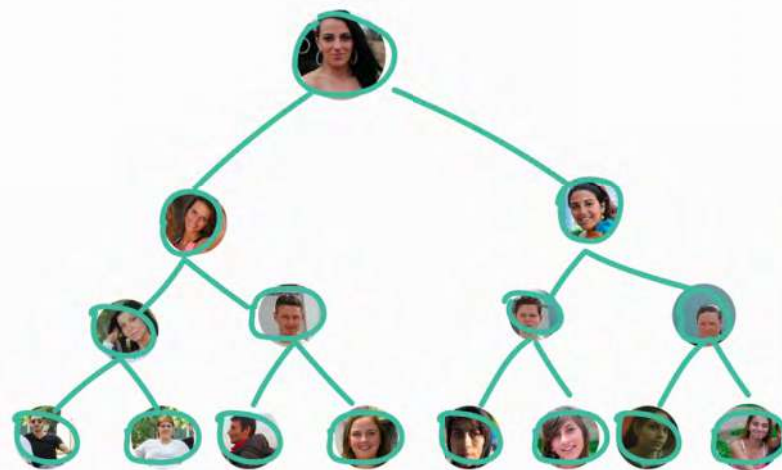
Dijana's Impact

Knowmads

Value for the NGO

1. **Sustainable, independent strategy**

2. **Independently from external partners**

3. **Take the burden off your shoulders, and**

4. **Empower the people that matter the most to you: your community!**

What does this mean for me?

For you and your organization, challenges can ignite innovation and adaptive solutions. As this case study illustrates, it's feasible to reconsider funding, expanding beyond monetary resources. Prototyping network and peer-to-peer systems can empower your community. Recognizing your community's strengths and resources is pivotal for cultivating resilience. Striving for sustainability and self-sufficiency can lead to greater independence. Empower individuals to drive transformative change within your community. Embrace a mindset shift to reshape narratives and leave a lasting impact.

Authors: Tímea Mónus, Dominika Michalska, Diego Alatorre Guzmán, Viviana Calvagno and Eva-Maria Chapuy.
Team Facilitator: Archie MS
Junior Facilitator: Alvaro Valls Boix

Read more about this solution on
https://www.weareholis.org/blog/knowledge-nomads-by-dancing-dupetky

Building the Universe

By Team Wild Cats

Challenges Unveiled

In the broader context of addressing challenges in the field of inclusive education, the collaborative effort with Ferova Skola led to the development of a unique prototype solution. As Ferova Skola acts as a connector to enhance inclusivity and children's well-being, as well as communication between schools and kindergartens. This experience allowed for a deeper understanding of Ferova Skola's mission, underscoring the commitment to their cause.

Building the Universe

Gathered insights on Helena's role, organizational growth possibilities, children's well-being, the school environment, and key stakeholders allowed to create an ecosystem map, revealing the potential for the community around Ferova Skola to ease Helena's workload. Three ideas aimed to build a network around Ferova Skola, emphasizing a shift in the organization's role from sole performer to a leader, thus enhancing the overall impact.

1. Welcome Toolkit for Leaders - The Backpack is toolkit designed to empower educators in streamlining their approach to addressing children's issues with greater ease and simplicity.

2. "I Am the Kid from the Future" - A transformative program aimed at helping educational institutions gain a firsthand understanding of their impact on students. Through this initiative, schools can adopt a more student-centric approach, enabling them to better cater to the needs and perspectives of their young learners.

3. Inclusivity Library - Weekly sessions, led by Helena and others, offer an interactive approach to inclusivity for those in education, fostering community, empathy, and empowerment.
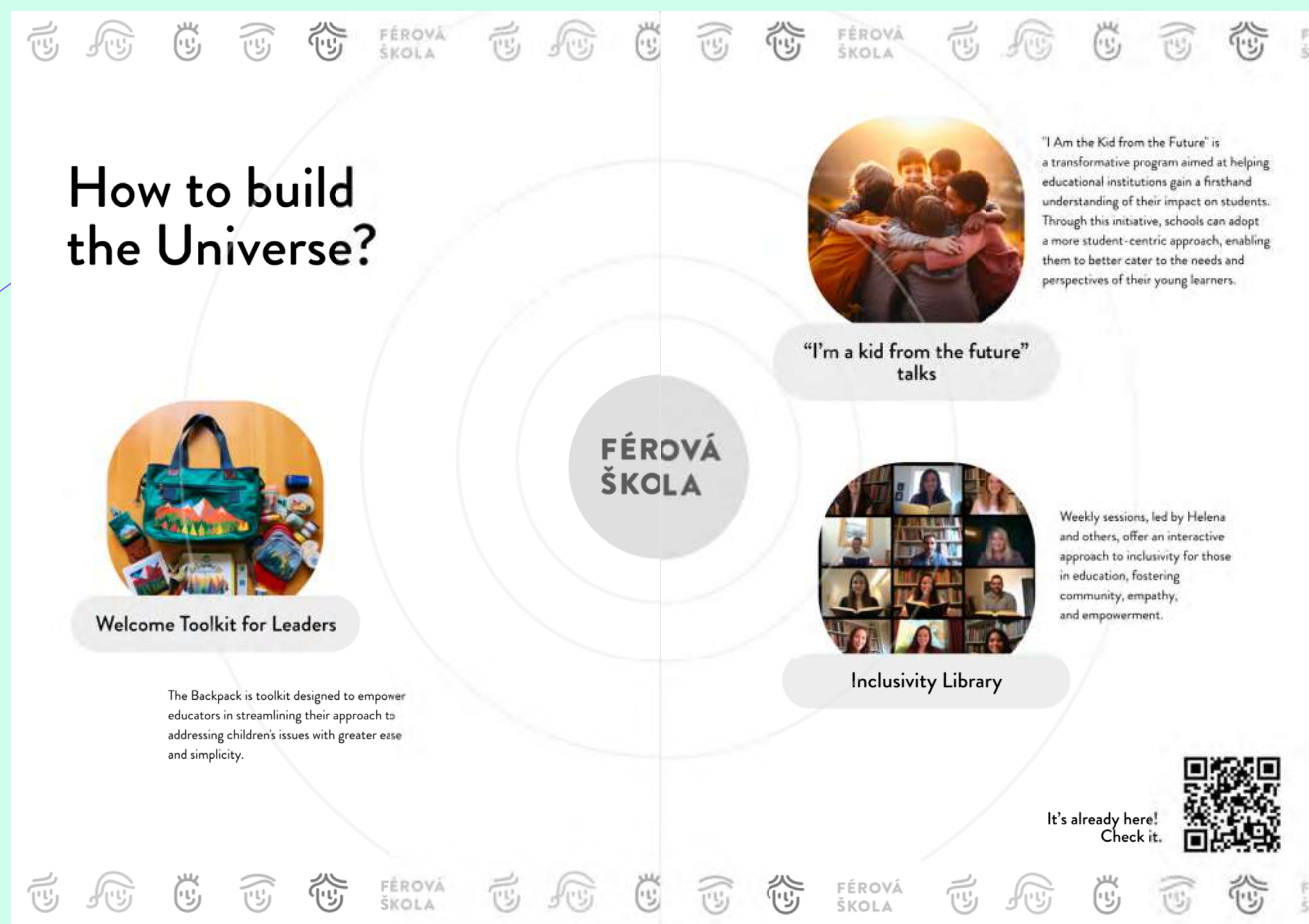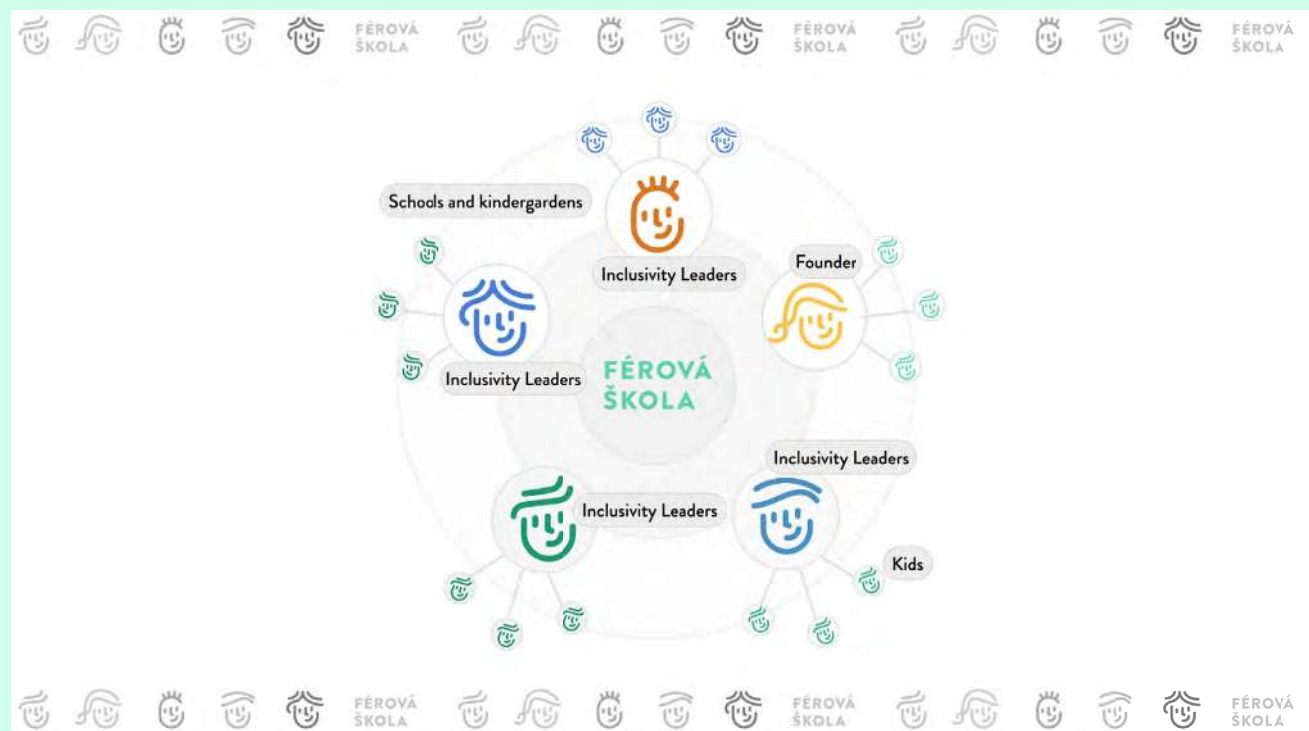
Impact Potential

This project is an attempt to shift towards a more self-sustaining model and provided a practical roadmap for Ferova Skola's future actions. This human-centered approach focuses on relieving Helena's workload while streamlining communication between schools and kindergartens, ultimately leading to a stronger community of allies.

"You have certainly opened up new perspectives for me, such as transforming Férová škola into more of a help and support platform—a place where teachers, principals, and parents can find the tools, resources, and experts they need"

Helena Pravdová, owner of Férová škola

A Novel Approach

The emphasis on decentralizing responsibilities and empowering engaged individuals within the educational ecosystem to take a proactive role. By providing tools and procedures, the project encourages these individuals to become leaders and champions of inclusivity, guided by Ferova Skola's wealth of best practices and expertise. This approach goes beyond traditional top-down models and promotes a more grassroots, community-driven initiative for fostering inclusivity and wellbeing in early childhood education. It recognizes the potential within the community to lead positive change and leverages their strengths to create a more self-sustaining model for Ferova Skola.

How to build the Universe?

Welcome Toolkit for Leaders

The Backpack is toolkit designed to empower educators in streamlining their approach to addressing children's issues with greater ease and simplicity.

FÉROVÁ ŠKOLA

"I Am the Kid from the Future" is a transformative program aimed at helping educational institutions gain a firsthand understanding of their impact on students. Through this initiative, schools can adopt a more student-centric approach, enabling them to better cater to the needs and perspectives of their young learners.

"I'm a kid from the future" talks

Weekly sessions, led by Helena and others, offer an interactive approach to inclusivity for those in education, fostering community, empathy, and empowerment.

Inclusivity Library

It's already here! Check it.

What does this mean for me?

Consider exploring these five key areas for your organization:

1. Building Partnerships: Collaborate with schools, kindergartens, and similar groups to tackle inclusive education challenges collectively.
2. Understanding Needs and Crafting Solutions: Assess the community's needs and create initial programs or projects focusing on empowering educators, fostering student-centered approaches, and promoting inclusivity.
3. Empowering Community Leaders: Encourage a decentralized approach by supporting community members to advocate for inclusive education. Provide them with tools, resources, and guidance.
4. Establishing Support Platforms: Transform your NGO into a hub offering tools, expertise, and networking for educators, principals, parents, and stakeholders.

5. Starting Small and Scaling Responsibly: Initiate pilot programs aligned with your NGO's objectives. Gather feedback, refine, and expand successful initiatives while adapting to the evolving needs of the community.

Focus on partnerships, prototype solutions, empower community leaders, create support platforms, and evolve based on community feedback for a more inclusive educational landscape.

Team Wild Cats participants: Klara Czopik, Agata Szczebyło, Michał Kociszewski, Beatriz Segura Garcia, Marlon Davis and Ivannia Alvarado.
Junior Facilitator: Dominika Majewska
Facilitator: Yang Li

Read more about this solution on
https://www.weareholis.org/blog/how-to-build-the-universe-by-wild-cats

Tales of Resilience & Inspiration

In the pursuit of resilience and empowerment for NGOs, our journey through Holis School has been infused with inspiration. This chapter delves into the driving forces behind our quest for a brighter future that allows us to grasp the 'non-tangible' feeling of resilience. After conducting self-assessment work, you can draw inspiration from real case studies in this chapter, showing how collaboration and a social innovation approach can help NGOs to become resilient. It serves as a valuable resource for other organisations or/and NGOs workers aspiring to embark on a similar path.

Key Takeaways from Collective Knowledge - we'll explore the invaluable insights that emerged from the collective knowledge, highlighting the wisdom of our experts and the profound takeaways from their shared experiences grasped by the project manager at Holis Diana Takacsova.

Antifragile Metadesign - Diego Alatorre Guzmán builds on the ideas of antifragility and meta-design as a strategic approach for organizational creativity that offers an engaging and thought-provoking exploration of these concepts and their implications for our journey.

Cultivating Resilience - a ray of hope - Alvaro Valls Boix, a junior facilitator offers his own unique perspective, contributing an article that inspires further reflection on the principles of resilience and empowerment.

On expanding resilience

By Diana Takacsova
Project Manager of Places to Grow, expert at Holis School 2023

Holis School brings together practitioners from all walks of life, aiming at a holistic approach to any question: this is why I chose to pose my questions to interviewees - Holis School experts - broadly. You will find collated collective knowledge in the below contribution - and two separate interviews providing a detailed look at early childhood development, NGOs, design, and strategy. Here, I will start from resilience on the personal level – because all NGO workers are also individuals – and build up towards the collective – because they are all part of something bigger. If our own needs are not met, how do we go further? Once we are aware of those, how do we weave together our individual existences?

A good life

Our approaches to what is a fulfilled life differ - and a focus on our own well-being is often overlooked in our everyday reality. Sometimes, we need a reminder from someone else. This can be as simple as to stay hopeful, travel and hug trees (Yang) – or as imaginative as designing a process to find out what you actually want and need - what your body needs, and what your mind needs (Lilla). Once you look at the big picture, I would like to leave you with Alvaro's thoughts:

"Invest your energy towards what you think is your purpose and what you believe. It doesn't need to be the same thing along your life: of course, it can change - and you have to change with it. You will feel fulfilled, whether you have more or less money - or more or less things. You are in your place. You are serving the purpose you think or you feel you have."

A connection - and collaboration

To work together is essential: but it is not easy to start, navigate, and see collaboration succeeding (whatever success means for any given person – and in any given situation). Where do we go from the point when we bring people together? Are there red lines that make collaboration impossible? Remember to connect on your similarities and benefit from your differences, says Roland as he emphasises the need of seeking that shared interest, friend, challenge – you name it – to further benefit from the exchange of everyone's lived experience. What should NGOs know about working with designers? Here is what Henryk shared from his practice:

"This is not the only perspective: do not seek to work only with designers. Designers value honesty and transparency - and they like to research and understand the context. Do not be afraid of questions that seem strange. Be aware of designers who come in and say that they have a solution. They should have questions - and know how to find answers."

Lastly, a short note on dissecting approaches to addressing complex challenges, including social ones, by Radoslav:

"Different perspectives could sometimes be clashing. But we need to find a way - and sometimes it is paradoxical. We can call it a paradoxical mindset that is not either-or. We need to give up something to have something for the good of the society: maybe the solution which is good for all is not the best for me. But because it is good for all, I can actually benefit from it as well."

Finding resilience in the NGO context

How does resilience translate into the everyday realities of NGOs? In forging a resilient vision of an NGO, Henryk highlights the need to understand the different roles and different needs between various actors, which are often not leveraged as mutual synergic exchange united around a shared purpose and vision: **"The most important in leadership is that the team knows how to support - and can support the leader, because the team outsources courage and vision to the leader. But the leader also needs to outsource some things to the team."** Reframing possibilities can be, as Dominika notes, an exercise of reassessing terms, especially in NGOs that are small:

"Our approach has been taking the things that we have always understood in one way, and shifting concepts such as well-being, partner, funds; rethinking them in ways we haven't tried before."

What does this mean for me?

As an NGO worker, at times, it is easy to be paralysed by the sheer scope of a challenge. How can we remain hopeful and focused in today's interconnected realities? Hope is a good starter – and it can manifest in different ways from managing one's own mind and staying hopeful through seeing all rapid change and uncertainty as an illusion underneath our true system (Yang), or in finding others who share the same values - the creative, passionate people around you, like Roland says. In Dominika's view, it can come from dissecting complexity into small, achievable steps that are not overwhelming. Or it can be also a case – outlined by Henryk - for relying on the opportunities for breakthrough arising from the interconnectedness of the world:

"There is a sentence present among different cultures: need is the mother of inventions. If we have the need - the problem - that's what innovation feeds on. And these will be solved because that's how the world works. The only risk is that we don't change - but we constantly are in transition".

The interviewees and Holis School 2023 participants:

- Álvaro Valls Boix is mathematician and project manager
- Dominika Majewska is a designer, researcher and social innovator
- Dominika Targosz is a cook, and a plant-based cuisine enthusiast and promoter
- Henryk Stawicki is a circular design consultant, strategist, leader and facilitator
- Lilla Török is a multidisciplinary designer working in the intersection of design, art and technology
- Radoslav Pittner is a Senior Change Manager at Ashoka
- Roland Harwood is a successful serial entrepreneur and connector of ideas and people
- Yang Li is a curiosity-driven innovator and mindfulness practitioner

Find out more about the interviewees here: https://www.weareholis.org/experiences/building-resilience-of-ngos

Interview with Stanislav Daniel

Stanislav is a Roma activist with many years of experience in promoting equal education rights for Roma children in Slovakia and internationally. He currently works for a philanthropic company based in Vienna. He believes in just society and is using his knowledge, mental capacity and life energy to contribute to the world that he would like to see

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the field of Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the Visegrad region?

Unfortunately, I see more frequently that when we talk about ECD in the region, it's often discussed only in the context of marginalised, disadvantaged, Roma and whoever else. In reality, ECD benefits all children - but the findings are that those on the margins benefit from it the most. The other big challenge is that it's still so much in the hands of the non-profit sector when I believe it should be a state guaranteed service. One of the opportunities is that in some municipalities ECD services and their availability is something that the locals learned to use so much that they will not be able to imagine the future without it. So for the next elections of the mayor, they will be asking for it.

How can resilience be useful for NGOs in this and other contexts?

These kinds of (ECD) provisions often depend either on private philanthropy - which may easily change their priorities, stop funding in the future - or they are financed through European Union or central government funds that often also come from the EU. At times, there is a gap in service provision: organizations cannot cover this and, in a worst-case scenario, have to fire people. When we talk about resilience, it's about being able to deal with these situations. Unfortunately, I also would like to note that then there are some of the bigger challenges such as the war in Ukraine, which led to many Ukrainian refugees, typically mothers with children coming to the region. ECD organizations proved their resilience as they were very typically the first ones being able to react.

How do you see the role of interdisciplinary collaboration in this?

Interdisciplinary collaboration is at a very early age in our region. When you have early childhood experts, they would maybe talk to other educational experts, but not so much economists, for instance. ECD in its nature is beyond one area: even if I stick to some very conservative definitions, it would at least include health, social affairs and education. For instance, in Slovakia, that's three different ministries – and those do not exchange data - or work together.

How to bring together diverse actors for collaboration and how to bridge differences?

The best way to approach this is to work on the basis of radical transparency. We all have to play with an open hand, so that others see our cards. We can't have hidden agendas. And that's where we sometimes fail: people come with diverse agendas but may not be so open about them. Someone establishes a network, but in fact it's a project of their own organization. And then when the funding for this project ends, the whole network ends. On a positive note, Holis School shows that it is possible; we can bring people together from a diversity of areas, contexts, countries - and they can spend a week working on very particular cases from our region. People can learn. If they ask questions, those questions will be answered. There will be someone who knows more about this. I think that's the only way to get through diversity.

How to stay hopeful and focused in this world of complex and interconnected problems?

That's very challenging - people shouldn't underestimate it, because the world is hard. The touch with reality may be sometimes quite difficult. I believe there is a certain power of having supervision, allowing yourself to be tired and all those things that sometimes we just forget about. We go as machines - and we hope that we will live forever. I don't know who's the author of this quote, but I've seen it a few times already: if you're tired, learn to relax, not to quit.

Interview with Archie MS

Archie MS is an empathetic design strategist, energetic knowledge sharer, inspirational coach, and community wrangler. They connect with others through laughter, cherished memories, experiences, or chaos.

What is your process for approaching a new challenge?

Whether that challenge be personal or professional, I spend a lot of time thinking about it, looking at it from different sides, and getting more perspective. If you're going to say it's another form of overthinking, then yes it is. At the start, I spend a lot of time letting the emotions out, learning about the space, figuring out what the situation is, and then plan a set of actions to overcome challenge.

Should be social design and innovation based on interdisciplinary collaboration? And why, if yes, why?

Being interdisciplinary is only one parameter. I believe creativity plays a larger role as it forces the team to think outside the box which matters more to solve the problem. Many times During ideation sessions, even with doing multiple rounds and interdisciplinary teams, we end up with similar answers. At this point,The discipline/craft becomes irrelevant and the ability to think outside the box becomes more important. Creativity comes from our different experiences and the ability to think freely.

How to bring together diverse actors for collaboration - and how to overcome differences?

The best way is to bring decision makers and action takers into a room to have conversations, share insights and make decisions on actions to take. Simply put, Collaboration starts with a conversation. To stay consistent and manage differences, continuous conversations need be planned for across the length of the project. This will help build the comfort and comraderie amongst all actors.

What is the secret of your creativity?

Creativity to me is the ability to freely express oneself without being held back by any constraints and expectations of an outcome. It is an exercise of the mind. Some artist said to creatively experiment for two hours a day. Who has 2 hours to spare? so, I started doing it for an hour to train my mind to think outside the box. I don't feel like I've had a successful day until I've spent an hour making something. It has given me the courage to try new things in my personal and professional life.

Antifragile Metadesign:

Strategic Creativity for Social Organization

By Diego Alatorre Guzmán
Participant at Holis School 2023

From natural phenomena to social disasters: wildfires, pandemics, economic recessions, educational exclusion and margination, represent critical threats as they are not easy to predict. Running an NGO is not an exception and you may feel endangered with not enough visibility of the chains of cause and consequences that lay on your future.

This is what I found at Holis School 2023, a series of reflections that may share some light on your venture to make this world a better place. In the forthcoming lines you will find traces of my research, backed by hands-on experience, looking into complex systems from an interdisciplinary approach, providing practical insights regarding chaos, and its implications for collective organization.

Instead of evading risk, recent research describes natural and social metabolisms that improve their performance in the face of adversity. These were called antifragile systems by Taleb[27] who suggests that antifragility is more valuable than robust and adaptive systems, as these are designed to adapt to unforeseen situations that might never even happen by functions and elements that justify a state of emergency that target efforts to avoid the catastrophe by focusing on the necessity, not on the possibilities.

27   Taleb, Nassim Nicholas (2012) Antifragile: Things That Gain From Disorder. Penguin Books.

Antifragile systems, on the other hand, tend to exploit faults and errors to become better and stronger. As strange as these may sound, their behavior has been found beyond theoretical discussions: in practical scenarios in nature and in technology, with notable applications in science, governance, planning, and decision-making contexts. Their approach is different from other design methodologies for several reasons: intrinsically, regarding its particular approach that praises errors and nonlinear designs; and extrinsically concerning the application domains, which are infinite (Russo and Ciancarinia).[28]

Convex tinkering is presented as a method of scientific discovery based on decentralized experimentation that increases the chances of significant upsides, not by avoiding risk, but by undertaking shared adventures, where design is not merely a matter of style, but can radically transform our practices by allowing genuine improvements that require a thorough understanding of the systems where we operate.

As a force that frees us from the oppression of discipline, metadesign contemplates extra-aesthetic and supra-cultural strategies, accessible only from outside, therefore requiring the dialogue and assimilation of complementary visions (Van Onck;[29] Gene Youngblood).[30] Since from within, any definition will always be incomplete, metadesigners such as Humberto Maturana[31] and Arturo Escobar[32] call to **distrust technology as the main solution to our problems and urge paying attention to the way we interact with it. As relational beings, the nature of our greatest problems tends to be associated, not to the things themselves but to the emotions that govern us while we interact with technology, and thought it, with others.**

What does this mean for me?

Translating these ideas into easy to follow, day to day recommendations is not easy, but that is fine, as my intention is not to invent a flawless recipe for you to follow, but a provocation to acknowledge the co-responsibility for the continuous construction of the present, where NGOs are not only a tool for change, but a living organism by which we take care of life, in all its forms and scales.

28 Russo, Daniel & Ciancarini, Paolo (2016) A Proposal for an Antifragile Software Manifesto, Procedia Computer Science, Volume 83, 2016, Pages 982-987, ISSN 1877-0509, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.procs.2016.04.196

29 Van Onck, Andries (1965). Metadesign. Setor de Publicações FAUUSP. Tradução de Lúcio Grinover. Texto original publicado en Edilizia Moderna no. 85.
30 Youngblood, Gene (1986). Metadesign: Toward a Postmodernism of Re-construction. Ars Electronica Catalog (Linz, Austria: Linzer Veranstaltungsgesellschaft)
31 Maturana, Humberto (1997) Metadesign: https://www.pangaro.com/hciiseminar2019/Maturana_Metadesign.pdf
32 Escobar, Arturo (2016) Autonomía y Diseño. La realización de lo comunal. Popayán: Editorial Universidad del Cauca.

Cultivating Resilience - a ray of hope

By Alvaro Valls Boix
Junior Facilitator for Holis School 2023

Ups & downs... but they remain... resilience is not the result... they were already like that... they discontinue their activity... but they rise again, like the phoenix... result of their true alignment with their mission and values ... they can just not help it.

Mission and values are at the core, but being resilient just with the heart can be very tough and sometimes fatal. Resilience can significantly be improved. This muscle can significantly be strengthened, to increase the probability of prevailing, to be in good shape for when the bad times come, and to not leave it all to the heart. In this article, I'll briefly share a firsthand account of my journey as a junior facilitator during Holis School 2023, and will provide an extension of my research, rooted in both theory and, most importantly, real-life experiences, showcasing the practical application of resilience.

Proven tactics and strategies to increase resilience are available in articles, studies, and research papers, and organizations and NGOs that wish to, can develop and master this muscle. **It is within reach.** To name some, research points to the teams and individuals as one of the touchstones for this purpose and talks about having members of the organization personally aligned with its mission, to ensure commitment and support in any circumstance.[33] Building self-sufficient teams, that will look for opportunities proactively and for solutions autonomously when facing a challenge, is also a key strategy to follow.[34] In terms of management, some authors propose having team leaders with a servant attitude, that put the mission of the organization up front, and that are ready to support and push the growth of the members of the team. We were able to recognise the latter practice at this year's edition of the Holis School at Hostětín, where the leaders were fully focused on providing a complete transformative experience for the participants, while paving the way to produce the best results for the challenges at hand. This was translated in a full commitment of participants with those proposed challenges.

The relation with the community within which the organizations operate is also mentioned in academic sources. Earning the trust of the community, by being exemplary and reliable in your actions over time, will make other players become your partners and allies, and will pay off when they have an opportunity to support the organization. A clear example of this are the collaborations that many NGOs have been able to sign with Holis School over time, to have its support in the shape of interdisciplinary social innovation projects to address their main challenges. The altruistic participation that Holis School itself gets year after year from experts of different fields is another good example. This is a very good way to turn theory into practice.

What does this mean for me?

As someone working with NGOs, the presence of proven paths toward resilience offers a glimmer of hope for any organization aiming to brace itself for the uncertainties ahead. Numerous strategies exist, and the ones outlined here are just a glimpse. The knowledge is readily available. By gradually incorporating these practices into organizations, regardless of their size, NGO worker/supporter can undoubtedly alleviate the challenges and uncertainties faced while pursuing the organisational mission. Let's emphasize once more: It is attainable! Although not without its challenges, just like anything worthwhile. Strategic planning is essential to steadily implement approaches that align with each organization's unique needs, tailoring best practices to suit the distinct nature and character of each enterprise. It's a feasible undertaking, and the mission is certainly worth the commitment. Good Luck!

33   Witmer, H. & Mellinger, M. 2016. Organizational resilience: Nonprofit organizations' response to change. Work (Reading, Mass.). 54. Doi: 10.3233/WOR-162303.
34   [2] Maor, D., Park, P. & Weddle, B. 2022. Raising the resilience of your organization. Article from McKinsey & Company. Accessed 15 September 2023. https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/raising-the-resilience-of-your-organization#/

A Roadmap Forward

**By Justyna Turek
CEO of Holis**

In this final chapter, we shift our attention to the outcomes and the path forward, and, combine our collective reflections on the journey and a forward-looking blueprint. Having gone through self-reflection, assessment, drawing inspiration from case studies, and gaining insights from experts, it's now time to put our knowledge into action. It's time for you - to make thighs happen.

Embracing Resilience as a Culture

Resilience isn't just a concept; it's a culture that all of us, especially NGOs should aim to cultivate. Explore how our exploration of resilience has evolved into a shared ethos that will continue to guide our path.

Key Takeaways

In this section, we distill the essential insights and lessons that have emerged from our holistic experience, highlighting the key takeaways that will serve as beacons for our collective journey.

Staying Committed to Resilience

Resilience is an ongoing commitment. We'll delve into our action plan for the future, articulating how we will maintain our dedication to this cause and ensure its continuous growth and impact.

Embracing Resilience as a Culture

By Justyna Turek
CEO of Holis

In today's rapidly evolving world, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play a crucial role in addressing various social and environmental challenges. To effectively navigate this complex landscape and continue making a meaningful impact, **NGOs must cultivate resilience not just as a strategy but as a core element of their organizational culture.** The significance of embedding resilience in NGO culture leys in these key principles:

Leadership & Vision: Resilience starts at the top. Effective NGO leadership should champion resilience as a core value. Visionary leaders inspire their teams and partners by demonstrating commitment to overcoming adversity and adapting to change. Also, as leadership transitions are inevitable. By identifying and developing future leaders from within, NGOs can maintain their resilience and sustain their mission. *Examples of the Tools: Balanced Scorecard,[35] Strategy Map,[36] SWOT Analysis,[37] Business Model Canvas[38] or Stakeholders Mapping.[39]*

35 https://hbr.org/1992/01/the-balanced-scorecard-measures-that-drive-performance-2
36 https://www.mindmanager.com/en/features/strategy-map/
37 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/SWOT_analysis
38 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Business_Model_Canvas
39 https://www.ibm.com/design/thinking/page/toolkit/activity/stakeholder-map

Staff Engagement & Development:
Empowered and engaged employees are more likely to contribute to an organization's resilience. Encourage participation, innovation, and continuous learning. *Examples: Surveys, mentorship programs, virtual team bonding communication channels, courses to develop competencies, or online management tools.*

Values, Ethics & Transparency: A strong ethical foundation builds trust with stakeholders. Transparency in operations and decision-making not only upholds an NGO's credibility but also ensures adaptability in challenging circumstances. *Examples: an anonymous system to leave feedback and compliance, a transparent process and list of partners, open data platforms, social media for communication with the community, or blockchain technology.*[40]

Prioritize Staff Well-being: NGO staff members are the driving force behind their mission. Prioritizing their well-being, both mental and physical ensures a more resilient workforce. *Example: flexible work arrangements, peer support network inside and regular feedback, etc.*

Incorporating resilience into an your NGO's culture is an ongoing journey. By instilling these principles in daily operations, you can help NGOs to navigate unforeseen challenges, adapt to changing circumstances, and ultimately drive positive change for the communities and causes they serve. Embracing resilience as a culture is not just a strategy; it's a way of life for NGOs striving to make a lasting impact on the world. Keep in mind that these are examples and should be customized to suit each organization's unique needs and current circumstances, as not every element will perfectly align with every NGO's situation.

40   https://www.ibm.com/topics/blockchain

Minimum Viable Resilience

In this section, we distill our research on NGO resilience into five practical takeaways that serve as the foundation for an NGO's journey towards resilience. We refer to this as **'Minimum Viable Resilience'** (inspired by Community Canvas),[41] signifying the essential building blocks required for an NGO to initiate its resilience journey. By pinpointing these core elements, you can help NGOs to establish a resilient foundation without immediately exhausting their resources. MVR provides NGOs with a roadmap to commit to resilience, ensuring a brighter future. The timeframe for achieving this may vary, depending on resource availability. The key is to remain open to changes and continuously nurture the development of these foundational elements.

- **Strategic Goal Definition** - Clearly articulate your organization's goals and objectives in a collaborative process involving all members. Ensure alignment in perspectives. For instance, the Rainforest Alliance developed a comprehensive strategy for sustainable agriculture, featuring specific, measurable, and time-bound targets aimed at rainforest preservation and farmer support.
- **Risk Assessment & Mitigation** - Identify potential current and future risks that could disrupt your operations. Analyze their potential impact and develop strategies for overcoming them as a team. For instance, Médecins Sans Frontières conducted an extensive risk assessment during the COVID-19 pandemic, allowing them to swiftly adapt their medical aid programs.
- **Financial Resilience** - Enhance financial stability by diversifying funding sources and leveraging existing resources. Explore opportunities for reusing or sharing resources. For example, Save the Children forged partnerships with corporations, governments, and individual donors to establish a variety of income streams supporting their mission.

- **Performance Monitoring & Evaluation** - Implement a robust system for tracking and evaluating program effectiveness. Consider the example of Water.org, which employs a systematic monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the impact of their water and sanitation initiatives.
- **Forward-Thinking** - Prioritize future thinking in your strategies. Anticipate upcoming challenges and opportunities, ensuring your organization remains prepared for change. Consider engaging in scenario planning and trend analysis to foster resilience. This forward-thinking approach enhances your adaptability and positions you to thrive in a changing landscape.

"Operating in conditions of change and, consequently, uncertainty is, in a sense, a constant for non-governmental organizations. What we, as a Foundation, prioritize is flexibility in both planning and projects implementation. We may not always be able to achieve what we set out to do, but what matters most is cultivating a mindset that allows for swift responses to changing circumstances. The COVID pandemic taught us this lesson well – with planned in-person conferences, office work transitioning to online. Also important to us is continuous learning and evaluation. We learn from mistakes and promptly improve what doesn't work, which greatly streamlines work and helps in the more efficient implementation of projects"

Marta Piechocka, Project Manager at Information Society Development Foundation (partner at Holis School 2023)

41   https://community-canvas.org/

Scaling Deep into Resilience

Dear Reader, as we are finishing our journey through this Guidebook, we are aware that this might be overwhelming for you and your organizations. You might ask right now a fundamental question "Where to start?". The heartening news is that you don't need to start this process from scratch. Many NGOs already possess a wealth of connections, networks, and partnerships established over the years. This isn't about reinventing the wheel; it's about focusing on growth through nurturing these existing partnerships. We want to leave you, with the message that NGOs' strength lies not just in their organization's structure but in the relationships they have built. This is a valuable legacy that can continue to be nurtured on their journey forward.

For this, we propose to follow a **scaling deep** method[42] that places a strong emphasis on creating profound and lasting impacts on the cultural and social aspects of a community or organization when implementing scaling strategies. It goes beyond mere expansion in size or scope. Instead, it encourages a deep understanding and alignment with the values, beliefs, and traditions of the community or organization being scaled. This approach seeks to create a meaningful and enduring change in the very essence of the entity being scaled.

How to do this? Or how to "maintain" it?

Forge Local Partnerships: Connect with local NGOs and community groups that share similar goals. Collaborating at the local level can lead to mutually beneficial projects and shared resources.

Utilize Online Collaboration Tools: Leverage digital platforms for remote collaboration with other organizations, to keep track of the evidence of your work and to share knowledge, experiences, and even joint grant applications.

Keep your eyes open for new adventures: Know your limits, build on your support network, and get ready for the unknown. Beware that most insightful experiences are unexpected and beyond your current standing point. Looking for new challenges and applications can be risky, so make it fun to embrace it and place yourself there, boldly and courageously. As we conclude this journey together, our message is clear: **you're not alone in this endeavor. The rich tapestry of connections and partnerships that you've woven over the years is your most valuable asset.** You're not starting from scratch; you're building on the foundation of relationships that have sustained and nurtured your mission. **Embrace the "scaling deep" method as you navigate the path forward, focusing on meaningful, enduring change rooted in community and values.** Forge local partnerships, leverage digital collaboration tools, and remain open to new adventures—your resilience journey is ongoing.

Good Luck! - Holis Team

42 https://networkweaver.com/scaling-deep-where-it-came-from-and-more-to-go/?mc_cid=146454d8f3&mc_eid=9ad45ba969

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- **Hungary: Carpathian Foundation**

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Our collective efforts and the support of our partners and community reflect a commitment to making a positive impact and fostering resilience, collaboration, and transformation in our communities. Together, we look forward to a brighter future.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.

- Visegrad Fund

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