Pact Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) Handbook

A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO THE OCA TOOL FOR PRACTITIONERS AND DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS.

pact

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Purpose of this handbook

This handbook is intended to help development practitioners familiar with organizational assessments to understand the potential and use of Pact's Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool. It is not meant as a detailed technical guide (for this, please see Appendix 8: Links to other materials). This document provides Pact practitioner and manager with the information they need to understand how the Pact OCA works, and how best to incorporate it in their country strategy or program. While this document is primarily designed for internal Pact purposes, it can be shared with donors and partners making funding or partnership decisions.

The Pact OCA - Description & Overview

Why engage partner organizations in participatory assessments?

In the past decade, local ownership and organizational learning have become integral to many international programs that engage in capacity development. The High- Level Forums on aid effectiveness in Rome, Paris, Accra, and Busan[1] increasingly underlined country ownership, development priorities set by aid recipients, and local capacity development as key areas of focus for implementers. These focal points have placed the future of development in the hands of local organizations, many of whom still need greater capacity to assume this leadership role.

According to Pact's capacity development theory of change, stronger organizations have greater impact on health, the environment and livelihoods of their target communities. The success of these local organizations—which take charge of improving their performance and increase their ability to introduce meaningful change in their communities— depends on how well they develop their capacity. To become strong and effective, organizations must assess and analyze the roots of their successes and challenges.

Local actors are most empowered when they have the decisive voice in shaping their own assessment; engage with teammates in discussions about organizational capacity; and develop plans to strengthen their capacity, which they can carry out independently as they switch from one donor to another. The commitment and buy-in of local organizations is therefore critical. When a partner actively engages in an assessment using the Pact Organizational Capacity Assessment (OCA) tool described in detail in this handbook, the organization receives more relevant and deeper insight into its capacity than an external expert review would provide. Coupled with the partner's commitment to improvement, follow-up plans are implemented effectively and sustainably.

Families of organizational assessments

Externally driven: engages an outside expert who leads the process, analyzes results and makes recommendations.

Self-assessment: independent or facilitated process of using a readily available tool for self-scoring and capacity strengthening plan development according to industry standards.

Customized self-assessment: independent or facilitated process of developing individual standards of organizational performance and benchmarks for achieving the ideal state of development.

Self-assessments also enable partners to better measure their change in capacity and performance over time. Because during a Pact OCA, we are the facilitator and not the judge, the high level of trust developed with the partner organization promotes dialogue and necessary organizational improvements that are not externally imposed. Committed partners often track their own progress, and consistently provide updates.

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[1] 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness. Accessed at: www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4/about/aid-effectiveness.html.

Pact has been at the cutting edge of organization-centered learning for several decades. Our traditional OCA tool belongs to the 'customized self-assessment' group (see Box 1 above). The Pact OCA allows partner organizations to drive their own assessments and capacity development processes, while at the simultaneously providing a necessary 'reality check' based on international best practices and organizational performance standards.

The Pact OCA - What is it?

The Pact OCA approach acknowledges that organizations are the owners of their development process. The OCA tool is participatory by nature and joins members from all levels of an organization, whenever possible, creating a space for sharing, analyzing, and making judgments about organizational performance. The Pact OCA helps organizations identify their strengths and weaknesses on their own and identify unique organizational ***capacity areas*** (see Box 2), clarify their vision, plan for success, and ultimately take greater ownership over their future.

Often organizational capacity development focuses on systems and structures, policies and practices, and staff skill development. Recent advances of the OCA also integrate technical[2] (health, natural-resources management, governance, etc.) assessment components into the OCA to present a holistic picture of the organization and to lead the organization by its mission and community impact rather than systems and procedures.

> **Examples of Capacity Areas from Various OCAs Facilitated by Pact:**
>
> *Leadership and Management, Service Delivery, Human Resources Management, Finances and Administration, Core Values, Strategy, IT and Communications, Resource Mobilization, Stakeholders and Partnerships, Organizational Structure, Assets and Offices, Professional Skills*

Since the late 1990s, Pact practitioners have used the OCA tool in many different ways and in all parts of the world. The traditional customized self-assessment OCA process has been tailored to multiple contexts. The OCA tool can be implemented as the ***classic customized self-assessment*** or ***facilitator scored*** and then negotiated with the partner organization; performed over an ***extended period*** of time or ***rapidly***; tailored to an ***individual*** non-governmental organization (NGO), community-based organization (CBO), governmental institution or business, or designed together with a ***cohort*** of organizations. Learning from these variations, which is summarized in this handbook, will guide you as to how best to tailor the OCA to your context.

> The Pact OCA is **NOT**:
>
> - A checklist
> - Judgment
> - Organizational Performance Index
> - Cross-country comparison tool
> - Grant-making decision instrument
> - USAID OCA

The OCA process builds capacity every step of the way. It generates several outputs, including an Institutional Strengthening Plan (ISP), also referred to as an Action Plan and Capacity Strengthening Plan, which describes how Pact, other stakeholders and the organization itself will work together to support capacity development. Because various parts of the organization are engaged in the assessment, the organization's commitment to implementing these plans remains high even after the assessment ends. Data collected through the OCA process

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[2] The technical assessments may engage PCAT, ACAT, TOCAT and other tools (see Glossary in Appendix 1)

can be used to track changes in the organization's systems, policies and practices and contribute to tracking change in organizational performance through the Pact Organizational Performance Index[3].

Where does it come from?

Designed to bring rigor and learning to the process of organizational capacity assessment and strengthening, the Pact OCA is a product of multiple years of research and field practice. Pact developed our OCA methodology from field experience in South Africa and Ethiopia as well as collaborative work with the Education Development Center (EDC) in the 1990s.

Pact and EDC, with funding from USAID's Office of Private and Voluntary Cooperation, developed the pre-cursor to OCA: the Discussion-Oriented Organizational Self-Assessment (DOSA). The breakthrough of this approach was its ability to help NGOs identify

> **Countries where Pact OCA has been used:**
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> *South Africa, Ethiopia, Thailand, Lesotho, Vietnam, Ukraine, Kenya, Tanzania, Myanmar, South Sudan, Nigeria, Malawi, Namibia, Botswana, Swaziland, Nigeria, Madagascar, DRC, Afghanistan, Cyprus, United States, Ecuador, Bolivia, Rwanda,, Sierra Leone Laos, Cambodia, Mongolia, Sudan, Zambia*

perceived organizational strengths and weaknesses, explore differences of opinion regarding these perceptions, and create consensus around future organizational capacity development activities. The methodology also enabled NGOs to assess change over time, thereby tracking the degree to which such capacity-building activities contributed to significant changes and increased capacity to deliver better results; and to benchmark their individual organizational results against a peer group or cohort of organizations.

The classic, customized self-assessment OCA methodology we use today builds on the foundation of the DOSA, but tailors the design of the assessment tool to participating organizations to ensure the tool's relevance. It also includes action planning to guide implementation of priority capacity development efforts.

> The Pact OCA tool has been used by more than 150 facilitators for almost two decades.

A second root of Pact's contemporary OCA methodology is found in the work of William Booth, Radya Ebrahim and Robert Morin on the Pact OCA tool in 1998. The OCA tool is a customizable organizational assessment methodology that operates through the negotiation of scores between organizational participants. The original OCA tool formed the basis for many Pact OCA tools developed and applied across Eastern and Southern Africa. The tool spawned the idea that assessments could be scored by the facilitator and then negotiated with the partner organization, on way of conducting the OCA. The full OCA tool methodology is described in the book *Participatory Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting: An Organizational Development Perspective for South African NGOs.*

Why is it needed?

Facilitated, participatory organizational capacity assessments are the most effective way of looking at organizational strengths, weaknesses, successes, and areas for improvement. If performed well, they provide the

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[3] The Pact Organizational Performance Index is a tool that tracks change in organizational performance over time and is used in data collection for Pact's Global Capacity Development Indicator (http://tinyurl.com/PactOPI).

deepest and most truthful insights into organizational performance weighted against multiple opinions. Structured conversation about organizational capacities conveys the connections between different organizational functions, and identifies internal best practices for replication across teams and departments. The Pact OCA tool:

- Brings the organization together, develops trust, and opens communication.
- Empowers and engages non-management staff in organizational development processes, typically proclaimed to be 'managers' issues'.
- Serves as a capacity development exercise.
- Generates organizational commitment to ISP implementation.
- Builds trust between the organization and the external capacity developer.
- Serves as the starting point for Pact's follow-up capacity strengthening engagement, with the partner's entire staff understanding the rationale behind it.
- Examines the organization holistically.
- Enables iterative, learning-based development that helps organizations adapt to the changing environment.

There is also an imperative from donors to conduct the OCA. USAID FORWARD Procurement Reform and the Local Capacity Development Initiative borrowed from Pact's OCA and its precursor DOSA to build USAID's Organizational Capacity Tool. Immersing partners into Pact's OCA approach will prepare them for the potential USAID assessment, and consequently, direct funding from this donor.

Who does it engage?

The Pact OCA tool can be used with various types of actors. According to Pact practitioners who have used the tool, the most common groups engaged are civil-society organizations (CSOs), CBOs, networks, cohorts, and local governments. Less than 10 percent of OCAs involve businesses.

Much like other Pact approaches (e.g., Local Governance Barometer or Organizational Network Analysis tool (ONA)), one of the OCA tool goals is to bring different actors into the room together for reflective dialogue. It is important not to limit OCA participants to senior management. A broad, cross-functional and cross-hierarchical array of organizational members, or for smaller organizations, the full staff team should be engaged.

> **Potential participants**
>
> **Individual members of organization**: leaders, managers, officers, volunteers, financial, HR, administrative and other staff members; board members
>
> **Organizations**: all types of civil-society organizations, community-based organizations, government institutions, businesses, peace committees, and women's groups
>
> **Groups (cohorts) of organizations**: formal, informal, and sectoral networks

What makes it unique?

Pact OCA's *facilitative* nature, on the other hand, empowers capacity development rather than determines decisions on funding disbursements[4]. The unique nature of the Pact OCA tool rests in how we engage each organization in the assessment exercise. Organizations are engaged in the process through:

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[4] For grant pre-award assessment purposes, Pact usually uses its Management Control Assessment Tool (MCAT).

- Dialogue to reach consensus on successes and issues from across the organization, rather than unilateral judgment by an external expert;
- Flexibility in applying the tool and defining capacity areas to ensure that it fits into the organizational context and environment;
- Measurement of the organizational consensus in addition to capacity scoring, which triangulates the results and conveys hidden disagreements without finger pointing; and
- Cohort application within one community/country to engage in sharing and learning; in a cohort OCA process, several peer organizations collaborate to develop the self-assessment tool and engage in a joint discussion of the comparative anonymous results post-assessment.

> Pact Ethiopia conducted a customized OCA with a government partner, which developed what seemed like too many indicators (statements of excellence) to assess the organization. Upon being challenged to reduce that number, a representative said that although they are many, "internally they really touch us."

Key principles of the OCA

Pact developed its OCA methodology around the following four core principles that prove true in all adaptations:

- *Participation* and *user ownership* are the key to OCA success. The more engaged and empowered the whole organization is throughout the entire process, the more learning is spread. Commitment to follow-through capacity development rests within all teams of the organization.
- *Customization* ensures capacity areas measured are those most relevant to the environment and experience of each country's civil society.
- *Communication* between group members, the organization, and facilitators, as well as sharing of results across organizations helps to reveal relevant issues and build consensus.
- *Continuous learning* that stems from revisiting assessment results and tailoring the ISPs provides a significant catalyst for change and adaptation.

Based on these principles and Pact's experience, we've found that the OCA works best when:

- Partners trust that the assessment will not affect their grants with Pact and engage in the exercise for their own benefit and not as a funding requirement.
- The partner's leadership sees value in the process and is ready for an honest conversation with their staff.
- The partner organization is prepared for the work involved and commits to participate in the planned activities.
- The assessment is carried out on the organization's timeline and reflects the partners' needs.
- Pact staff understands the main principles of OCA and are ready to tailor the process to the needs of the organization without jeopardizing the quality of the results.
- Pact's facilitation team is cross-functional, i.e. represents various areas of knowledge such as technical, financial, and capacity development.
- The process engages members from all parts of an organization.

How does it work?

Every Pact OCA includes preparing the partner organization for the upcoming activity by clarifying goals, processes, and expectations of both sides. The facilitator and the organization determine who should participate in the assessment to represent the diverse opinions from all departments of larger organizations, or the full staff team for smaller entities.

A typical OCA then engages the partner organization in either tool design or revision of a ready-made tool with indicators, or statements of excellence[5] by capacity area (See Appendices 4 and 5 for sample tools). Once the tool is ready, the group engages in a facilitated discussion and assessment exercise, which results in a set of scores processed and summarized by the facilitator. A distinctive feature of the OCA is that it calculates not only the capacity level, but also consensus among the participants (Figure 1), which allows disagreements to be solved efficiently. The qualitative and quantitative insights that emerge from this process open new channels of communication and information-sharing and serve as a catalyst for team-building and organization-wide learning. Once the results are ready, the group convenes again for a debriefing and action-planning workshop. The OCA process may be repeated on an annual or bi-annual basis depending on programmatic needs and resources.
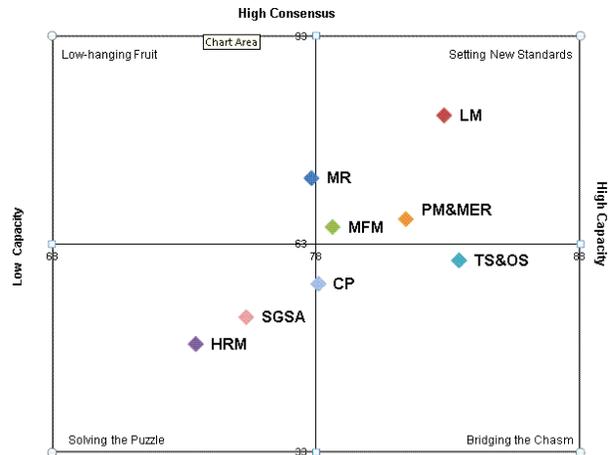
Figure 1: A Typical OCA Results Chart (the abbreviations correspond to the organization's capacity areas: LM – leadership and management, MR – mission and representation, etc.)

There are several variations of the OCA, including: Classic OCA, CBO OCA and the Rapid OCA. The following algorithm is helpful in deciding what type of OCA will be useful to your project:

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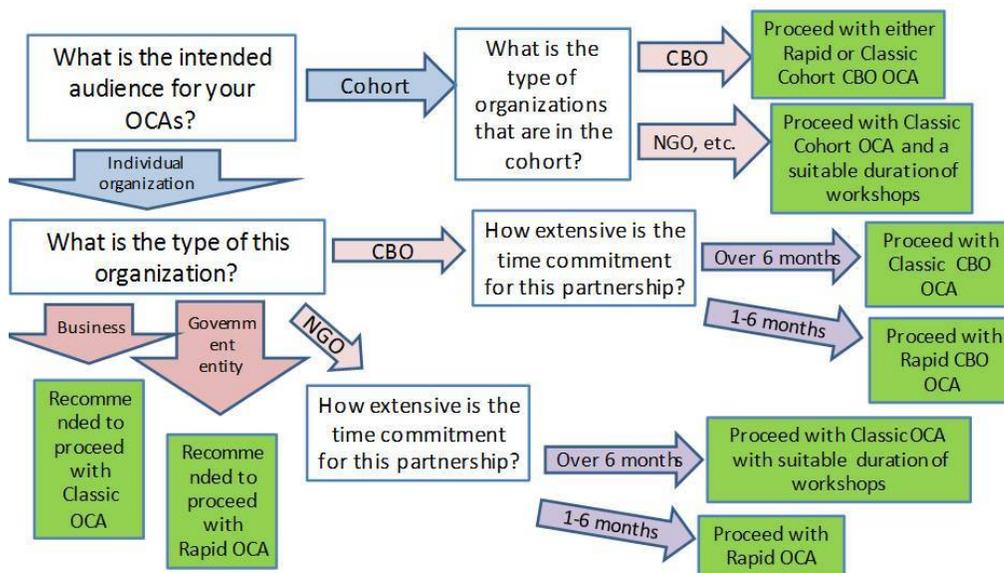
[5] Statements of excellence are aspirational indicators that describe the ideal quality of a capacity area; for example, "leaders actively promote staff participation in planning and decision-making" under capacity area 'Leadership.'

Step-by-step process

As mentioned in the OCA description above, the tool can be customized in multiple ways for different types of partner organizations. The Classic OCA described in detail below is the recommended option for long-term, key partners of Pact. With short-term partners or when budget and time constraints do not allow for the Classic OCA, the Pact team may use the Rapid OCA. In some cases—depending on the civil- society context or donor requirements—the Pact practitioner will use the Facilitator Scored and Negotiated OCA. The differences with Cohort and CBO OCAs are also described in the boxes below.

Classic[6] OCA

Step 1: Partner Preparation

- Pact identifies which key partner organizations will undergo the OCA self-assessment based on the impact area strategy, project priorities, and the budget.
- Pact convenes meetings with the leaders of the organization to introduce the methodology and receive their buy-in.
- The facilitators and the organization's leaders jointly identify the goals and process and agree on the expectations of the process.
- The partner organization commits the time necessary to complete the Classic OCA by scheduling the appropriate number of sessions.
- The plan for using OCA results is drafted to ensure that there is sufficient support to engage in capacity development after the assessment.

Step 2: Tool Design

- Participants gather for a workshop to develop their own capacity areas, statements of excellence (indicators) for each capacity area, and to discuss the scoring system[7] suitable for their context (see Appendix 4 for sample statements of excellence and scoring sheet).
- Facilitators finalize the tool after the workshop, including development of benchmarks for the calibrated scoring, and prepare for the self-assessment activity.

Step 3: Guided Self-Assessment and Results Processing

- Pact convenes a two- or three-day workshop during which selected participants from the organization (or the whole organization for smaller entities) engage in a facilitated discussion and score each capacity area.
- After the workshop, the facilitator processes all scores by using the results processing Excel spreadsheet with OCA formulas that calculate capacity and consensus.
- A report with all results is prepared, which might include comparison charts with previous OCAs.

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[6] The Classic OCA used to be referred to as the "full OCA".

[7] A regular scoring system uses Likert scale of strongly agree / agree / neither / disagree / strongly disagree. A calibrated scoring system uses narrative benchmarks for each level of a statement of excellence rather than subjective numbered scoring. This adds rigor and validity to the discussion that precedes scoring.

Step 4: Results Debrief and Data-Guided Action Planning

- The same group convenes for a two- or three-day workshop.
- Data-guided action planning begins with the organization's interpretation of the data, which ensures the contextualization and validation of results (one day).
- Based on the conclusions agreed upon by the participants, they develop an action plan (one day).
- Post-workshop, participants refine the action plan into a set of concrete actions with goals, timelines, and responsibilities that constitute an ISP.

Step 5: Institutional Strengthening and Continuous Learning

- The partner organization implements activities outlined in the ISP with Pact's support.
- The organization engages in periodic learning and feedback activities (at staff meetings or dedicated events).
- Re-assessment using the OCA process can take place once every year or two years.

Adjustments made when adapting the OCA are highlighted in the boxes below.

Rapid OCA	Facilitator Scored, Negotiated OCA
This type of OCA can be used in time- and resource-constrained situations, or with short-term partners. It is important to remember that the results will likely have a less transformative impact on the organization. - Pact prepares the tool based on existing pre-designed tools and tailors it to the needs of the organization. - Instead of longer workshops, Pact convenes one-day scoring and results debrief/planning meetings which cover each capacity area to a lesser extent than the Classic OCA. - The organization takes responsibility for developing its action plan independently after the workshop.	In some circumstances, such as donor requirements or specific project design, assessments must incorporate external perspective while scoring organizations. The Pact OCA allows scoring to be performed by the facilitator and negotiated with the organization to ensure they agree with the scores. - The process follows the Classic OCA, however instead of the participants scoring themselves, facilitators perform the initial scoring. - The scores are then presented to the organization, and when there is a disagreement with the score, the organization provides evidence to support their argument. - Consequently, the follow-up discussions focus on capacity area only, and not consensus.
Cohort OCA	**CBO OCA**
Working with a group of organizations allows learning to be shared from individual assessments and strategies to be set for developing standards of excellence. - The OCA tool is designed in a participatory manner by the members of the cohort of organizations. - The self-assessments are carried out by each organization separately from the group, following a Classic or Rapid OCA. - After individual assessments, the cohort meets to review assessment results (without revealing individual scores), discuss trends, set group performance standards, and engage in group learning activities.	CBOs working in only one community often have nascent, informal structures and a volunteer staff base. Tailoring the process to suit CBO capacity is vital for attaining meaningful results (see the Sudan Case Story on page 14 below). - The CBO OCA process is similar to the Classic OCA, but it focuses more on qualitative discussion than on hard numerical data derived in the assessment. - In some cases, the notion of consensus makes little sense to the participants and therefore should not be used. - The scoring system is simplified by using a 3-point instead of 4- or 5-point scale, and graphic visualizations of meaning such as ☺ / ☹ instead of numbers.

Timeline & major milestones

Implementing the complete Classic OCA is a highly energizing and powerful exercise that can seem time-consuming at first. While actual implementation normally takes a maximum of two weeks, it can take longer due to scheduling, resources, and partner commitment to the process. Gaining the latter can be the lengthiest part of the process, but experience shows that once partners learn about the OCA, they readily make time for OCA sessions in their busy schedules.

While Rapid OCAs set a limit on the amount of face time spent with the partner organization, they still require Pact staff to fully commit to the process. For cohort OCAs, Pact needs to set aside enough time to converse with each individual partner, and if necessary, a group meeting. The institutional strengthening activities that follow OCAs are much more labor intensive since they require an individual approach for each partner.
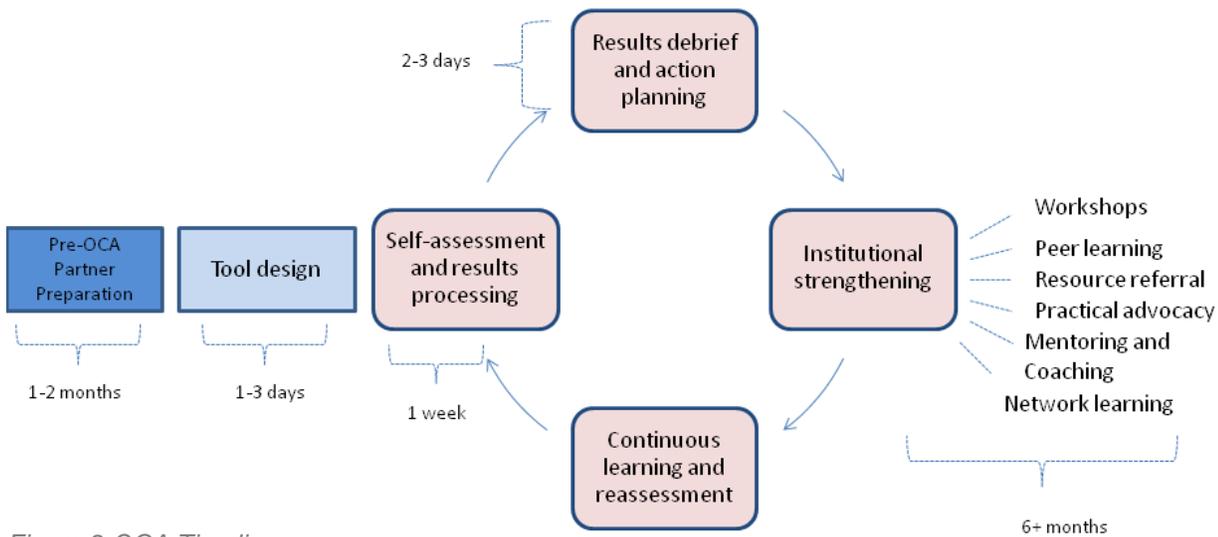
Figure 2 OCA Timeline

Resources required

The resources required to ensure a strong OCA process are staff and partner time and necessary workshop costs, which must be included in the budget of Pact's proposal to the donor (refer to Appendix 2 for sample proposal language). At least one well-prepared OCA facilitator who knows the OCA process is mandatory. The main consideration while preparing the OCA staffing plan and budget is to establish a process that will help generate enough space for an open conversation, informed scoring, and adequate ISP planning.

Staffing

Ideally, two trained and experienced Pact facilitators lead an OCA process. Because of the unique facilitation technique, at least one facilitator must be trained in the OCA methodology. If the OCA is integrated with a technical assessment, the relevant technical staff members should be familiarized with the methodology. Program Advancement's Capacity Development specialists can be made available to Pact staff for training country staff on the OCA methodology (see Appendix 5 for contact information).

Budget

Any OCA requires at least one in-person workshop with each participating organization. For a Classic OCA, the investment will include two to three separate workshops. It is normally more cost-effective to send Pact

facilitators to the partner's location. Some Pact offices include OCA funds in the grantees' budgets, transferring the ownership and responsibility to the grantee for leading the OCA process from the very beginning.

Lessons learned

Results & efficacy data

The Pact OCA is an effective tool that substantially increases local ownership of the capacity development process. Strong qualitative evidence supports this assertion:

- In July 2008, *Pact Malawi*, together with its partner CABUNGO, conducted a baseline OCA of the Mponela AIDS Information and Counseling Center (MAICC). During the OCA, MAICC learned about the challenges it faced. Based on that learning, MAICC underwent a number of capacity-building activities with assistance from Pact and other stakeholders. In February 2011, Pact Malawi facilitators conducted a follow-up OCA of MAICC with representatives from the MAICC board, executive leadership, staff, and volunteers. The most recent OCA showed that the organization has tremendously improved in all capacity areas, as evidenced by the growth in scores. Those improvements can be directly attributed to better communication and participation in capacity development activities by all staff.
- Before rolling out the OCA to partners, *Pact Ukraine* piloted it with two volunteers. The Ukrainian Center for Common Ground tested the OCA methodology to determine how useful the tool would be for the NGO. The pilot encouraged the organization to review its structure and revise its strategic plan to address emerging opportunities and sustainability needs. In addition, Pact tested the OCA with a volunteer organization, the all-Ukrainian organization Democratic Alliance (DemAlliance). The tool helped DemAlliance to fundamentally revisit their overall organizational strategy. DemAlliance is now one of the most outspoken defender of rights in Ukraine, with independent but closely networked branches across the country.
- *Pact South Africa* promised partner organizations that the assessment would not compromise their extremely busy service-delivery schedules. In addition to the OCA (focusing on capacity areas of NGO governance, human resources management, networking and partnership, and sustainability), the team developed three other assessment tools for partners (Management Capacity Assessment Tool (MCAT); Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting (MER) OCA; Program Quality Assessment (PQA)). Those tools were applied in a well-coordinated fashion, whereby aspects assessed by one tool were not repeated/re-assessed by others. Various teams took the lead in the assessment process with each partner organization, and results from four partners were gathered in one joint partner support plan. The partners greatly appreciated the efficiency and quality of this specialized and integrated approach.

Case story #1: Classic OCA Adoption in Ukraine

In 2008, Pact Ukraine presented the Pact OCA to 11 local Ukrainian facilitators, four of which continued to practice this methodology as certified Pact OCA facilitators. To determine how the OCA tool worked in practice, one of the facilitators, Alyona Horova, piloted the OCA with her own organization, the Ukrainian Center for Common Ground. The process allowed the organization to develop new products and services, specifically by analyzing its capacity to access new markets. Following the OCA, the organization's members said that they appreciated and understood the benefits of monitoring and evaluation.

Other facilitators confirm achieving similar results during application of the OCA with Pact Ukraine's partners. DemAlliance, for example, fully embraces Pact's participatory approaches, and asked Pact for assistance when the organization became unsatisfied with its strategic plan. The OCA enabled DemAlliance to develop a new, more satisfactory strategic plan. As many organizations in Ukraine are quite advanced, one of the best uses of the OCA is for strategic repositioning.

The flexibility of Pact's OCA approach attracted facilitators Svitlana Tymchenko and Svitlana Kuts, allowing Pact to start working with an organization in Tabula Rasa. Both facilitators recall that, with one exception, the OCA empowered partners to think about their organization as a whole for the first time. Traditional project thinking and limited funding prevent many from looking at their organization holistically. Very often, team members are busy with everyday tasks and have little understanding of their colleagues' roles and responsibilities. The OCA opens new channels of communication and heightens the role of each individual on the team.

The OCA is not only a self-assessment tool; it is powerful enough to make people re-think their organization's essence. In that regard, the OCA worked well with a cohort of five organizations in Crimea. Those organizations sought to create regional resource centers for NGOs and needed to engage in a strategic visioning exercise. According to the participants, the OCA completely changed their original ideas in ways they had never thought of, and helped them to identify their role in the community. The process brought significant positive change before they established the centers, and allowed them to avoid potential mistakes.

Another interesting case where the OCA proved useful was with a hierarchical think tank lead by a scientist. Without a culture of participation, it took a lot of time and effort to explain the purpose and use of the OCA to the organization's director. Even after an explanation, the director tried to manage the discussion. Members of the organization, particularly new young analysts, however, felt empowered to intervene and ensure their views were heard. Through the OCA, young employees got to know the organization better, and engaged in an effective team-building exercise. Many of the young employees stayed with the organization long-term. The OCA helped the director to better understand what good management and leadership consists of, and she adjusted her style as a result.

According to the local facilitators, the main difference between the Pact OCA and other assessment tools used in Ukraine is its flexibility. The world changes very fast and many ready-made assessment tools become rapidly outdated. Pact Ukraine works with organizations that inculcate change. The OCA enables them to introduce change, creativity, and innovation into organizational life. Beyond creating a scoring tool for self-assessment, the OCA crystallizes the vision of the ideal organization, and prioritizing the action to get to that ideal state.

Many other assessment tools do not emphasize an organization's uniqueness, and may damage self-esteem. The Pact OCA underlines individual characteristics as strengths. A Crimean community development foundation, for example, thought their informal networks were bad practice and were shy about publicizing them in Ukraine where most organizations operate via formal communication channels. Although traditional assessments emphasize formal communication channels as a standard, after the OCA, the Crimean foundation realized how important this unique feature was for their success.

Even such a powerful methodology does not always work perfectly. One regional youth organization did not understand the OCA process, and the process resulted in a very impractical plan. This demonstrates the importance of having the partner ready and prepared for such a transformational exercise; without this understanding, the transformational impact will be minimal. The organization's desire and understanding of what it takes to complete the process are equally important. At least one person in each partner organization (preferably the leader) has to understand and serve as the OCA agent for the rest of the team.

Initial resistance to the OCA, which largely concerns time commitment, evaporates after the organization has seen its implementation for the first time. At first, most organizations think the OCA will be a waste of time, but once they are involved in the process, they appreciate the exercise and grow as an organization. In Crimea, it was difficult to find time for the OCA, and the participants tried to squeeze and shorten OCA activities. But after the first event, they relaxed and stopped bargaining for time.

Adult education is not traditional in the former Soviet Union, and OCA facilitation methods are very new. However, even the most traditional thinkers enjoy these methods. When people have different backgrounds, and then they start understanding each other, the progress is groundbreaking. The local facilitators also note the feeling of pride each time they finish the assessment with a partner.

Case story #2: South Sudan's CBO Excellence Initiative

In 2010, Pact launched a pilot CBO Excellence Initiative to provide extended support to 18 selected national organizations working in peace-building, and water provision and sanitation in Southern Sudan's Greater Equatoria, Upper Nile, and Bahr el Ghazal[8]. The Initiative aimed to strengthen these partner organizations via a nine-month integrated program consisting of organizational capacity development, funding and increased networking.

Initially mystified by the OCA, the partners wondered what sort of training had brought them together. This feeling quickly dissipated, and the initial kick-off meeting, which used participatory facilitation activities, helped to positively engage the group. The kick-off meeting resulted in a participant-designed OCA tool, which included statements of excellence that characterize excellent CBOs in their unique operating environment. Figure 3 shows the capacity areas prioritized by the cohort (see Appendix 5 for the extract from the South Sudan OCA tool).

Strategic Organizational Development	Stakeholders	Human Resources Development
Assets and Offices	Administration and Finance	Core Values

Figure 3: Capacity Areas Developed by the CBO

Pact staff and CBO offices facilitated follow-up OCA self-assessments. OCAs spanned three days, with the first day focusing on participant-driven discussions and activities, including participant scoring. Day two focused on sharing and discussing OCA results with the capacity and consensus scores presented separately for ease of explanation. Participants often reenacted results presentations outside under a tree with participants lining up close to each other or farther apart to demonstrate the level agreement. On day three, participants focused on prioritizing and action planning. Participants thoroughly enjoyed the activities, many of which were designed for low-literacy groups using "voting" exercises, and noted that when workshops lasted only two days, they felt rushed.

Developing action plans is often the most difficult part of the OCA, as action planning is a methodical and detailed exercise. At the same time, action planning is also the culmination of the OCA and requires energy and dedication from participants to translate discussion into something concrete and actionable. Making the process understandable and relevant to the participants was extremely important; for example, facilitators encouraged groups to plan their implementation timelines around rainy and dry seasons, rather than on a quarterly basis, which is sometimes an unfamiliar concept in rural areas. Facilitators also used an empowering exercise which surprised participants by showing them how much capacity development they could support without external help. The exercise also allowed all staff to have a voice—from cleaners and guards to project managers and directors—

CBO OCA Scoring Results Presentation

Explanation of color coding by the Malakal OCA team:

Red is bad like blood or danger.

Green is good like grass and the harvest.

Yellow is in the middle like the sun, which is sometimes nice and warm, but sometimes bad and too hot.

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[8] Note that since the initiation of CBO Excellence, Southern Sudan has gained independence and is now the Republic of South Sudan.

in determining what was most important for staff morale and improved project results.

The Pact team tried to offset several major challenges faced during the OCA implementation process in the following ways:

- A simplified results processing spreadsheet (available for download from Pact's Intranet) allowed Pact staff to calculate results in remote areas without Internet connection without Pact DC's assistance. In some instances, results were hand-written because of lack of electricity.
- Due to low levels of literacy among some participants, Pact simplified the scoring process by using smiling and frowning faces instead of numbers, and focused on qualitative discussions instead of numerical data. Illiterate participants were sometimes uncomfortable circling scores and required assistance to select the number they felt appropriate.
- The consensus score, the most difficult for participants to grasp, was replaced with the word "agreement" and color-coded figures conveyed more or less agreement. The colors also required explanation because the widely accepted "traffic light" colors do not create the same associations for a Sudanese national.
- South Sudan is a large country with long distances between villages, poor communication and little road infrastructure. To maximize the time spent with a CBO, the Pact team first tackled the most difficult parts of the process and left easier tasks for individual mentoring with their community development officer.

As the South Sudan team prepares for the second year of the CBO Excellence Initiative, reflections on year one results have been critical. New ways of ensuring that the second phase of the Initiative brings even more value to the participating organizations include inviting more buy-in via the improved selection process and engagement of CBOs as early as the planning stage. Action plans developed as a result of the OCA will have very realistic commitments embodied in a "100-Day Action Plan" to sustain participants' enthusiasm after the assessment. A revised and longer OCA training to increase Pact staff's confidence and competence will ensure high-quality services to participants.

Success factors

1. *Partner buy-in*: It is important to embark on the OCA journey with partners who understand that they should drive their own development. It is absolutely critical that the people entering the room for the assessment know why they are engaged and what is expected from them. The most successful experiences, as outlined in examples above, come from groups that are well prepared for the process.

2. *Trust*: The facilitators must provide a safe and secure environment in which even taboo subjects within an organization can be discussed. This may require excusing the director from the discussion for a later debrief, delaying sensitive discussion until there is sufficient trust to address it, and respecting when and where to bring up issues so that they can be fully addressed. Trust is the key to a successful OCA.

3. *Skilled national staff*: Most successful OCAs are led by qualified, cross-functional facilitation teams of local staff. Therefore, appropriate training of staff in OCA facilitation is one of the key success factors. For instance, Pact programs in Kenya and Ethiopia conduct annual facilitation training to ensure that all new staff members are skilled facilitators.

4. *Appropriate facilitation*: Applying the right facilitation techniques for organizations at different stages of growth (INGOs, national NGOs, provincial NGOs or CBOs) is important. Pact staff should invest time in visiting partner organizations to understand their operations and challenges before holding the assessment workshop. That way, there will be adequate understanding of the practice, and discussion can be more meaningful.

5. *Keeping true to the OCA principles*: As described above, the OCA is not about judgment, and there is no right or wrong answer; similarly, facilitators are not experts. The OCA is a development process that unfolds in a unique way for each and every organization. The best facilitators help the organization in their own way of learning and are rewarded by witnessing unprecedented growth.

6. *Spend just enough time*: Even for a Rapid OCA, it is vital to spend sufficient time developing and refining high-quality action plans and ISPs. Not rushing through important steps of the process will inevitably result in feasible and actionable plans which can be immediately implemented.

Mistakes to avoid

1. *Mandate OCA with a grant*: Frequently, capacity scores decrease as the organization becomes more aware of its strengths and shortcomings, and becomes a truly learning organization. While acclimating to the methodology, partners may be concerned that Pact will use the OCA for judging grant-worthiness and set unrealistic scores for "passing the test." This perception undermines the value of honest discussion and results in a poor assessment.

2. *Too much OCA*: In some cases, Pact teams spend so much time on the OCA process that they have little time for anything else. The OCA is intended to inform and catalyze the "real work" of capacity development. If you need to monitor change on a frequent basis, use a simpler tool such as the OD Roadmap[9], rather than frequent follow-up OCAs.

3. *OCA scores calculation:* The score calculation sheet contains a few formulas that might be difficult for a practitioner to understand. Until you are sure that you can do the calculations independently, allow a few days between the scoring session and results debrief session so that you have time to address any issues with the results calculation spreadsheet.

4. *Not using OCA results:* The richness of data that result from an OCA can inform Pact's other capacity development interventions, such as marketplaces or key competency- building programs. The biggest mistake of international implementers is to put the results of such powerful processes on a shelf, or to produce and file the report without further action.

5. *Raising unrealistic expectations:* OCAs should not be conducted with partners unless resources are available to support follow-up capacity development activities. Since the OCA is a process that generates rare interest from the partner and takes a substantial amount of time to complete, it is important to be able to continue supporting the partner post-assessment, to avoid burnout of ideas and disappointment.

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[9]
https://intranet.pactworld.org/COP/CD/Documents/Pact's%20Approach,%20Best%20Practices%20and%20Tools/Capacity%20Assessments%20and%20Institutional%20Strengthening%20Planning/OD%20Roadmap_Pact%20Namibia.xlsx

Adaptations and impact area applications

The Pact OCA has been tailored to various settings in different ways, including:

- At the request of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Pact analyzed the organizational capacity in health and governance areas for a cohort of NGOs. The facilitators calibrated and negotiated an OCA approach that engaged the participants and provided objective assessment data to the donor.
- Pact applied the OCA, as described above, as part of a nine-month CBO Excellence Initiative with rural CBOs in South Sudan.
- The OCA was applied in Thailand to address the specific culture of dialogue; Pact facilitators decided not to use the consensus score.
- Pact applied the Cohort OCA for health organizations (grantees under the REACH project in South Africa and Tanzania).
- Global Fund recipient organizations in Vietnam integrated technical and organizational OCAs.
- Pact South Africa's prime partner organizations, AMREF, Starfish, and Comprecare, applied the OCA with their sub-partners (largely nascent CBOs) as part of comprehensive capacity development support. The Pact team trained, mentored, and supported each partner in implementing the OCAs.
- Pact Zimbabwe developed a tailored OCA tool to help organizations working on gender issues with capacity development.

Contextual considerations

Hierarchical societies and cultures: In many cultures it is very important that people vote secretly, so that participants are able to comfortably express their true thoughts. However, some groups are less hierarchal or are more comfortable expressing dissent in front of one another. They may even benefit from seeing how their colleagues vote.

Cultural perceptions of the world: As highlighted in the case story from South Sudan, it is important to use the OCA process that suits the participants' understanding of the world around them. In cultures that see the world through stories, hard numerical evidence has little meaning, and can be confusing. In communities with low literacy levels, visual representation of the scores (smiley faces, color coded pictures, etc.) can be helpful to understand the meaning of the scores.

Lack of Internet or electricity: In some locations where printing services are not available, it is sometimes necessary for the facilitators to generate the results on their computers and then copy them by hand onto blank paper—an extremely time-consuming process. In areas where printing is not available, facilitators should schedule time for hand-copying between day one and day two. They may also want to consider alternate methods of presenting the results for discussion, such as highlighting only one or two statements of excellence per capacity area on flipchart paper, as explained in the section below.

Foreign languages: Conducting an OCA with simultaneous interpretation is not ideal. It is therefore important to engage local facilitators. Simultaneous interpretation creates a degree of separation between the facilitator and the participants and significantly slows down the process. It can also lead to misunderstandings if elements of the OCA are not interpreted as the facilitator meant to say them. As the OCA is dependent on people from every level of the organization participating together, it is simply a reality that sometimes it is necessary for facilitators to work with interpreters for any group where there are non-English speakers, even if some members of the group speak English well. Part of the uniqueness of the OCA is that it puts all voices within an organization on equal footing, from the cleaner to the executive director. Making sure that all participants are able to fully engage in the OCA in a language they clearly understand makes the process much more personal and meaningful.

Where a local language is needed, the ideal process is to translate the OCA tool and materials in advance and train local facilitators who are fluent in the language used by the partner.

Appendices and Resources

These appendices are intended to provide additional information which the Pact manager or marketer may find useful in trying to understand more about the Pact OCA.

Appendix 1: Glossary

Calibrated Scoring: A scoring system that uses narrative benchmarks for each level of a statement of excellence rather than Likert scale of strongly agree / agree / neither / disagree / strongly disagree.

Capacity Area: A clearly defined area of an organization that has a specific function; for example, human resources management, finance, IT, leadership, governance, etc.

Civil Society Organization (CSO): An organization that operates in multiple communities or at the national level. It can be an NGO, non-profit organization, trade union, association, etc.

Cohort: A group of peer organizations, not necessarily a network.

Community Based Organization: A CSO that operates within a single community (regardless of whether that organization is faith based or secular).

Faith Based Organization: A CSO operating in multiple communities or at the national level whose governance structures are explicitly linked to a religious institution.

International Non-Governmental Organization: A CSO operating in multiple countries (regardless of whether that organization is faith-based or secular).

Institutional Strengthening Plan (ISP): A program-management document that describes what Pact will do to build the capacity of a partner. An ISP can be referred to as a capacity development plan, action plan, partner support plan, etc.

Management Control Assessment Tool (MCAT): A checklist of management and financial indicators used to judge the grant-worthiness of the partner.

Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (OCA): A guided self-assessment tool used to help organizations assess their strengths and weaknesses, clarify their vision, plan for success, and ultimately take greater ownership over their future.

Program Capacity Assessment Tool (PCAT): A checklist of programmatically relevant indicators used to judge the grant-worthiness of the partner.

Statement of Excellence: An indicator that describes the ideal state of things or characteristics within each capacity area, which the organization or cohort is striving to achieve (for example, "our organization has an active and engaged board of directors").

Technical and Organizational Capacity Assessment Tool (TOCAT): An organizational self-assessment tool which integrates technical (HIV & AIDS, livelihoods, natural-resources management) assessment with organizational for more holistic capacity development.

Appendix 2: Sample Classic OCA Scoring Sheet

**T-MARC Company: Organizational Capacity Assessment
February 2010**

	Statements of Excellence	Performance (scale 1-5)	Most Important
Capacity Area 1: Strategic Planning			
Statements of excellence for scoring (#1- #9)			
1	The organization has clearly defined objectives that guide all of our work.		
2	T-MARC Company consistently sets objectives that are appropriate for the organization (realistic yet challenging).		
3	The organization implements activities based on a clearly defined strategic plan.		
4	We review our strategic plan and objectives periodically.		
5	We regularly review national policies and the latest research in order to inform our strategic plans.		
6	We have a viable business plan, supported by a comprehensive market analysis.		
7	Management has a forward-thinking, business-minded approach that enables T-MARC company to be competitive.		
8	All planning activities are conducted with significant participation by key stakeholders.		
9	We continuously seek and implement strategies that ensure T-MARC remains on the cutting-edge in our core competency areas – not just in Tanzania, but globally.		

Statements of Excellence	Performance (scale 1-5)	Most Important
Capacity Area 2: Management		
Statements of excellence for scoring (#10-#19)		
10 Our organization has a well-defined governance structure that supports accountability and transparency.		
11 The organization has an active and engaged board of directors.		
12 The board plays a leadership role for the organization including fundraising, oversight, strategic direction, and supervising the executive director.		
13 The senior management has a very clear understanding of its responsibilities and relationship to the board and its committees.		
14 Management duties are not dependent upon one person, but shared between several team members.		
15 T-MARC's management team sets a positive example for staff to follow.		
16 Management uses multiple approaches to ensure that staff members are aware of T-MARC Company strategy and align their actions accordingly.		
17 Our management consistently models strong project management skills that enable the successful implementation of activities.		
18 The management is able to manage their time and that of their team members so that project deliverables are met in an efficient and effective manner.		
19 Members of the management team are able to interpret financial data and adjust their activities appropriately.		

The complete T-MARC Company tool can be downloaded from Pact's Intranet following this link: http://tinyurl.com/TMARC-Tool.

Appendix 3: Extract from the CBO OCA Scoring Sheet

South Sudan CBO Excellence Initiative: August-September 2010

|	Statements of Excellence				
	Capacity Area 1: Administration and Finance				
	Statements of excellence for scoring (#1- #11)				
1	Our organization spends finances according to the budget throughout the project period.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
2	Our organization maintains an up-to-date filing system with all financial and narrative reports, records, and receipts.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
3	Our organization maintains a visual record (photos, video, cd, etc.) of all activities that is updated on a monthly basis.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
4	Our organization has a bank account with three signatories.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
5	Our organization always ensures that financial acquisition and reimbursement forms are approved and authorized before transactions are made.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
6	Our organization has developed policies that control management of finance and define division of responsibility among different stakeholders.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
7	Our organization hires external auditors annually to check the financial status of the organization to promote transparency to the donors and staff.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
8	Our organization frequently sends its employees for training in administration and finance to build their capacity.				
	1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺
9	Our organization organizes quarterly fundraising activities (art work, drama, concerts, etc.) for the sustainability of the organization.				

Statements of Excellence				
1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺

10	Our organization has professional staff who develop reports and proposals that attract funding agencies and donors to ensure the continuity of the organization.

1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺

11	Our organization generates income when possible (through the service industry, training facilities, meeting halls, sound systems, tents, accommodation facilities, etc.).

| 1 ☹ ☹	2 ☹	3 ☺	4 ☺	5 ☺ ☺

The tool continues with the following capacity areas: Strategic Organizational Development, Human Resources Development, Assets and Offices, Stakeholders, and Core Values and is available for download from Pact's Intranet at http://tinyurl.com/SS-CBO-OCA.

Appendix 4: Sample Repeated OCA Results Comparison Charts

Organizational Overview
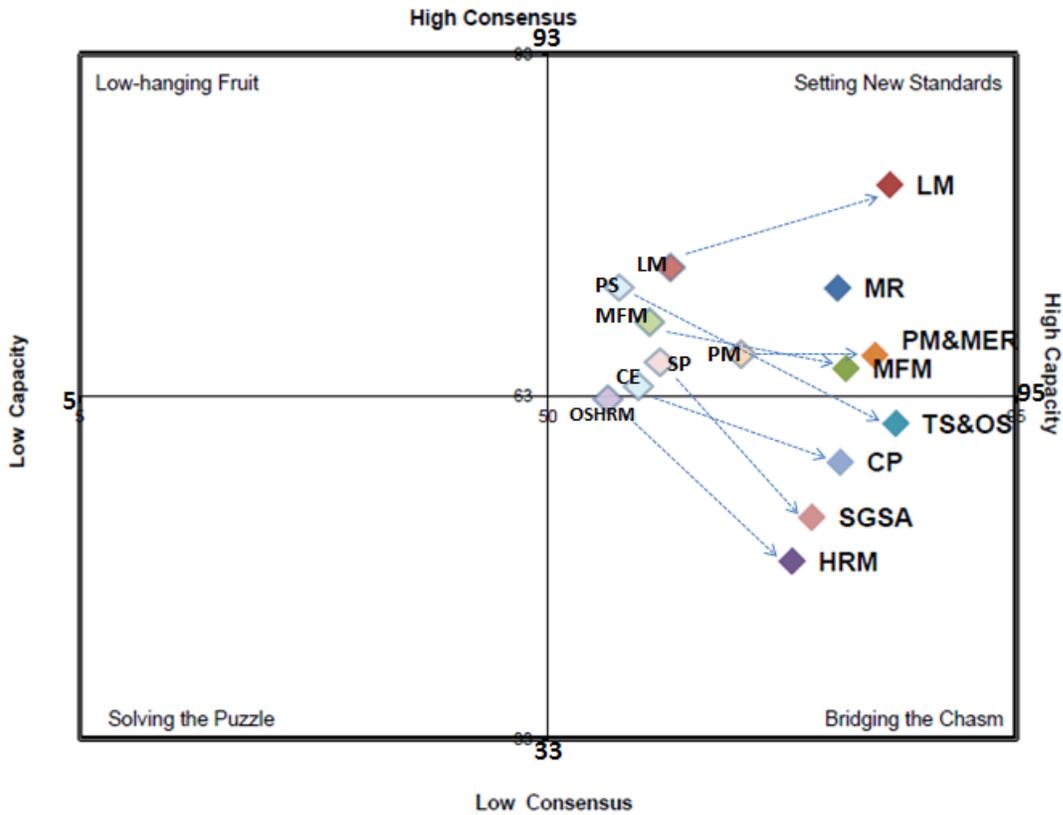
Strategy and Planning (2008)
Strategy, Growth, Sustainability and Adaptation (2011)
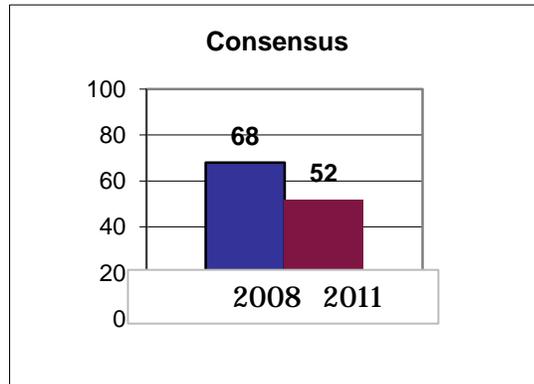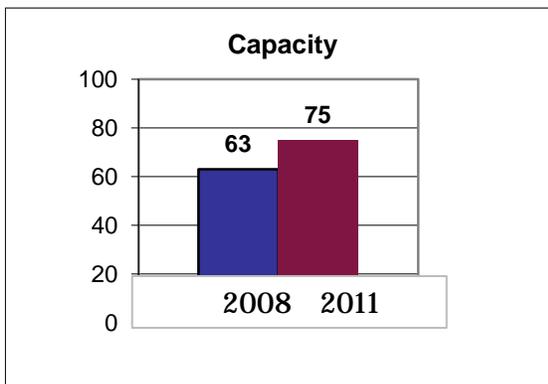
Appendix 5: Contacts within Pact

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