

Organisation Cultures at Sida

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1 The assignment

The Institute for Personnel and Corporate Development was commissioned by Sida's Department for Evaluation and Internal Audit to make cultural analyses at Sida. The following questions were in focus in the study:

- How can the culture at Sida-Stockholm and at embassies with fully delegated powers be described and understood? Is it possible to see patterns in assumptions that either support or counteract the implementation of the Field Vision and performance management at Sida? Are there differences between the divisions?

Working with cultural analyses is not without problems – the definitions and approaches vary to a great extent. Since the culture concept can be defined in many different ways, it is necessary to describe how we have worked with culture analyses at Sida. In the next chapter we present how the culture concept has been defined and used for the study. The empirical material has been collected with the aid of case studies at four organisational units at Sida – two embassies with full delegation and two divisions at the head office in Stockholm. Workshops have been held at all the four units and have been supplemented with interviews. In addition to this documents have been analysed and a questionnaire survey has been made. The analyses of the documents are presented in chapter three, and chapter four provides a presentation of the case studies and the results of the questionnaire. In the fifth and final chapter there is a discussion of conclusions and recommendations. In appendix 1 we present the procedure we have used to implement the study.

2 Organisation cultures

2.1 Definition of the culture concept

The word “culture” can arouse many associations and accordingly there is reason to explain how the concept has been used in this report. The culture concept can be defined at different levels: a national level, a regional level or a generation level and so on (Hofstede 1991:19). Organisations can also be seen as cultures and within these cultures there can be different levels of sub-cultures. The use of the culture concept in an organisation context has been common in recent years and it has many definitions. However, common to them all is the understanding that it is not only what is physically obvious or officially formulated that influences our behaviour. Regardless of how well formal control systems, rules and attitudes (which are also cultural products) are formulated, it is always possible to interpret, evaluate and relate to them. Culture is a type of “handrail” that helps us to behave in the way expected by those around us. In this respect the culture concept is a collective phenomenon – how we perceive what we see and hear is to a great extent dependent on the context we live and work in. Culture is something we have learnt and is a result of earlier experience. Accordingly we define the culture concept in accordance with Schein (1985:1999):

Culture is the stable pattern of learnt assumptions that are made in a defined group.

Assumptions can be expressed in different ways – both verbally (for example, in speech and writing) and physically (for example, in buildings, meeting rooms or IT systems). Analyses of these expressions – artefacts – can help us to understand an organisation better.

2.2 Importance of understanding Sida's culture

Corporate cultures are never wholly “good” or “bad”. On the other hand they can be regarded as more or less functional in relation to the tasks that shall be done. The culture can constitute a form of support for – or an obstacle to – processes of change, learning, management and control, and forms of cooperation – all issues of importance for Sida. One of the more important issues at Sida is the implementation of the *Field Vision* and the development of performance management, i.e. internal management and control procedures. In this context, performance management refers to the process that has the aim of ensuring that intended results are achieved in a cost-efficient manner. Performance management at Sida is done through the Government's annual directives and letter of appropriations and the ensuing instructions and processes. The most important control processes are the regional and country strategy processes and the contribution cycle. In addition to this, there is the internal operations planning process in which the country strategy work, the annual country plans and assessments in the contribution cycle are linked together. The intention of the *Field Vision* is to strengthen activities in the field (in partner countries). After the embassies in Tanzania, Vietnam and Nicaragua were given fully delegated powers in 1999, the number of embassies with full delegation has increased. In the *Vision for a strengthened field orientation, action programme*, the meaning of full delegation is expressed in the following way.

Full delegation implies that the field office has received full responsibility, to the extent possible, for the initiation, planning, preparation, decision-making, implementation, follow-up, quality assurance and evaluation of the development programme with a specific country.

The *Field Vision* is thus an example of a change that also necessitates modifications to the culture. In order to implement the *Field Vision*, it is necessary that the personnel act in accordance with the vision. The organisation's culture, conceptions, values and norms are thus of great importance in making the vision possible and in developing performance management.

2.3 Approach

We use a technique for culture analyses that has been developed by Schein (1985, 1999) and which is based on research into organisation cultures. We supplement Schein's analysis model with the so-called “cultural web model” developed by Johnson (1992) and Johnson and Scholes (1997). Using this approach the organisation's culture is described with the aid of nine themes (see figure 1). These themes are numbered in the model merely to show our working procedure. The numbers are in no way related to the importance of the factors. The cultural web model has been used as a tool, in particular at four workshops but also in studies of documents, interviews, observations, and for a questionnaire survey.¹

It is important to state that cultural assumptions are not only made in respect of what happens inside the organisation, but also in the ways the organisation sees itself and is perceived by others. The first theme sheds light in particular in these issues. Like Schein (1999), we have collected aspects relating to the first theme under the heading: “*Mission, strategy and goals*”. Every organisation must handle external demands on it in various ways and most organisations therefore develop assumptions about their mission (about why we exist) and thereafter develop strategies and goals as a way of organising activities. One consequence of this is that the organisation creates structures, systems and processes in order to make it possible to meet these external demands. The first theme: “*Mission, strategy and goals*”, contains questions such as: What is Sida's mission? Why are you doing what you are doing? Do you

¹ Methodological issues are presented in Appendix 1.

ever have to defend yourself against criticism – and if so what are you criticised for? What is the message in Perspectives on Poverty?

Thereafter *structures of work* are discussed in the form of questions such as: What are the three most important tools – instruments to do a good job? How important is experience and intuition? To what degree is your work regulated?

The third theme that is described is the *organisational structure*. At workshops participants were urged to describe their organisation with a picture and thereafter explain how they see their own division/unit in relation to other parts of the organisation. We have also collected descriptions of the organisational structure in other steps in the procedure.

The fourth theme is concerned with *power*. Influence is sometimes used as a synonym for the power concept and we have chosen to handle them as equivalent phenomena even if there can be certain differences in their definitions. Questions in this area take up aspects that give people power at Sida, ways in which formal and informal power are manifested, the people who have power, and the power balance between Sida-Stockholm and the field.

The fifth theme concerns *control systems*. How is success measured? What is a good result? How does a member of staff know that he/she has done a good job? How is work followed up?

The sixth theme refers to the *work environment*. This does not merely refer to the physical working environment, it also includes the psychosocial environment (the so-called working climate). At the workshops the participants were asked to collect arguments for and against working at Sida and in their division/unit. In all steps in the study, special interest has been attached to statements on the working climate and learning.

The seventh theme refers to *routines and rituals*. What does a meeting look like? What is celebrated? What routines/rituals are typical? It is important to realise that it can be very difficult to see one's own routines and rituals since, by definition, they have become "common" and thus often occur without people being much aware of them. External observers can therefore be necessary to enable light to be shed on these issues.

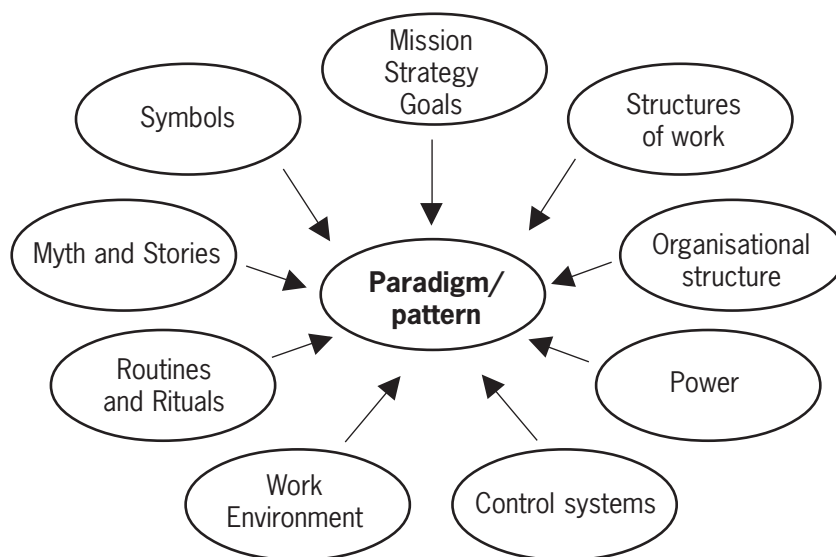


Figure 1: The Cultural Web model – a modification of Schein (1999) Johnson and Scholes (1997)

Myths and stories are the eighth theme. Here we were interested in listening to different types of stories told by the staff – orally or in written form. During the workshops the participants were encouraged to comment on the stories that were told. What are the stories all about?

Symbols were collected as the ninth theme. Apart from a discussion of purely physical symbols – what do typical Sida symbols look like? what thoughts do they arouse? – the participants in the workshops were requested, as were the persons interviewed, to reflect on what Sida symbolises externally – how do partners in cooperation perceive Sida?

It is important to state that we work above all with *perceptions* of symbols, power, routines, working environment or other things in the nine themes in the cultural web model. We do not claim to have found the one and only, undisputed, true Sida culture. There is no such thing in large, complex organisations. Perceptions can vary in an organisation or a division/unit but, with the aid of a culture approach, we seek the common expressions in the *defined* group. It is important that those who are studied should be able to recognise certain descriptions, but also that we, as external analysts, can add something to the descriptions with the aid of links to theories and earlier surveys. The most central and communicated perceptions have therefore been identified and analysed. These constitute the so-called paradigm or pattern of perceptions that can be said to characterise the unit or group studied.

3 Analysis of documents

3.1 Value words

The analysis of the corporate culture at Sida was started with a selection of documents relevant for the assignment and of fundamental importance for Sida (see appendix 1). The analysis of the documents basically had two objectives:

- To gain an understanding of Sida's mission
- To search for expressions of a desired culture.

The analysis of documents is presented on the basis on the analysis model with the nine circles that we have used.

Mission strategy and goals

What is said in the documents on the vision, on the mission and on strategies to achieve the goals?

The following are the most common expressions in the documents and indicate answers to the above question:

- Strengthen the capacity of partner countries to exercise ownership.
- Importance of analysis from POP.
- The good organisation – the good employer.
- NPOs lack knowledge about Sweden and Sida, POP, methods/routines – they have to develop their capacity.
- A knowledge organisation.

- Different knowledge is an asset.
- Importance of continuous learning.
- Change, flexibility, fresh thinking, different opinions OK.
- Knowledge and action in the field are given priority.
- Field Vision – mission statement, all staff more field-oriented.
- Our knowledge is most important.
- Create right conditions – development of knowledge is crucial.
- Sustainability.
- International development cooperation.
- International network.
- Flexibility, change, expertise, experience from abroad, learning, projects, evaluation.

Structures of work

What are the “working tools” – how does one approach the assignment and what skills are necessary?
Some expressions that illustrate answers to the question:

- Holistic, well-integrated approach.
- Analytical capacity.
- Sida at Work – principles and procedures.

Organisational structure

How is the organisation reflected, what is the division of roles and responsibilities? The following expressions recur in the documents studied and describe structures, roles and responsibilities:

- Strong field organisation; holistic perspective; cross-disciplinary knowledge.
- Work organisation corresponding to needs.
- Flat, decentralised, specialised.
- From a vertical organisation to a horizontal communicating organisation with professional networks.
- Unclear roles and responsibilities (Field Vision).
- Who has the authority to decide on the use of personnel resources.

Power

Who has power over what and why? Examples of ways in which power is described in the documents:

- Strong HQ – actively supporting the field.
- Locally employees work under different conditions.
- NPOs are the backbone of the embassy – continuity, institutional memory, gateway to local society.
- Decisions are made where the problems and knowledge exist.

- Strengthened field, increased decision-making powers, extension of the right to use funds, sufficient manning, improved status in respect of telecommunications.
- NPOs; number of staff doubled in 5 years, more important, position upgrade – equal footing with posted staff.
- Sida-knowledge.
- HQ = experience, institutional memory, professional expertise.
- From aid dependency to partnership.
- FO in charge, RD strategists, SD subject experts/advisors, AD support
- Management and controls based on values.

Control systems

How do we know that we are doing what we have been assigned to do? This is usually described in the following way in the documents studied:

- Country strategy, country plan.
- Assessment criteria; relevance, effectiveness, flexibility, sustainability, quality of cooperation, risk management.

Work environment

What characterises the psychosocial work environment? Examples of how the environment is described:

- Participation, inspiring, learning, diversity, different opinions, dynamic, flexible, analytical and creative.
- Opportunities for learning
- We are each other's working environment.

Routines and rituals, Myths and stories, and Symbols

What signals are given externally and what unites the staff?

The last three circles lack direct statements in the documents studied. On the other hand, the documents transmit signals through their layout, their logotype and their language. It can also probably be claimed, without any exaggeration that, for Sida, the written document is both an important symbol and a confirmed routine.

3.2 Conclusions

In the documents certain value words/expressions occur more frequently than others – expressions that signal the type of organisation that Sida wants to be. Not merely because they give a picture of an attractive organisation but because they are assumed to represent a functional way of thinking, being and acting – on the basis of the mission Sida has as an organisation, not least in relation to the field vision. If these words are allowed to constitute a description of Sida, we would see the following:

Sida is an organisation that is steered by *visions and goals*. The organisation is permeated by a *holistic perspective*, considerable *flexibility* but also by *indistinct processes*. The structure consists of a *supportive HQ* and a *strong field*. It is also *flatly decentralised* and *specialised*. Sida is a *knowledge-intensive* organisation, in which *Sida knowledge* is valuable. It is *ready to change*, *dynamic* and *creative*. There is broad scope for *different opinions* and an ongoing process of continuous *learning*.

An ideal picture of the good organisation with the good employer.

The question is naturally whether, and if so how, this is manifested in practice?

4 Cultural perceptions

4.1 Mission, strategy and goals

It is quite clear that those who participated in the survey feel a certain pride in Sida. They often pointed out that the goal of Sida's work is a good goal and they consider that Sida has a good reputation as a development cooperation agency. Or, as one of the interviewees pointed out:

“I feel that I am working for a good cause – reducing poverty in the world. It is clear that the road to success is not easy but at least the aim is good.”

This type of statement was one of the most common at Sida. In several similar statements we can see how the interviewees perceived this mission of “reducing poverty” as stimulating, as well as the understanding (and in some cases resignation at the prospect of the task) that the road there is not simple. The difficulties in achieving a mission of this type are naturally considerable. It has been pointed out in research how important it is to formulate concrete goals and strategies (plans for reaching the goals) that are necessary in organisations, particularly where the mission (the very reason for the existence of the organisation) is difficult to achieve.

One of the documents discussed most at Sida is Perspectives on Poverty (PoP). The questionnaire contains a statement on this very document. Respondents are asked to decide on the extent to which they agree with the statement: “I use Perspectives on Poverty actively”. As we can see from the table below, the respondents differ somewhat in their responses. At Sida-Stockholm there are more who disassociate themselves from the statement than is the case in the field. We use the mean value here in order to give an indication of the direction of the answers – a high mean value shows that most people in the group agree with the statement. Where Perspectives on Poverty is concerned, the mean value is 3.4 for those in the field and 3.0 for those in Stockholm (see table 1).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	16	23	25	23	14	3
Field	6	14	33	27	19	3,4
Total	11	18	30	25	17	3,2

Table 1. Distributions of responses (in per cent) to the questionnaire statement. “I use Perspectives on Poverty actively”, broken down by Stockholm and the field.

In the case studies many members of staff also pointed out that Perspectives on Poverty is merely a “mission statement”. Or as one of the participants in a workshop put it:

“Perspectives on Poverty is more idealism than practical reality. Reality is more complicated but idealism is needed to legitimate the activity and to justify actions.”

The fact that there is sometimes a need to legitimate development cooperation activities is quite clear. The documents are used internally – in order to justify certain actions and are referred to – but can also be shown externally to legitimate activities. In both workshops and interviews the staff pointed out that they must sometimes defend themselves and Sida from criticism. Criticism is often perceived as not objective and not particularly meaningful. However, in workshops and interviews, national programme officers stood out in this matter since they called attention to the fact that the criticism is sometimes more central and intensive.

“Yes, we are often criticised. In particular we must defend why we focus on some programmes and not others. However, sometimes we must also defend Sweden or Sida’s position in relation to the authorities here. And sometimes we must also defend ourselves and why we have chosen to work for an aid organisation.”

This statement is one of many similar statements and is a clear illustration of the discussion at Sida on the situation of the national programme officers.

One interesting difference that can be discerned from the responses to the questionnaire, the interviews or the workshops is that, as a rule, the NPOs speak less critically of Sida and more loyally in respect of, for example, various directives and instruments. Where Perspectives on Poverty is concerned, the NPOs agree to a greater extent than other members of staff with the statement that they use the document actively. Here, the NPOs have a mean value of 3.7 compared to 3.0 for other members of staff.

It is important to state that the ambition of a document such as Perspectives on Poverty is actually to give a perspective to the assignment and not to exercise a form of control in the daily work. Country strategies and country plans provide more active support in the daily work. Here the mean value for both Sida-Stockholm and the field gives indications that this is the case. This was emphasised in particular in the workshops held at the embassies. Several persons commented that the country strategies and the country plans are important for their daily work. They are not sufficient, but they are necessary for directing activities. Several of the staff also pointed out how the quality of the country strategies and country plans varies, which creates problems.

“The country strategies and the country plans are the most important guidelines for me in my work. I see that they are being improved considerably and this makes my work easier. When the guidelines are not so specific as those I am working with now, the duties seem diffuse and difficult to work with.”

In both workshops and in interviews it was often commented that there is considerable freedom for individuals to act. At the same time, this naturally requires consensus in respect of goals. The situation with regard to consensus is reflected in the responses to the statement: “At Sida there is considerable consensus in respect of goals” (see table 2). The same tendency can be found here as for the question on Perspectives on Poverty – the respondents in the field agree with the statement to a much greater extent than those who responded in Stockholm. The mean value of the responses from Sida Stockholm is 2.8 (compared to 3.7 from the field). This indicates that there are more people at head office that feel that there is no consensus where the goals are concerned. The lack of clarity experienced by the staff was also commented on in workshops and interviews.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	7	26	47	19	2	2,8
Field	2	13	22	33	29	3,7
Total	5	19	34	26	16	3,3

Table 2: Distribution in responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: At Sida there is considerable consensus in respect of goals”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

All those who were interviewed pointed out that the goals of the organisation were not specific and that performance management was thus not merely a matter of course. There were many questions about the Field Vision, performance management and the organisation. Or, as one of the interviewees said:

“What do we expect of each other? What are we entitled to expect? The Field Vision creates new roles but how well prepared are we at Sida? What consequences will the Field Vision have for us working centrally? What role will we play? What shall we do? What shall the field do? Visions with all respect, but now I feel it is time for better guidance. Performance management can also be discussed. What does a good result mean?”

Not as many questions were raised in the case studies made in the field. Many commented that, as a result of the Field Vision, there were now more possibilities to take action, to be flexible and of to make decisions more rapidly. Or, as one of then participants in workshop said:

“The focus is on reducing poverty and strengthening the work being done by the government locally to reduce poverty. We want to be a good aid organisation and the Field Vision gives us the opportunity to act more efficiently.”

The question of Sida-Stockholm’s role also arises here. What support can the field expect from the Human Resources Department, Information Department or other departments?

The change towards greater delegation envisaged by the Field Vision can result in a less specific role for a central organisation and thus make it more difficult to achieve consensus on goals. In the field Stockholm is regarded as a service-support organisation. The question is whether Sida-Stockholm has the same impression? The Field Vision means new roles for the staff at the embassies – not least for the national programme officers. The new roles involve new requirements in respect of qualifications and experience, but in both the field and in Stockholm the wish was expressed for a holistic approach in order to make new roles and requirements more specific.

Conclusions: As ideas, the mission and the Field Vision have considerable support in the divisions/units studied, but in practice there are many doubts. There is a desire for a clear definition of expectations and responsibilities in the organisation. The freedom that many experience can also be a sign of a lack of clarity in the organisation. This, in turn, can contribute to a feeling of a lack of smoothness in operations, with shortcomings in communications between different divisions – not least between Stockholm and the field. Performance management is also accepted as an idea, but there is a lack of clarity in respect of what the goals really are and how results shall be measured.

4.2 Structures of work

A number of approaches can be discussed under the heading of working methods. We chose to keep the discussions at workshops and in interviews at an general, overall level with questions such as: What are the three most important instruments for doing a good job? To what extent is your work regulated? How important are experience and intuition?

In the questionnaire there was a statement to the effect: “Sida at Work provides me with support in my daily work”. In the responses there is once again a difference between Stockholm and the field that is interesting to draw attention to since it shows that more people in the field agree with the statement (see table 3). The mean value for staff in Stockholm is 2.9, while the mean value for the field is 4.1.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	10	29	27	27	7	2,9
Field	2	4	18	29	47	4,1
Total	6	16	22	28	29	3,6

Table 3: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “Sida at Work provides me with support in my daily work”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

The difference can naturally be explained by the fact that the character of the work is different and that the document is more useful for some persons than for others. NPOs in particular are positive towards Sida at Work, or as one of them said:

“I get a lot of assistance from Sida at Work. It is my “little bible”. I can use it as an encyclopaedia if there is something I am unsure about. It is the first step when you have to do something but don’t really know how to do it.”

In all workshops and interviews, attention was drawn to the need of “Sida experience”. Members of staff mentioned repeatedly that “knowing Sida is most important of all”, “without Sida experience you will not make much progress in your work”, and “knowing Sida is crucial”. It seems as if informal networks have a very strong position in the organisation. One consequence of the emphasis on the informal networks is that new members of staff can feel that it is rather difficult at Sida. Or as one of the persons interviewed pointed out:

“It is both easy and difficult to work here. Easy since everyone is friendly and pleasant. Difficult since it took time before I understood what I should do – or rather how I should do what I should do. I believe that many other new members of staff feel the same way. It takes time to understand the organisation – where you can get the right information, what strings you should pull, and where the decisions are made. It takes time to get the whole picture and I felt almost lost in the beginning. And then quite suddenly one day I felt as if I knew what was going on! Now I know who to ask and how to work with matters that concern me. But it took time.”

Some of the duties require expertise – attention was specifically drawn to this at the sector departments. The importance of knowledge of different types – subject knowledge, Sida knowledge, development cooperation knowledge – is emphasised. However, as is the case with all knowledge, it is difficult to define exactly what is needed. A great deal of knowledge is so-called tacit knowledge and can only be transferred and developed through experience. Thus experience is highly valued at Sida. There are specific ambitions to document experience and to draw up methods among Sida staff. In the interviews and workshops it was pointed out that many documents are created with this specific ambition in mind.

The outcome is not always positive since members of staff feel that it is difficult to gain attention for the method or approach that they advocate. Or as one of the members of staff at Sida-Stockholm put it:

“There is an enormous amount of knowledge at Sida. There are an enormous number of driving forces and different wills. However, it is not possible to take an active interest in everything since there is always something else that demands your attention.”

Perhaps this is the explanation why so many responded negatively to the statement: “Sida has a good ability to take systematic advantage of the experience of members of staff?” In table 4 we can see that, particularly in Sida-Stockholm, staff disassociate themselves from the statement – only 11% partly agree, and as many as 50% are at the other end of the scale. The mean value for Stockholm is 2.4 while the value for the group at embassies (3.1) is somewhat higher.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	20	30	39	11	0	2,4
Field	4	36	20	27	13	3,1
Total	12	33	30	19	7	2,8

Table 4: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “Sida has a good ability to take systematic advantage of the experience of members of staff?” broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

Conclusion: Social networks, knowledge and experience are perceived to be of greatest importance for doing a good job at Sida. The organisation, roles and responsibilities are perceived to be somewhat ambiguous, which has the effect that new members of staff can find it difficult to make progress in their duties. The Field Vision has focused on working methods in the field while Sida Stockholm’s mission and working methods are perceived to have been overshadowed. There is a feeling that the experience at Sida-Stockholm is not used in the “right way”, in both the field and in Stockholm.

4.3 Organisational structure

It was often mentioned that the formal organisation is unclear. Roles, expectations and demands are sometimes difficult to interpret. In connection with changes – such as the introduction of the Field Vision – it is necessary to specify the consequences that the changes will have for all concerned. If this is not done it is probable that the lack of clarity will increase since some will act in accordance with the new expectations, others will continue to act as they did before, and some will seize the opportunity to formulate new roles for themselves in the freedom that exists. This was also commented on by participants at the workshops in Stockholm:

“Many good wills pull in different directions and, with a lack of specific guidelines, there are some divisions that decide themselves what they will do and not do. Since the organisation is so complex I believe that you are not always aware how one action can affect other, completely different, parts of the organisation. I think it is understandable that some want to clarify their roles – but the problem is that sometimes this is done solely on the basis of their own situation. How can one department suddenly decide not to do something any more? This naturally has direct consequences for others who have not been asked.”

This is also shown in the questionnaire. *None* of the respondents in Stockholm agreed completely with the statement “Sida’s organisation is well designed for the duties that shall be performed”. On the other hand, people seem to be more satisfied with the organisation from the perspective of the field. The mean value for Stockholm was 2.8, while the value for the field in 3.5 (see table 6).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	9	23	47	21	0	2,8
Field	2	19	28	28	23	3,5
Total	6	21	37	24	12	3,2

Table 6: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “Sida’s organisation is well designed for the duties that shall be performed”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

This was reinforced in the workshops and interviews – both in Stockholm and at the embassies abroad. For many in the field it is quite clear what they are expected to be responsible for, while there are many questions about the support that can be expected from Stockholm. This lack of clarity is also commented on in the case studies in Stockholm – and in this context some divisions are mentioned as examples of poor organisation while others are presented as the opposite. There is a common desire that the organisation should be clearly defined for all parts of Sida.

In connection with the workshops, the participants were encouraged to draw and explain what Sida’s organisation looks like. The pictures vary a great deal (with many different metaphors such as “spider”, “ship” or “net”), but there is considerable consensus that the field should be in the centre. The descriptions are not particularly hierarchical (with one exception); the organisation is usually described as being fairly flat.

Oral presentations of the organisation contain descriptions of functions and positions that are often personal, with names of persons as defining concepts. The image of Sida as a personal and informal organisation recurred in interviews and workshops. One member of staff said:

“I believe that part of the reason why we emphasise Sida experience so strongly is due to the fact that it is actually in this way that one learns the organisation. It is often persons who have and take responsibility, persons who have the right contacts or the right information. With the right experience it is possible to understand how the organisation functions.”

According to many of the informants in the case studies, one obvious change that has taken place in recent years is the stronger link with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In this respect some questions were also raised about Sida’s future role and the power situation.

“We are completely different types of organisations. Perhaps it can be said that the Ministry for Foreign Affairs has a culture of instruction and Sida has a culture of dialogue. All changes that take place will affect Sida more than the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Sida staff at the embassies will need to learn to represent Sweden and how to handle the Ministry.”

Of those that responded to the questionnaire, some considered that the Field Vision has definitely changed their work, while approximately just as many said that the Field Vision has not meant any changes. The mean value of responses to the statement “the Field Vision has meant considerable changes in my work” was 3.0 in Stockholm and 3.1 in the field (see table 7). The picture was also split in the workshops and interviews – on the one hand some say that the Field Vision is merely a natural consequence of the way in which the work has been done for a long time, while on the other hand, others say that the Field Vision has resulted in considerable changes in their work. Some also pointed out that their workload had increased considerably with the implementation of the Field Vision, while others said that their workload was unchanged (see table 8). Above all, some of the interviewees at the embassies pointed out that their workload had increased:

“I have an enormous amount to do – new duties are added all the time and it is difficult to find the time to do them all. I work as well as I can but I feel that I need support and help. It is not always easy to ask for help. My colleagues have no time to spare and I know that I would like to have more support from Stockholm but unfortunately I cannot get what I want from them either.”

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	13	21	31	23	13	3
Field	7	33	16	33	11	3,1
Total	10	27	23	29	12	3,1

Table 8: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “The Field Vision has meant considerable changes in my work”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	17	42	25	17	0	2,4
Field	7	16	7	35	35	3,7
Total	11	28	15	27	19	3,1

Table 9: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “The Field Vision has increased my workload”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

Others emphasised that their workload has tended to increase all the time: “you do a lot of work for your salary”, one person said and laughed. Another participant at the workshop supplemented the picture:

“Sida functions in this way: the more you have to do, the more you get to do. There is no one who has direct control over you and manages your duties and workload, but the expectations that you should do a good job have the effect that sometimes you take on too much. At the same time you know that the duties will never be completed – the work is never ending.”

The possibility of exerting an influence on one’s own work has both advantages and disadvantages. Among the advantages mentioned it was stated that the duties are often very interesting, the work is instructive and stimulating. The disadvantages include the difficulty in knowing what one can expect of others and what one is entitled to demand of oneself. Responsibilities and powers can be unclearly formulated and links to goals and results are weak. In table 10 we can see the distribution in the responses to the statement: “At Sida there is a specific allocation of roles and responsibilities”. Once again we can see a tendency that staff at Sida-Stockholm consider that the organisation is not specific. Only 13% agree with the statement – the other 87% are more reserved in their judgement.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	18	38	31	13	0	2,4
Field	5	43	19	19	14	3
Total	11	40	25	16	7	2,7

Table 10: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “At Sida there is a specific allocation of roles and responsibilities”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

Conclusions: The Field Vision has considerable support in the organisation but there are some doubts about the organisation of certain central functions. The formal organisation is perceived as being rather unclear. This refers above all to Sida-Stockholm's responsibilities and powers, while the field considers itself to be understaffed. There is a wish that roles should be clearly specified. The freedom felt by members of staff that they themselves can exert an influence on their work has both advantages and disadvantages.

4.4 Power

As mentioned above, there are considerable opportunities for members of staff to exert an influence on their own work. The Sida employee can be seen as a typical "knowledge worker" where the driving force possessed by the member of staff – the will to do one's work well – is essential. Do those who responded to the questionnaire feel that they have sufficient powers to do their work well? The answer is "yes" to the statement put in the questionnaire (see table 11).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	5	11	32	48	5	3,4
Field	0	0	19	51	30	4,1
Total	2	5	25	49	18	3,8

Table 11: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: "I have sufficient powers to do my work well", broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

Few persons – and this applies particularly to the field – disagree with the statement "I have sufficient powers to do my work well". The vast majority consider that they have sufficient powers. One member of staff at an embassy said:

I sometimes feel dizzy when I see what responsibilities I have. I have incredibly great powers and it is not strange that sometimes I feel under stress since it is also often a great deal of money and people's living conditions. It is both fantastic and terrible!"

Or as one of the members of staff in Stockholm pointed out:

"It is quite clear that I have the power to act but this does not necessarily mean that I really can act. I cannot act totally independently of others and it is important to get the support of the right persons in order to have the possibility to really achieve something."

Knowing the right persons is important in order to attract attention internally if the issue is not of great interest externally. An issue that arouses the interest of the media is also perceived to have great interest internally. However, But as a participant in a workshop in Stockholm commented: "the interest of the media is transient" and thus internal interest can be spasmodic.

The best way to acquire power seems to be to have it already. The most common answers to the question of who has power are "management" or persons with specific expertise. This is naturally the most common response in all organisations – power follows position. It is meaningful to see whether power is institutionalised, i.e. whether power bases are built merely on the fact that the person (or the group) once was important (since he/she had specific expertise, experience, or knew the right persons) but that these reasons have now outlived their day. Sida appears to be in a transition period. Several people said that old power structures are disappearing. Or as participants in a workshop said in the course of a conversation:

“There was a time when Sida was almost like a family. Well, not everyone at Sida was part of the family but those who ran Sida kept together.”

“That’s true. We have heard how they kept together both at work and at play.”

“It’s fairly obvious that this can be so in an organisation where people sometimes live so close to each other, travel together and experience a great deal together. The problem is that those who are not part of the family feel left outside.”

“But now it’s not quite like that any more. Old power structures are being broken up and replaced.”

A family-oriented power structure can have both advantages and disadvantages – common values, loyalty, consensus and the avoidance of conflicts. However, a perpetual search for consensus can create a breeding ground for group thinking and indistinctness.

However, power structures are perceived to be undergoing a process of change – the participants in workshops and those who were interviewed often pointed out that things have changed or will be changed. The Field Vision has given more power to the field with the consequence that power is perceived to have decreased in some divisions at Stockholm. The entry of a new generation is imminent and this will have consequences for the power structures.

Conclusions: In this context, a power base is something which gives influence in the organisation. Identified power bases (without any internal ranking order): 1) Position; 2) Proximity to others with power (networks); 3) Institutionalised power; 4) Specific expertise; and 5) External interest. Sida is in a process of transition. Old power structures are being replaced by new power structures. The Field Vision is perceived to have given more power to the embassies with delegated powers and less to some central functions. Many drew attention to the stronger role of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

4.5 Control systems

Measuring results of the types of activities pursued by Sida is very difficult in both the short term and the long term. Where control systems are concerned, the classical questions are “What are the relevant indicators? What methods should be used to measure results? When should measurements be made? At the workshops and interviews the questions asked were: How is success measured? What is a good result? How does a member of staff know that he/she has done a good job? How is work followed up?

It is obvious that there are doubts as to whether Sida follows up the right aspects of its development cooperation activities. Few members of staff agree with the statement: “Sida has systems that follow up the right aspects of activities” (see table 12), The mean value is as low as 2.5 in Stockholm. In the group defined as the field, the mean value is 3.2.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	21	26	38	15	0	2,5
Field	2	26	35	26	12	3,2
Total	11	26	37	21	6	2,9

Table 12: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “Sida has systems that follow up the right aspects of activities”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

The case studies at the embassies and divisions in Stockholm reinforce the impression that financial control systems are not capable of following up the right aspects of activities or of providing information that can be used in the daily work. Several of the staff interviewed – like the participants in the

workshops – drew attention to the weaknesses of the formal control systems and the elusive goals. Or, as one of the interviewees put it:

“It is by and large impossible to determine whether a person or department or a project is doing the right things. What should you measure? Over what period of time? Success can be so many things. It is easier to see what is a total failure.”

Sida’s organisation is permeated by complexity. In complex organisations a formal control system has the task of attracting the attention of persons in the organisation to important situations or states of affairs that can be thought to concern them. However, it is clear that this role is not played by the formal control systems in the opinion of participants in the workshops or the staff who were interviewed. Fairly brief answers were given to questions about formal control systems and it was pointed out that it was not that type of information that they needed. Formal control systems appear to work more as control instruments than as tools for planning. Since formal control systems require an overall grepp, individual members of staff found it difficult to express an opinion on how they work. Or, as one member of staff said:

“Of courses there are systems for quality control and for management and I always report what is requested. But sometimes I wonder how the figures are used. Can they be used to plan activities better? Could a better control system combine goals and activities more explicitly?”

The responses received to the questionnaire supplement this picture. Once again there are differences in perceptions between the field and Stockholm. In Stockholm there is a lower degree of agreement with the statement: “The indicators we use at Sida are relevant for measuring efficiency”. The mean value is 2.5 in Stockholm, compared with 3.0 for the field (see table 13).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	12	45	28	10	5	2,5
Field	0	40	35	16	9	3
Total	6	42	31	13	7	2,8

Table 13: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “The indicators we use at Sida are relevant for measuring efficiency”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

The discussions on good criteria for success tended to be intensive in all the case studies. There is a great interest in discussing what is successful behaviour at Sida. The results concept was discussed at all the workshops. On no occasion was it possible to reach agreement on effective indicators or a definition of a good result. The participants in the workshops discussed aspects such as productivity, efficiency, high quality, Sida satisfaction, or the perspective of the partners in cooperation. In the discussion there were no clear common perceptions apart from the fact that Sida satisfaction was never given priority. Common comments from the participants:

“Sida satisfaction – what would that be?”

“I don’t know what is a good result from a Sida perspective.”

“What is important is that I myself and those I work closely with are satisfied – if that is Sida satisfaction then I am for it. But if Sida satisfaction refers to some overall goals – then I don’t know what it is.”

In several discussions a subjective concept such as high quality ended up as the first priority. It was emphasised by several members of staff: “it is important that I do a good job”, “high quality is most important”, “the fact that my colleagues and I judge that the work is of high quality is crucial”. This concept was only questioned in a few individual cases and then the persons in question pointed out that sometimes one had to be satisfied with things being “good enough” and that it was very difficult to make a definition of what could be considered to be high quality. The importance of feeling responsibility was often emphasised – both in respect of one’s own job and Sida.

Conclusions: Performance management as a concept did not arouse any strong feelings until the discussions took up the definition of a good result. Then a large number of questions, formulations and thoughts were expressed. Results concepts are vague and not generally spread throughout the organisation. Those that exist were questioned and the link of performance management to activities emerged as being weak. Formal control systems and operational control systems have a weak position in the divisions/units studied. Formal control systems are perceived as working more as control instruments rather than tools for planning. The image of management and control at Sida is not clear. Instead, informal control systems are emphasised in which behaviour is governed by values and norms so that they are appropriate for the tasks. The “inner control” is perceived as being of importance for doing a good job. The importance of assuming responsibility was underlined in interviews and workshops.

4.6 Work environment

The informal environment in which we work is probably one of the strongest footholds for cultural artefacts. The working environment is permeated strongly by existing values and norms of what is good and bad, right and wrong. However, the physical, concrete environment also contains cultural imprints. In the questionnaires and case studies we therefore posed questions on both the concrete and the abstract environment.

Communications that function well are often an indication of a working environment that is functioning well. Communications can naturally be of different types – both in respect of technical methods and content. The implementation of the Field Vision requires communications that function well between Stockholm and the field – particularly since the field often regards itself as understaffed or lacking certain specialist functions. Over a period of just a few years IT systems have revolutionised communications. Today information can be rapidly disseminated all over the world. Several members of staff pointed out in the interviews that this has driven up expectations in such a way that it has increased both the amount of information and expectations that colleagues all over the world can rapidly answer questions or provide points of view.

“The demands are greater today than they were before. We must be able to respond rapidly to questions. Previously a matter took time – since the postal service had its limitations. Now it feels as if we must act more immediately when we receive an e-mail with a few questions. I don’t know if we are getting more done than we did before – we are possibly using our time incorrectly. It is sometimes difficult to sift through the enormous amount of information that exists today as a result of information technology.”

IT that does not function properly leads rapidly to irritation. In response to the question on IT in the questionnaire – if the staff had the IT support they needed to do their jobs properly, the respondents in the field had a lower degree of satisfaction than the respondents in Stockholm (see table 14).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	4	7	24	38	27	3,8
Field	9	23	21	30	17	3,2
Total	7	15	23	34	22	3,5

Table 14: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “I have the right IT support in relation to my working duties”, broken down by respondents in the field and Stockholm respectively.

Technical problems are often mentioned as one of the more obvious sources of irritation for the staff at the embassies. The IT issue was high on the agenda in all the interviews at the two embassies that participated in the study. Technical problems block the work for long periods of time. On the other hand, in Stockholm it is not the technical aspects of the IT systems that cause problems. Instead here emphasis is given to the large amount of information and the need of being able to sort out all the information that is not relevant.

In most of the documents that were studied, Sida is mentioned as a learning organisation (see analysis of documents). In the statement on learning in the questionnaire, there is a pronounced difference between the field and staff in Stockholm. In the field there is a high level of agreement – mean value 3.4 – with the statement that members of staff learn from each other in a systematic way, while the corresponding value for Stockholm was 2.8 (see table 15).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	11	27	38	22	2	2,8
Field	2	23	33	21	21	3,4
Total	6	25	35	22	12	3,1

Table 15: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “We learn from each other in a systematic way”.

In the studies made in the field, it was often emphasised that staff learn from each other and through their assignments. At the same time, importance is attached to having more time for analysis and reflection, and time to read. However, there was nothing in the case studies that shows that a systematic method for learning from each other had been developed or created – other than good meetings. Learning rather emerges as being very dependent on the individual concerned and that there are shortcomings in possibilities for transfers of knowledge. The lack of time and suitable meeting places are some of the reasons given. As one member of staff said:

“Being an employee at Sida is fantastically instructive. The duties vary and the opportunities of developing in one’s work are enormous. I feel that it is extremely stimulating. At the same time there are occasions when I have almost banged my head against the wall when I have tried to get the hang of a certain duty. The person who did the same duty before is far away from here, sometimes communications don’t work and there is no one to ask.”

Where the psychosocial working environment is concerned, the focus is often on stress. The responses to the statement “I can do my job without feeling negative stress” do not indicate that there are any major problems of this type at Sida. At the same time it is naturally the case that every member of staff that does not agree with this statement can be in the risk zone for stress complaints if the problems are prolonged. More people experience negative stress in Stockholm. The NPOs state that they feel negative stress in their work to a much smaller extent than others. Their mean value (which cannot be seen in the table but can be found in the statistics) is 3.6.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	24	31	22	16	7	2,5
Field	15	13	17	36	19	3,3
Total	20	22	20	26	13	2,9

Table 16: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “I can do my job without feeling negative stress”.

This is a distribution of responses that naturally provides food for thought since staff working in the field often speak about their workload, lack of time for reflection, having to divide their energies instead having the desired focus. At the same time, the staff at the embassies emphasise that their work involves interesting, challenging projects and eventful working days. Negative stress is usually experienced if the work lacks a purpose or does not particularly provide any pleasure. Perhaps this feeling is more common among some of the staff in Stockholm. Several of the persons interviewed commented on the stimulation they felt at working in the partner countries.

In conversations on the working environment, the following aspects were often emphasised: the good atmosphere, good managers, good working conditions, informal work groups, freedom, openness and trust.

“The atmosphere is good, good management, closeness to management, a good working environment and also – never a dull moment!”

Also at the divisions studied in Stockholm, the staff expressed great satisfaction over their immediate working environment. Here the emphasis was placed on the open and friendly climate and the working groups which functioned well. For an external evaluator, the pleasant and obliging attitude at the different divisions was striking. The staff spoke in an open, reflective and interested way about their organisation and their duties – this is in itself a cultural manifestation.

Conclusions: The psychosocial working environment stands out as being good. Openness and friendliness permeate contacts. There is greater job satisfaction in the field than there is in Stockholm. This is a reason to return to the discussion on unclear responsibilities and roles at head office. At Sida attention is drawn to the considerable opportunities for individual learning – not least when one is in the field. The more systematic organisational learning is perceived to be neglected. The problems in the IT field (in this context both the information and the technology) are felt to be considerable.

4.7 Routines and rituals

Routines and rituals create security and order but they can also outstay their welcome and be considered to be unnecessary or annoying. One of the more meaningful rituals in an organisation is the introduction of new members of staff – the process of socialisation into an existing working culture. The questionnaire contained a statement to this effect: “At Sida members of staff are introduced to new duties in a satisfactory way.” Among the respondents in Stockholm we find that more than half are on the negative side of the scale and only a few (5%) completely agree (see table 17). Nor is the mean value (3.1) particularly high in the field for this statement – most chose the central figure on the five-point scale. The NPOs are somewhat more positive with a mean value of 3.6, but they also call attention to shortcomings. One NPO said:

“There was a great deal that was good in my introduction but I feel that it a lot can be done better. I need more information and better knowledge. I want to have more continuous feedback from Sida in Stockholm and I need a better understanding of the entire organisation.”

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	29	22	24	20	5	2,5
Field	17	11	33	22	17	3,1
Total	23	16	29	21	11	2,8

Table 17: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “At Sida members of staff are introduced to new duties in a satisfactory way.”

We know from the field studies that there are shortcomings in routines when there are changes in programme officers. There is often a time-lag between a person leaving his/her position and the arrival of the new person. This time-lag leads to deficiencies in the transfer of knowledge, regardless of the ambitions of the individuals concerned. Or as one of the programme officers commented:

“The person who had my position before had left the country when I arrived. There was a gap of six weeks between us and it was naturally not easy to get into what he had done even if he had made as good preparations as possible. In any case there were a number of files in the room when I arrived.”

In one of the field studies, the idea of NPOs as mentors for newly arrived programme officers was presented. NPOs do not change positions very often and can possibly function as “gate-openers” since they bear the institutional memory – they know how things functioned earlier at the workplace. Or as one member of staff put it:

“In any case it is necessary with the Field Vision that we also think about the role of the NPOs. It is not simple – it is not either-or. There is a great deal to think about here.”

One very clear norm at Sida is to take care of each other. The mean value is slightly higher in Stockholm (3.8) than in the field (3.4) but in both places more people are in agreement with the statement “At Sida we care about each other”. It is also very clear that it is not only the open and friendly attitude that is rated highly. It is also social routines such as having coffee breaks together, parties, celebrating birthdays and meetings. These routines function as a form of social cement in the organisation.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	0	7	27	49	18	3,8
Field	2	17	35	28	17	3,4
Total	1	12	31	38	18	3,6

Table 18: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “At Sida we care about each other.”

Routines are formalised solutions of earlier problems. Routines are necessary since they simplify our daily life and make it systematic. However, routines can also contribute to inefficiency since some routines – solutions – can remain in place although the problems no longer exist. This can mean that a way of acting that is no longer functional is retained. The reason is that routines are difficult to question since they are often such a natural part of behaviour. One consequence of this is that in many organisations the workload constantly increases since new routines are added while the inefficient old routines are retained. The statement in the questionnaire: “At Sida we often retain routines that are no longer necessary” shows a fairly variable view among the respondents (see table 19). The mean value is in the middle for both Stockholm and the field. It can also be difficult for people themselves to assess the value of some routines. Or as one member of staff put it:

“It is obvious that you sometimes think about the value of certain routines – filling in questionnaires or forms, or having to write certain documents. You can ask yourself if the production of documents is not in fact a routine in itself: a way of showing that a certain job has been done. Sometimes perhaps far too many documents are distributed, far too much information – in a routine fashion. But, I don’t know – it’s difficult for me to judge.”

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	5	16	39	32	8	3,2
Field	8	26	29	24	13	3,1
Total	7	21	34	28	11	3,1

Table 19: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “At Sida we often retain routines that are no longer necessary.”

Conclusions: The introduction to a workplace is of decisive importance for the speed and ways in which new members of staff are socialised into both their working duties and the organisation. The overlapping of members of staff from Stockholm in the field is a weak point. The importance of the NPOs in this context should not be underestimated. One characteristic of a good workplace can be that people care about each other. In this respect Sida is perceived as being a good workplace. In cultures there are always traditions that are difficult to break – a review of routines in order to merely retain those that are functional promotes positive development.

4.8 Myths and stories

What are the myths and stories? Are there stories that are always told to new members of staff? What stories are told at the coffee breaks, in the corridors?

Here our attention was drawn to two questions that recurred in all the case studies. The first concerned relations between Stockholm and the field. The statement is “There is a widespread impression that Sida Stockholm and the field do not understand each other” The reason for this statement lies in the stories told to us during the case studies. People in the field often said that it was a “long way to Stockholm” and told other stories with a focus on “us” (in the field) and “them” (in Stockholm). The question was also taken up in Stockholm, or as one member of staff expressed it:

“It is easy to become forget how things really are in Stockholm when you are stationed abroad. I know, because it usually happens to me. I wonder what they are actually up to in Stockholm. Why don’t they give me the information I request? When I am here I know that people here have a heavy workload, but that is easy to forget sometimes.”

Despite the fact that most share the experience expressed by the interviewee above – working for a period of time in a partner country and for a period of time in Stockholm – it is often stated that different divisions/units do not understand each other. Over half the respondents agree with the statement that there is a widespread perception that Sida Stockholm and the field do not understand each other. As many as 64 per cent of those in the field agree with the statement. This is a clear indication that this type of story is actually told in the organisation and is a part of the conception of Sida.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	0	21	26	38	14	3,5
Field	7	14	14	45	19	3,5
Total	4	18	20	42	17	3,5

Table 20: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “There is a widespread impression that Sida Stockholm and the field do not understand each other.”

Groups tend to be stronger if they are subjected to pressure or are isolated. It is not uncommon that an “us and them” thinking arises in organisations when the working conditions lead to different groupings. This is not a problem in itself. Problems only arise if the groupings lead to breakdowns in communications or internal divisions in respect of the overall goals. In connection with the changes that have been made, there is clearly a lack of clarity in respect of roles and responsibilities. One effect of this can be the conception that “we do not understand each other”. This is particularly obvious for people in the field since they have the idea that they sometimes lack resources to do their jobs. Irritation can arise when they see that services or documents are being produced in Stockholm that they do not have any direct benefit of in their tight working situation.

A “document-producing spaceship without contact with the earth”. This is a description of Sida Stockholm in a personal document written by a Sida employee. This was also a recurrent view in the case studies, even if it was not expressed as drastically. Many commented – more cautiously – on the large amount of documents and the profusion of information. The subject of several stories was the production of documents that were not read or the “waste” that exists in the organisation since it is so difficult to acquire an overview of all the documents that are produced. In the questionnaire, respondents were therefore asked to make up their minds about the statement: “There is a widespread impression that we produce too many documents”. As many as 93% in Stockholm and 73% in the field agreed with this statement. No other question shows such a definite picture of people’s perceptions.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	0	2	5	33	60	4,5
Field	4	11	11	22	52	4,1
Total	2	7	8	27	56	4,3

Table 21: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “There is a widespread impression that we produce too many documents.”

The fact that the field has a somewhat lower mean value (4.1 compared to 4.5 for Stockholm) is surprising, since it was a phenomenon that was often brought up in the case studies at the embassies. One comment from the field:

“Sida-Stockholm is a producer of documents and sometimes it seems as if they are not producing what we need. There are many guidelines and models. It is difficult to keep yourself updated when you are working in the field.”

Many of the stories that were mentioned at workshops, interviews or which we heard during coffee breaks underline the different experiences that people have had. These experiences are often fairly dramatic – in which the world of Sida is presented as being full of life and adventurous. The less adventurous stories focus on similarities and differences between different countries, on successes and failures, an “us and them” (and this can refer to different divisions at Sida) and on old managers.

The third questionnaire statement in this field refers to the feeling of belonging. This feeling is naturally created in an organisation such as Sida by the character of its mission, but it is also created by being together. During the course of the project we often encountered the expression “Sida-ite”. We do not believe that all members of staff are “Sida-ites” – for this it is necessary to have been at Sida for quite a while and to have created one’s own network. Once again the picture emerges of an organisation with a relatively good working climate. More than 60% of those who responded to the questionnaire agree that there is a strong sense of belonging at Sida. There is no difference between the field and Stockholm, or between NPOs and other members of staff.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	2	14	20	36	27	3,7
Field	2	9	27	33	29	3,8
Total	2	11	24	35	28	3,8

Table 22: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “Working at Sida gives me a strong feeling of belonging.”

Conclusions: The stories often have an “us and them” theme. There is a widespread impression that the field and Sida do not understand each other. It was mentioned on several occasions that Sida Stockholm produces many documents. One feeling possessed by many members of staff have is that there is an overabundance of information. The stories about unique Sida experiences are often full of life and sometimes a little adventurous.

4.9 Symbols

An employee in an organisation is seldom aware of the symbols that end up in the field of vision of an external observer. On the other hand, the symbols say something to those people who for one reason or another come into contact with the organisation. The first day of the study was spent on making observations which had that very aim – of capturing the immediate impression – the first impression. Among the impressions from the field, mention can be made of the feeling of “The Swedish Embassy”, the never-ending discussion on security and restrictions for the NPOs, the problems with communication/IT with Stockholm, the coffee breaks together and the informal atmosphere.

A very strong organisational symbol is the language used in the organisation. The language creates a feeling of belonging and simplifies communications. To an external observer, the use of language at Sida is initially a source of concern. What do the different expressions mean? The language of Sida is encumbered with abbreviations, and the responses received to the questionnaire indicate that the staff feel that it takes time to learn the language (see table 23).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	7	21	26	21	24	3,3
Field	9	20	20	34	16	3,3
Total	8	21	23	28	20	3,3

Table 23: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: “Sida’s language with all its abbreviations takes a long time to learn.”

Other symbols of importance include the physical environment. As an external observer in the field studies at the embassies, one is struck by the strict, distinguished “exterior” and the warm, welcoming “interior”, strongly permeated by a sense of belonging to the Swedish embassy and thus including

security routines, the Swedish flag and Swedish design. At the Stockholm office, the symbols correspond to the symbols that, at the external level, characterise Swedish government agencies: order, no strong visual manifestations, friendly reception.

The organisation's reputation can be seen as a symbol. The reputation is of decisive importance, not merely for how well the organisation functions externally but also for the staff's feeling of pride and job satisfaction. These issues were examined in the questionnaire partly through a statement on Sida's reputation among its partners and partly by a statement on Sida's reputation as an employer. The responses to the statement: "Sida has a good reputation among its partners in cooperation" indicate a very high degree of satisfaction. As many as 93% agreed with the statement (see table 24). No one completely disagrees with the statement. This is naturally a source of pride of the work being done by Sida staff.

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	0	0	12	38	50	4,4
Field	0	0	2	34	64	4,6
Total	0	0	7	36	57	4,5

Table 24: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: "Sida has a good reputation among its partners in cooperation".

The following quotation comes from a workshop in the field:

"In comparison with other donors, we are regarded as flexible and having faster decision-making routines."

Sida's reputation as an employer is not quite as good, in the opinion of the respondents to the questionnaire (see table 25). Here the mean value for Stockholm is 3.2. For those in the field the mean value is higher (3.6).

	Do not agree at all				Agree completely	Mean value
	1	2	3	4	5	
Stockholm	10	10	40	28	12	3,2
Field	7	10	29	29	26	3,6
Total	9	10	34	28	20	3,4

Table 25: Distribution of responses (in per cent) to the statement made in the questionnaire: "Sida has a good reputation as an employer".

Conclusions: The visual symbols are modest and do not deviate from what can be expected. A definite Sida jargon can be identified since Sida's language is full of abbreviations. Through the language, members of staff can enjoy a feeling of belonging or can be excluded. The reputation as a donor is perceived to be very good. This can be a source of pride.

5 Conclusions and recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

There are both similarities and differences between the divisions/units studied and perceptions at Sida. In the sections above, we have mainly pointed out the differences in views. In the conclusions we would like to emphasise more general aspects in the Sida culture that are of importance for the Field Vision and performance management.

As an idea, the Field Vision has considerable support in the divisions we studied, but in practice there are many doubts. The Field Vision has focused on working methods in the field and it is felt that Sida Stockholm's mission and working methods have been put in the shade. There is a feeling that the experience available at Sida Stockholm has not been utilised in the right way, in both the field and in Stockholm, with the consequence that there is a pronounced "us and them" thinking. The Field Vision is also perceived to have given more power to the embassies with delegated authority and less to some central functions. Many members of staff commented on the strengthened role of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and the fact that the cultural differences between the different organisations are so great. The organisation, roles and responsibilities are perceived as being ambiguous, which has the effect that new members of staff can find it difficult to make progress in their duties, which also leads to a strong emphasis on experience and social networks. There is a desire that expectations and responsibilities in the organisation should be clearly defined, particularly as many draw attention to the fact that Sida is in a transition period when a family-oriented (or social group-oriented) culture is being replaced by profession-oriented values.

Performance management is accepted superficially, but there is no unanimous view on what are good results from a Sida perspective. The lack of concrete, common goals is obvious. Formal control systems – control systems for operations – have a weak position in the divisions studied. The link between performance management and financial control systems stands out as weak. Instead, informal controls are emphasised in which values and norms govern forms of behaviour so that they are suitable for the task. There are also explicit wishes that the organisation and its management should be developed. Above all, individual members of staff need a stronger link between their work and results. Many make high demands on themselves, but feedback in respect of performance is sometimes weak.

It is obvious that, at the ideological level, the Field Vision and performance management do not encounter any strong verbal resistance. The Sida culture is characterised to a great extent by consensus in which value is placed on compromise. Instead of open conflicts, both individuals and groups of individuals choose to create their own platforms for action. This makes the implementation of new ideas particularly difficult since it cannot be expected that the staff will directly follow new decrees as they have a large number of their own solutions that function satisfactorily. The idea of "assuming responsibility" is also valued highly at Sida and the freedom to act is considerable as long as one maintains that one is "assuming responsibility" or "has experience". This can create difficulties in processes of change, since the resistance is vague and non-verbal. The freedom experienced by many members of staff can also be a sign of a lack of clarity in the organisation. In turn this lack of clarity can contribute to a feeling of unevenness in operations, with deficiencies in communications between divisions/units – not least between Stockholm and the field.

A change is seldom allowed to be made at the ideological level if strategies, control systems and structures do not follow the vision. Our examination of cultures at Sida shows that there are shortcomings in holistic thinking. Changes in one dimension have consequences in another but, if changes are vague, old habits win. Old routines are retained and the staff continue to act in the same way as before. More forceful action is needed on the part of Sida for the full implementation the Field Vision and performance management. The degree of freedom of different individuals can vary but it is obvious that some individuals (or groups of individuals) have considerable freedom at Sida. This has the effect that some act in accordance with their own views on how Sida should function and others must thus adapt to that person or group. This lack of a holistic perspective can also lead to “wastage” in the organisation since it is not clear what types of actions are the most efficient.

At Sida, attention was drawn to the considerable opportunities for individual learning – not least when one is in the field. Organisational learning of the more systematic type is perceived as being neglected. The introduction to a workplace is particularly important for the possibility to learn. The overlapping of staff from Stockholm in the field is a weak point. The importance of the NPOs in this context cannot be underestimated. The NPOs also have a special need of systematic knowledge enhancement about Sida when the Field Vision has a full impact.

One cultural problem that stands out is the profusion of information that is perceived to exist at Sida. An over-abundance of information results in a lack of attention. This means that information is ignored – either since it is not noticed at all or since one assumes that new information will come later in any case. Good development work is never implemented as a consequence of the over-abundance of information. This is a cultural problem at Sida that requires active efforts in order to counteract it.

Loyalty, commitment and responsibility are characteristics of the divisions studied and this indicates that there is a good foundation for future organisation development.

5.2 Recommendations

The point of departure of each recommendation is the aspect of the cultural web model that we consider to be of particularly great importance for processes of renewal at Sida.

Define Sida's organisational structure

Today, management and control of Sida is divided and there is a need for greater coordination. The study shows a lack of clarity, above all in the organisation structure at Sida Stockholm that leads to “wastage” in the organisation and that Sida as a whole does not function optimally.

Define roles, expectations, responsibilities and powers

The allocation of responsibilities and powers should be clearly specified. Reporting channels should be defined and implemented in order to strengthen feedback.

Give priority to the information issue

Here we refer in the first place to the profusion of information experienced by members of staff even if from time to time technical problems can be extremely frustrating when they occur. The profusion of information leads to shortcomings in attention. Despite the fact that very good development work is being done at Sida, it does not always reach everyone. Here vigorous efforts are required.

Systematise learning

Develop systems for the transfer of roles – this is important not least when new programme officers are introduced at embassies. The Field Vision also has consequences for NPOs and increases their need for the systematic acquisition of knowledge of all aspects of Sida's work.

Prepare for the new generation

Sida is in a process of transition. Within a few years, many of the staff will retire and leave Sida. Sida's reputation as an employer (its trademark on the labour market) is perceived to be relatively strong, which is necessary to meet ongoing changes. The new generation, an increase in the volume of development cooperation, new partners in cooperation and new tasks create new demands in respect of the employer's trademark.

Literature

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- Schein, E.H, 1985, *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco. Jossey-Bass Inc. Publishers
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Appendix 1: Method

We use a technique for culture analyses that has been developed by Schein (1985, 1999), and which is based on research into organisation cultures. The procedure is described below.

Step 1: Before the visits to embassies and departments, an understanding is created of the organisational unit to be studied by reading relevant documents.

Step 2: First day at the unit.

Visiting the organisation.

Observations of cultural artefacts – the first impression.

Short, unprepared questions (of a social character) to members of staff available).

Step 3: Second day at the unit.

A workshop on assumptions, perceptions and values with a representative sample of members of staff (8–10 persons).

Introduction to our method and the use of the concept of corporate culture.

Discussion of our first impressions.

Mapping different cultural expressions and assumptions with the aid of the Cultural Web model.

Step 4: Third day at the unit to be studied.

Interviews with a representative sample of members of staff.

Supplement data collected previously during the workshop in order to increase understanding.

Step 5: Analysis to understand the paradigm/pattern of basic assumptions in the case in question.

Step 6: Feedback of the results. Report to each unit studied.

As described in chapter 2, we supplement Schein's analysis model with the so-called Cultural Web Model developed by Johnson (1992) and Johnson and Scholes (1997). Using this approach, an organisation's culture is described with the aid of nine themes (see figure 1 in chapter 2). These themes are numbered in the model merely to show our procedure. This is in no way related to the importance of the themes. The Cultural Web Model is used as a tool, particularly at workshops, but also in studies of documents, interviews and observations.

In the analyses of documents we searched for words that denote values. In these analyses we focused primarily on the structures – the words. We have sorted the words and asked the questions: Where do they appear? How often and in what context? What do the words represent? We have compiled the value words/expressions that occur and how often they occur in the documents. Examples of documents that have been studied are Perspectives on Poverty (PoP), Sida at Work, Sida Looks Forward, Field Vision project report (draft), Individual planning and development talks, Human Resource Reports, The Role of Locally Employed Staff, Management Policy, Staff Flower, Memorandum from the Learning Strategy project, Organisation survey (2003), a number of issues of the staff magazine, DISA, and a sample of letters and travel reports. In the document analyses we have focused on finding value words/expressions that express how Sida is portrayed as an organisation and employer.

The questionnaire contained questions related to the circles in the Cultural Web Model. The questionnaire was distributed to 153 members of staff of whom 55 were at Sida-Stockholm and the remainder (98 persons) at embassies with fully delegated powers (which we have referred to throughout the report as the "field"). Approximately 65% (100 persons) of those contacted responded to the questionnaire.

Of the respondents, 59% were women and 41% were men. The breakdown between Stockholm and the field was almost equal. This means that 47% of those who responded to the questionnaire had their workplace in Stockholm and 53% worked abroad. From the non-response analysis we cannot find any systematics in non-response. There are no differences in non-response in respect of gender, age or location (Stockholm versus the field). The response frequency is assessed to be rather low but satisfactory in view of the fact that the questionnaire was distributed during the summer months and holiday period. There was a certain internal non-response in respect of some of the questions (they were not answered by the respondents). The internal non-response rate is small. Nor where the internal non-response rate is concerned can we see any pattern that would indicate errors in the questionnaire. It is important to state that the questionnaire was not intended to give an overall picture of perceptions at Sida. It is not possible to statistically generalise the results in view of the small sample of respondents. The aim of the questionnaire was to see tendencies and to obtain indications of how perceptions vary at Sida. These tendencies are used to reflect the empirical material collected in the four case studies. We have chosen to present the statistics from the questionnaires mainly in percentage form, despite the fact that the number of persons who responded was rather small (100 persons). We have done this in order to simplify comparisons between different groups. We have used mean values to show tendencies in the responses received.

The case studies have been made at four different organisational units at Sida – two embassies with fully delegated powers and two divisions at the head office in Stockholm. Workshops have been held at all four units and have been supplemented by interviews (in all 21 interviews). Both units and persons providing information (persons who participated in workshops or have been interviewed) have been kept anonymous in the report.

Reports from Sida Internal Audit

- 96/1 Sale of ANC's building society flat in Stockholm. Tord Olsson**
- 96/2 Double payments to Lärarhögskolan and Folkens Museum in collaboration with Botswana. Tord Olsson, Mats Sundström**
- 96/3 Recipient report as an instrument for Sida's follow-up and control. Mats Sundström**
- 96/4 Sida's use of the independent audit as an instrument for management and control. Tord Olsson**
- 97/1 Reliability of Sida's IT operations. Arthur Andersen AB**
- 98/1 Sida's assessment work during the preparation process. Mats Sundström**
- 98/2 Sida's disbursement procedures. Tord Olsson**
- 99/1 Sida's work with partners' procurement procedures during preparation and implementation. Mats Sundström**
- 00/1 Sida's follow up of projects channeled via the UN. Ann-Charlotte Birging, Mats Sundström**
- 00/2 Sida's follow up bilateral projects. Mats Sundström**
- 00/3 Sida's handling of support to Paraguay via the Swedish department of International Commission of Jurists. Mats Sundström**
- 00/4 Exposure of Sida's procurement to competition. Ernst & Young**
- 00/5 Sida's work with humanitarian aid. Wiveca Holmgren**
- 01/01 Sida's research collaboration – a review of SAREC. Wiveca Holmgren**
- 02/01 Sida's support to the Western Balkan Countries. Mats Alentun**
- 02/02 Review of Swedish Embassy in Windhoek. Wiveca Holmgren, Thorbjörn Bergman**
- 02/03 Review of Swedish Embassy in Vientiane. Wiveca Holmgren, Thorbjörn Bergman**
- 03/01 Sida's contract financed technical collaboration – a review of INEC/contract-financed technical cooperation and Sida-East. Wiveca Holmgren**
- 03/02 Review of Section for development cooperation in La Paz. Wiveca Holmgren, Thorbjörn Bergman**
- 04/01 Sida's Control Environmen – a Feasibility Study. Arne Svensson, Wiveca Holmgren**
- 04/02 Sida's management of Contributions in Corruption-Prone Environments. Mats Alentun**
- 04/03 Rapporter från Sidas internrevision 1995–2003 – en sammanställning. Folke Hansson**
- 04/04 Organisationskulturer på Sida Carin Eriksson, Barbro Forsberg, Wiveca Holmgren**
- 04/05 Organisation Cultures at Sida Carin Eriksson, Barbro Forsberg, Wiveca Holmgren**



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