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The Critical Incident Technique
in Knowledge Management-Related Contexts

A tool for exploration / planning,
evaluation and empowerment / animation

Written and edited by

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About the Authors

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The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a tool for exploration/planning, the evaluation of projects and empowerment/animation activities:

a) Planning/exploration: a new project, project component or activity should be designed. For this purpose the use of exploratory, i.e. creating a picture of the situation "from the scratch", describing the point of departure (base line) and giving recommendations for improvements, approaches, action....

b) evaluation: a project should be assessed. In this situation the method should contrast the expected situation (the expected results) against reality. This should also lead to recommendations for improvements but based on explanations of achievements and shortcomings.

c) empowerment/animation: a new project should be designed where the empowerment of certain groups (i.e. women) are the main perspective. The general key objective of the project is "to build local capacity" , mobilisation of own knowledge and resources in giving the target group a mean to express themselves and their view of certain incidents.

Critical Incidents (CI) are short narrative descriptions of situations where there is a problem of a systemic organisational and institutional adaptation, or where there is a problem rising from differences between the interacting parties. Critical Incident Technique is a qualitative tool to analyse and unearth the problem solving behaviour of people. It points a critical problem situation and packs it into a short story. This will trigger off the reflection process of the interviewed person and animate his/her problem solving behaviour. The Critical Incident Technique is situational and relies on the realistic situation of its narrative. The Critical Incidents are either presented as a story only or can be equipped with alternative explanations and feedback. In the case where beforehand "solutions" are prepared and discussed with the interview partners (i.e. the persons interviewed, the interviewees), the interview partners are expected to choose the "best" explanation considering the context.

1. The background

1.1   What is the Critical Incident Technique?

CIT was developed during World War II by John Flanagan, then head of the Aviation Psychology Program. Flanagan analyzed actual incidents of success and failure in training and worked backward to determine the specific behaviours that led to positive or negative results. The technique has been further developed. Since the 1950ies the Critical Incident Technique has become widely used as an action-oriented assessment method and today is recognized as an effective exploratory and investigative tool. The advantages of the Critical Incident technique are its non-academic and action-oriented approach.

The Critical Incident Technique is a qualitative research methodology that has been used successfully to identify recommendations for effective practice, and competencies for a wide variety of professionals in many disciplines.

The chief value of the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) for knowledge management studies resides in its potential to help researchers understand the knowledge-related behaviours critical to complex situations and proceedings in and between all kind of groupings.

The Critical Incident method is often classified as a cognitive technique because it focuses on the acquisition or use of knowledge or information by the interview partner. However, the process by which the information is given by the interview partner is in a sense experiential: information is given in the context or a possible incident, which simulates the experience of entering an incident as an actor, but without the risks of failure and embarrassment.

Critical Incidents also cover through this realistic story the affect, i.e. attitudes and emotions, as well as behaviours and skills of the people involved. Furthermore, the method uses the behavioural techniques of feedback and reinforcement. Therefore the cognitive, affective, and behavioural components are brought together in the Critical Incidents method, both in the content of what is learned and the process of learning.

The main advantage of the Critical Incident technique can be seen in the mutual benefit of both sides. Whereas the interviewer can gather the relevant information he/she is looking for, the interviewees as well can benefit from the Critical Incident experience, as they better understand behaviours critical to situations and proceedings important for their context.

2. The concept

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a very useful tool for:

a) collecting data for planning, assessments, base line studies, fact-findings (and applied research, usually within a wider research framework, eg. Action-Research)

b) reflecting on professional practice

The Critical Incident Technique is a set of procedures for gathering and analyzing reports of incidents. Incidents typically include two or three features: (1) a description of a specific situation, (2) an account of the actions or behaviour of a key player in the incident, (3) and the outcome or result. Used most frequently in management, and, specifically, human resource management, the technique has been used in numerous ways, for example, to establish performance requirements for positions. It has also been used widely in education, health, information systems development, and customer service.

Critical Incidents are based on a description of a certain event (incident), they do not explain the factors which led to this incident. In other words, Critical Incidents tell us what happened, but not why it happened. The possible causes are to be developed together with the interview partners (see Example Step VII).

The case of the Critical Incidents should be close to reality. Within this realistic framework of the story the interview partner is inclined to identify with persons or situations. Furthermore the contextuality of the story is supposed to match experiences the interview partner has had before. The form of a thrilling or astonishing story, hence critical and a well formulated question at the end of the story (e.g. why was the proposal refused? why has XY been fired? etc.) motivates the interview partner to become affected by/be part of the narrative. He/she can more easily relate to the concreteness of the story than to abstract questions. The case should be prototypical and provide on one side a concrete, tangible, familiar pattern, but on the other side some significant strangeness and impact to trigger off reflection & imagination process beyond standard (stereotype) answers. This active or even interactive participation in the tool is one of the reasons why interview partner appreciate the method. Also the learning success of the CIT can be classified as high: an incident in „real life" will remind the interview partner of the Critical Incident, and they will be able to come up with previously discussed solutions.

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3.   The tool

The Critical Incident Method is a flexible set of principles and does not consist of a single rigid set of rules. The method's flexibility is also demonstrated in the variety of its application ranging from observing effective and ineffective ways of doing something, to looking at helping or hindering factors, collecting functional or behavioural descriptions of events or problems, or determining characteristics that are critical to important aspects of an activity/situation or event.

The CIT is a method for getting a subjective report while minimising interference from stereotypical reactions or received opinions. Most importantly Critical Incidents minimize the effect of desired answers as the interviewees are drawn into the story. The user is asked to focus on one or more critical incidents which they could experience personally in the field of activity being analysed. A critical incident is defined as one which can have an important effect on the final outcome.

4. Advantages and limitations

The CIT is an open-ended retrospective method of finding out how the people concerned situate themselves with regard to the field being explored. It focuses on patterns of behaviour, resources, skills and knowledge. It is more flexible than a questionnaire or survey and is especially recommended in situations where the only alternative is to develop a questionnaire or survey from the start. It focuses on people's behaviour, so it can be used as long as the inherent bias of retrospective judgement is understood.

4.1   Advantages

1. The Critical Incident Technique is resource-oriented. It relies on the potential abilities and former experience of the interview partners and makes potentials/ideas tangible and creates awareness about resources/potentials/ideas. CIT effectively empowers the interview partner through this.
2. Interview partners feel their views and their criteria are being taken seriously as they can come up with solutions relevant to them in their context,
3. As stories are told out of the perspective of a third (invented) person the interview partner can recognize himself in this "alter ego" and support his "alter ego" with his ideas without being too exposed. The interview partner can therefore respond more openly to the story, as it is not about "him" or "her".
4. Critical Incidents are based within a context which is usually familiar to the interview partner. This contextuality gives the tool more meaning and makes the interview partners consider themselves to be part of the story.
5. Interview partners are challenged to be conceptually creative. Often CIT can be an eye-opener for them as they have to explain things or come up with solutions, which for them seemed to be trivial or have never been formulated. Tacit knowledge is activated with this method. This technique is helpful in emphasising the features that will make a system particularly vulnerable.
6. CIT encourages the interview partners to get mentally involved in a certain situation, procedure or chain. This living through a realistic situation leads to the fact that a story is not only heard but experienced by the interview partners.
7. The critical incident technique provides rich information: The Critical Incident Technique generates honest profound answers in many cases. Through the story told in the Critical Incident Technique a high degree of affectedness can be attained. Therefore the possibility to hide behind "general" answers can be limited.

8. In contrast to surveys, Critical Incidents provide us with answers which are longer and more detailed because the Critical Incident Technique reflects a natural setting, the focus is on participant's perspectives.

4.2   Limitations

1. As for all qualitative methods, also in the Critical Incident Analysis no hard quantified data is produced. Outsiders can always insist on the "weakness" of the data or on the results not being representative as they only reflect "special cases".
2. CIT – skills alone will not be helpful in analyzing a certain field of interest as a person with in-depths knowledge of a certain field has more ability to create, conduct and analyze the Critical Incidents. The more an interviewer is an expert in a certain field the better the Critical Incidents story he/she can come up with and the easier for him/her to place the answers in the right context.
3. Critical Incidents can be time consuming and laborious as a "good story" and clear "central questions" are prerequisites for a successful use of the method. The technique's aim is to produce dense material. To make most out of this rich material a concise analysis structure is highly needed.
4. The better the Critical Incident, the nearer it is to every day life aspects, the more interview partners can identify with the story told to them and the more useful/authentic the answers they come up with.

5. Practical guide

In the following you find a "methodological" input on every step of the Critical Incident Technique and within these steps boxes shall illustrate how this step was implemented in three examples:

Example 1: Identify and plan KM measures in village farmer extension system in Rural Laos

Example 2: Evaluate how measures for knowledge sharing among different development projects are implemented in an intergovernmental development agency

Example 3: Gender village association

Nonetheless it should be emphasised that the Critical Incident Technique does not consist of a single rigid set of rules governing such data collection. Rather it should be thought of as a flexible set of principles which must be modified and adapted to meet the specific situation at hand.

5.1   Preparation

Determine to what kind of questions you need answers. What is the interest of your evaluation/planning/empowerment? The questions would typically be defined by the terms of references (ToR). It can be helpful to define with the responsibles what the expectations of the Project Leaders are. Therefore with the expectations defined you can set a benchmark and have a basis to compare the results with. In other words, a project has had a successful impact or effect if collaborators show a behaviour which meets or exceeds their project leaders expectations. In other applications the questions might remain open, i.e. it could be the aim of the CIT to come up with the right questions.

`See Example Step I.`

5.2   Assessment Design

How to form your sample:

Systematic contrasting through case comparisons aims chiefly at covering an as broad as possible interview target group. Individual cases (interview partners) are compared to one another with respect to their substantive characteristics and features, such as sex, region and occupational level (hierarchy, job definition etc) according to the principle of maximum contrast and similarities and differences are sought.

- Define beforehand (possibly with your client) which sections or organizational aspects should be interviewed and what your hypothesis is, for example: "A certain group has a certain way to use a Knowledge Management system for their projects". Then try to define the important categories (sex, region, occupational level) and then choose interview partners, which you can put in maximum contrast (see example). The definition of the categories must reflect the ToR (Terms of References) of the evaluation.

- You can also use these contrast groups again to analyze your material by using the differences between the groups to explain some of the outcomes, for example: "which group's procedure is consistent with the should-be expectations of the client?"

See Example Step II.

5.3   The procedure

1. Choose a critical episode:

This would be something that stands out for the situation you want to evaluate, e.g. a successful or unsuccessful teaching/learning incident, an unsuccessful project situation, a specific problem presented to you by the client (communication difficulties, problems with a system, etc.). The incident doesn't have to be real, but it needs to be realistic. Most important: tell a story! (see example)

Situations/stories must be:

- a unique situation, but still plausible in daily context, so:
- familiar enough to relate easily (interviewed person must be able to put herself into the place of the other)
- relating to someone else's destiny allows to keep safe distance ("Imagine, one day your neighbour and friend XY is coming to you and telling you an incredible story: ... At the end, he asks you for advise. What would you tell him to do?")
- Situation must still be somehow strange and extraordinary (not daily), so some reflection is needed and no ready-made answer is at disposition (usually they are neither reflected nor very adequate) including a surprising turn in the course of the story might also contribute to the prevention of common patterns and precluded answers

2. After telling the interview partner your story you want him/her to come up with more elaborate answers than just "yes" or "no". Now, you would want the interview partners to fill you in with their thoughts and ideas you want to hear "their story". For this, you must ask open questions which allow them to elaborate their answers.

Communication strategies, which generate story-telling:

A preformulated introductory question is a means to focus the discussion on the problem under study. At the same time, the question has to be so broadly formulated that it functions like an empty page which is filled out by the interviewee in his or her own words, structured in his or her own way.

- Such a question could be worded as follows (after you finished telling the incident to the interview partner): "Tell me how it all happened!" The last statement explicitly invites the interviewee to turn away from the generally expected traditional style of interview of a question-and-answer game.

- In the continued progress of communication, general exploration serves to successively disclose the subject's view of the problem. The interviewer can ask questions which give the desired detail on the topics defined previously in the ToRs.

- Ad-hoc questions are necessary if certain topics are left out by the interviewees but are needed to secure comparability of the interviews. These are activated by key words or can also consist of single standardized questions and be asked at the end of the interview to avoid a question-and-answer game in the main part of the interview: for example, "Would you use tool XY in this context?"

5.4   Compose a Critical Incident

1. The components for incidents are the following:

a) they consist of antecedent information (what led up to it)

b) they contain a detailed description of the experience itself (action)

c) they usually describe the outcome of the incident (reaction)

See Example Step III.

2. Describe the incident to include:

- when and where it (supposedly) happened (time of day, location and social and organisational context)
- what actually happened (who said or did what)
- what people involved were thinking and feeling at the time and just after the incident

The interview partner is requested to read/listen to this incident which led up to a (non-)successful completion of a certain action

See Example Step IV.

3. Formulate questions to the interview partner which help to identify:

- what led up to the incident in his opinion
- how do they deal with the incident
- how the incident could have been avoided
- resources that people could mobilize.

In the interview situation the interview partners can be corrected if they attempt to reply with generalities, not tying themselves to the specific incident. This is more difficult to control if you are employing a written form, so ensure that the introductory instructions are clear.

The following questions might be helpful in analysing the incident:

- What is the problem?
- Why is it a problem?
- What would you do if you were the person in the story?
- Who would you ask for help?
- Why does this incident (not) stand out?

- What is going on?
- Where would you have acted the same as the persons in the story, where would you have acted differently?
- Did a particular mindset/bias lead to the event?
- Could you have interpreted this event differently from another point of view?
- What can you learn from this episode?
- How could you avoid the problem in the future?
- How could you now solve the problem which already exists?
- How can you prepare yourself to handle such problems?

- Now we come to your "dreams". Imagine you could have or do whatever you would consider as helpful, good, effective, efficient.
    o What would be your preferred (ideal) option/choice?
    o Why don't you choose this in reality? Why is it only a dream and what prevents you from doing it? What is lacking or what are the obstacles?
    o What would have to happen/change so you would/could do it?

See Example Step V.

5.5   Conduct the interviews – Helpful remarks

- **On unearthing all the options:** In the first turn you will get an easy - yet maybe not very interesting and meaningful - answer. You want more. And with each cycle the person needs to reflect more and over some time comes to possibilities he/she had forgotten. So it's worth insisting a bit. Hook up on promising beginnings and explore trails to their end.
  Ex. on selling products: "We would sell to the trade with the highest offer" - "How to find him?" - "We would ask people." - "Which people?" - "People from neighboring villages" - "who else?" - "People living in town." - "Who would you ask in town ?" - "Our cousin"
- **If people get stuck**, let them think and find their way first. Only when you can be sure that they don't come up with anything to say anymore, then you may provide a hint or keyword and open a new dimension of answers.
- E.g. if they don't think about using "media" like the telephone, mention something and from there they might go on by themselves.
- **Also look for the informal!** These are often more important sources - "the real ones". Ask for them and make it easier to reveal them. E.g. introduce it by saying: "In our country, the clever people meet important knowledge holders after work for a beer and discuss things there. Is there something similar in your context?"
- If their **ideas seem to be exhausted**, directly address and name more possibilities that you think they might have overlooked. But do it in non-invasive ways, not suggesting them a right or wrong answer!
- Watch carefully that you **don't enter into a** kind of **technical debate**! We are not interested in technical answers and explorations. We don't want to have any solutions how to sell sesame for a better price or how to fight against chicken   diseases! We only want to learn about what problem solving strategies people use, and who they address for help!
- Try to **be precise** - really precise. Ask back until you have got it exactly, who and what and where! Approximation can be misleading. Ask for concrete names of persons or institutions, even if only as an example and once you have that try to locate / identify exactly about what / who you're talking.
- Try to **separate hierarchical groups**, e.g. village authorities from villages. They may inhibit each other from speaking out due to rules and respect of each other!
- Most important**: there are no right or wrong answers**!!! Everything that the interviewed person mentions is correct and true! Our purpose is to find out about their reality and network - it is not to do an exam! Please explain this to the interviewed person and make sure he/she has understood this very well!

5.6   Analyse Critical Incident

1. Formulate initial findings and ideas. Compare your initial findings with the views of other key people (e.g. other interview partners, the client, other specialists in the field) to:

- discuss your interpretation

- modify your analysis, where necessary, in the light of peer suggestion, advice, perspective.

See Example Step VI.

2. Through discussion formulate categories for central questions.

Data analysis is conducted on the basis of cognitive interest, forming categories that emerge from the data, and determining the specificity or generality of the categories. It is a good idea to double-check with other experts/colleagues the categories you come up with as a credibility check.

When you have gathered a sufficient quantity of data you should be able to categorise the answers according to the central questions and produce a relative importance weighting for each - some "solutions" will be given frequently and some less frequently. It is important to make a difference in your report between facts/insights and potential/recommendations.

For a summative evaluation, you should collect answers which will enable you to make statements such as "many of the field managers/collaborators/villagers have given this or this motive for the incident." If you are going to do the same kind of evaluation a number of times, you may find that you can summarise the CIT categories you have extracted into a checklist which you can present to your client. The checklist items may function as memory probes but you do risk contaminating the data by the implicit suggestions of the checklist items: the essence of the CIT is that users report their spontaneous experiences.

The details you chose to include depends on the purpose of the report. If you name collaborators and clients, clarify issues of confidentiality. Better yet, use pseudonyms.

Collect and add verbatim quotes of participants, they have an highly illustrative effect and the readers have an instant connection to the reality of the interview partners. Furthermore verbatim quotes underline the affective component of the Critical Incident Technique in the report.

6. Literature

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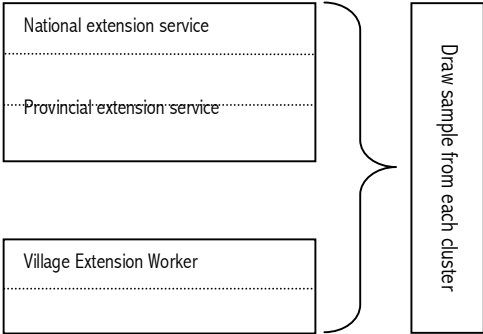
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7. Examples

Step (Reference to Text)	a. CITs for Planning Purposes (explorative CITs)	b. CITs for Evaluation Purposes (confirming CITs)	c. CITs for Empowerment Purposes (animating CITs)
Example	Identify and plan KM measures in village farmer extension system in Rural Laos	Evaluate the implementation of a knowledge management project, aiming at the sharing of experiences and ideas among different development projects in an intergovernmental development agency	Empower women of a village association to self-consciously deal with problems in a credit system Note: in this context, it is advisable to use a variety of critical incidents. This is to avoid the impression that empowerment is limited to certain specific situations
I. Objective **(chapter 5.1)**	To analyse the effective communication channels and ways, which transport agricultural knowledge; identify nodes, knowledge pools and bottlenecks	To describe effectiveness of project measures on KM; contrast the expected outcomes with achievements	To empower the target group in problem solving and dealing with critical situations. Women in the village ABC in Mali themselves identify possible solutions to a presented situation and through this recognize their own capacities and resources.
Define expectations	Gain the factual planning basis for future project activities	Assess the effectiveness of measures that tend to be tacit and hard to manifest; identify behavioural change; gain suggestions for improvement based on a retrospective on experiences	Ignite a reflection process with people, mobilize resources, create an idea for own capacity of problem solving and wealth of solutions

II. Design (chapter 5.2)	Focus group interviews (using CITs) with village farmers & representatives of governmental extension service.	Telephone/Skype interviews using the critical incident technique.	Focus group discussions (using CITs) with members of the women association.
	Defined beforehand with project leader and local collaborators of extension project	In accordance with KM Leaders beforehand defined target groups were categorized in a set of four dimensions, using the method of „maximum contrast" (cf. chapter 4).	As the purpose is to empower the individual members of the group, it is not possible to work with a representative group. All members that should benefit from the effort are to be involved.
	Target groups were categorised according to structure and organisation of governmental extension service on one side and village farmer extension system on the other	The following five target groups have been defined:	
	National extension service · · · Provincial extension service · · · Village Extension Worker — Draw sample from each cluster	Tech Department Staff — Tech. Advise — Backstoppers; Head Quarter — KM Leaders / Resonsibles — Field; Centralised Project Managers — Project Operation — Decentralised Project Managers	
III. Framework of the incident on which "context" is the fictional story built? (chapter 5.3 & 5.4.1)	Antecedent: Farmers in the past had experienced chicken diseases, which caused great losses. Trough the introduction of chickens vaccination, most of these epidemics were stopped and eliminated	Antecedent: Collaborators of the international agency have lived trough many situations of relative "isolation", ie. not having fast and immediate access to knowledge, experience and support of peers in situations of increased stress and need; experience of competition as a major constraint	Antecedent: Women have experienced microcredit schemes, they have seen potentials but also the problems and dangers linked to these systems, in the face of which they sometimes feel helpless.
	Action in the incident: Chickens are again dying; farmers immediately suspect another known epidemic and ask for the veterinary to vaccinate chickens. To everybody's surprise, chickens continue to die.	Action in the incident: A high pressure situation happens to a colleague, where vital — personal and institutional — interests require, that he/ she has quick access to all kind of knowledge available in the organisation; yet the timely constrains don't allow for an extensive search nor for extensive selection procedures, so the provided knowledge has to be selective, relevant and to the point.	Action in the incident: A fictional village woman — with whom they can easily identify — suffers from severe problems emerging from micro credit. She experiences an actual downward spiral.
	Reaction: Farmers are perplex by the expected outcome not to take place. Seeing challenged their current patterns of interpretation, they need to seek alternative ways and means to handle the situation (→ object of research)	Reaction: The person has to mobilise all possible channels and sources of knowledge, especially "instant" ways of procurement (no long research efforts) and those	The incident then splits up into several different probable scenarios, indicating ways out of the spiral.
			Reaction: Women get attentive and question the initial reaction of powerlessness. They question the attitude of resignation and rather dive into exploring different ways and possibilities of identifying solutions themselves, for which they can mobilise own resources and knowledge.

		relying/ depending on the "selfless" assistance of peers	The scenarios trigger a reflection process. Through it, they gain control over the situation and experience that they themselves actually do have a range of possibilities, based on their own capacities.
IV. The story **(chapter 5.4.2)**	Farmers in the village ABC are renown for their thorough and professional way to raise chickens. They have followed trainings, have built chicken houses, and feed them high-quality fodder. Some day, 10 chickens are found dead in the chicken run. People are puzzled, because everybody knows about vaccinating the chickens and they immediately call the veterinary. He immediately passes by and confirms that vaccination had taken place according to the rules. Vaccination can't be the issue. Yet, he doesn't know what the origin of this disease is and has no cure.	The story, part 1: ABC, 43 years old and from country UVW, is a project manager in the project office in the city XYZ. He is working with the agency for 4 years now and he has been managing a project for 3 years. ABC has been doing a good job. You (the interviewee) have met ABC before and found him a nice person. This morning, ABC has received an E-mail from a superior at the agency head office. The mail says that a donor has hold out the prospect of financing a supplementary, completely new project in the financial order of 2 mio US$ over two years, so a considerable amount of money. There is a competition in the agency for that project. The communication of ABC's superior makes clear, that for the continuous existence of the country programme it is important for ABC to submit a good project proposal and get this funding. He now asks ABC to prepare it within 1 month, which then will be submitted to a jury. The donor has established the following 4 criteria for this supplementary grant: I. it must be an innovative employment creation project based on recent approaches and best practices, II. they want to see experiences of other projects (within and outside of the ILO) taken into consideration and incorporated, III. they want to see coherence and integration among the projects and IV. the gender dimension should be attributed special attention.	The story, part 1: ABC is a 35-year old woman in XYZ, a rural village in the south of Mali. She is mother of 5 small children and together with her husband is running a small farm. ABC is member of the women's association and through this gets a micro-credit to start a small enterprise for roasting peanuts. To run this small manufactory she needs the collaboration of her husband. He visits a training to run the equipment. Over 6 months they are well established and ABC is in schedule with her repayment scheme. After 6 month, her husband falls ill and subsequently, she has high expenses for the doctor and medical treatments. He is no longer able to run the equipment and after 4 months even dies. ABC now is highly indebted and she can no longer operate her business. The regulations of the women's association credit scheme are clear, that she can't get another credit as long as she isn't meeting the obligations of any previous ones. ABC becomes more and more impoverished and can't take care of her children anymore. → Ask questions for part 1 (cf. below) The story, part 2: Scenario 1: The women's association is calling a meeting to collectively find solutions. DEF, a neighbour of ABC and

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		ABC is quite under pressure with terminating his current, ongoing project. He asks you (the interviewee) for advice how to proceed in order to draft this project efficiently, to fulfil all the criteria of the Dutch and where to obtain the information needed.	also member of the same association has been observing the business and in fact has been convinced by its potential. She – who previously never had a credit – is applying for one and offers ABC to take the manufactory over from her, paying her the amount, that ABC needs to repay a part of her debts. Because DEF also needs the know-how, she is even ready to employ ABC on a partial basis, which allows ABC to repay the rest over time.

ABC is quite under pressure with terminating his current, ongoing project. He asks you (the interviewee) for advice how to proceed in order to draft this project efficiently, to fulfil all the criteria of the Dutch and where to obtain the information needed.

The story, part 2:

After one week, ABC has done quite some work, has followed some of your advice and has talked with several people in country UVW and elsewhere. He has developed some good ideas already on which he exchanges with many persons in his personal network.

Now he receives another message from his superior at HQ, and it is not good news! The message says:

☐ ABC suddenly is requested to go on an urgent mission. So ABC has to submit the draft within one week only!

☐ Not only that but the superior is very clear that the success of this bidding is immediately vital for the future employment of ABC within the ILO, because without this grant there are not sufficient means to secure his further employment.

☐ Furthermore he insinuates that apparently one of the other competing departments seems to be the clear front runner in this competition.

Some variations, introduced on the basis of answers in Q1 in order to close certain doors and explore more, other alternatives:

☐ [*when relying very much on local informal networks*] ABC's superior is afraid that someone in the local context in *country* has passed on many good ideas of ABC to other competing projects. So he advises ABC to be cautious in mobilising the informal local

also member of the same association has been observing the business and in fact has been convinced by its potential. She – who previously never had a credit – is applying for one and offers ABC to take the manufactory over from her, paying her the amount, that ABC needs to repay a part of her debts. Because DEF also needs the know-how, she is even ready to employ ABC on a partial basis, which allows ABC to repay the rest over time.

Scenario 2:

ABC has a brother in the same village, who has recently returned from the capital. The women's association is ready to disburse a supplementary credit to allow her brother the required training. The brother is willing to take over this task, but puts the question of the load of debts – he has an own family to take care of.

Scenario 3:

The women's association is funding a micro-insurance scheme. Women have to contribute monthly premiums as part of the micro-credit repayment. The association is ready to make an exception and retroactively insure the credit of ABC, which allows her to obtain a new credit. The association is willing to make this arrangement under the condition that ABC with the next credit is paying a slightly increased insurance premium.

→ Ask questions for part 2 (cf. below)

		network, as it seems to be "leaking". ☐ [*when relying very much on certain specific persons*] The main information source so far is a very experienced and knowledgeable expert. He is now no longer available, because he leaves for a mission and will be out of reach. The story, part 3: Two weeks later you get the worrying message: it didn't work out: ABC's proposal didn't get funded and another one has landed the contract. The justification of the TC-RAM panel points out 4 reasons: ☐ The project proposal was not innovative enough ☐ It did not draw enough from other experiences and lessons learnt in other projects in the ILO ☐ There was no genuine coherence and linking to the other projects ☐ Gender didn't receive enough importance Now the big analysis of the why and how starts. Everybody wants to learn from this incident. Because you had been involved, they come to you and ask you for your opinion.	
V. The questions asked **(chapter 5.4.3)**	1. What would the farmers do in this situation 2. Who would they ask for helps? 3. How would they get in contact with them? 4. Why would they choose those informants? 5. What could be possible alternatives? Also "dream" about ideal ways 6. What could farmers prevent from mobilizing these resources in reality? 7. What would have to happen/change so farmers would/could do it?	General questions after part 1: What would you advise or expect him to do? General questions after part 2: General questions: 1. What would you advise or expect ABC to do? 2. Whose role in the ageny would it be to support ABC? 3. Would you consider this as your job? 4. Why would (/wouldn't) you help? (for moral, loyal,	General questions after part 1: 1. After the death of her husband, how could it have been avoided that ABC impoverished in the way she did? 2. If you were ABC, what would you do in her current situation, now that is has already happened? 3. What resources would you need? 4. What could help you to deal with the situation? 5. Whose assistance would you like to count on? 6. Where could you mobilize these resources? 7. What other alternative to this could you imagine?

formal, personal reasons)

5. How can you help him? What would you tell him?
6. [to tech. dept. staff only] Would you grasp the opportunity and make sure your theme is considered and integrated properly in the proposal?
7. [to tech. dept. staff only] Would you be ready to prepare some materials? Would you be able to send him tailor made tools?

General questions after part 3:

8. How can you imagine something like this can happen? Are you surprised? How would you explain this failure?
9. What would have helped ABC to ease and support his difficult task? And to improve this process, make it smoother and more effective? I'm talking about the institutional level of the agency.
10. With view to his very scarce time, what services to him or processes would have been helpful to save time and be very fast?
11. Whose responsibility would it have been to support him more in this endeavour?
12. How could the 4 criteria defined by the donor be addressed better?
13. How do you think, the sharing culture or spirit could be promoted at the agency?

Also "dream" about ideal ways

8. In reality, what could be obstacles in mobilizing the resources needed for these solutions?
9. What would ABC need so she would/could do it?

In this case, it is an important facilitator's task to be persistent in coming up with and exploring ideas and solutions. Initially people will be reluctant or need triggers to overcome initial inhibitions. Yet, in order to achieve an empowering effect, it is crucial to dig into resources and solutions, to unearth them and make them aware.

General questions after part 2:

10. Which of the scenarios seem probable to you?
11. Why?
12. What could be the obstacles in the different scenarios, that seem unlikely?
13. What could be done to make them more probable?
14. What could the association do/ introduce/ change, to pre-emptively avoid such cases or to get prepared to prevent them?

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| VI.   Main outcomes

(chapter 5.6) | On the basis of identified sources and channels of knowledge, a communication map could be drawn up, which brought out main axes, nodes, critical spots and flaws
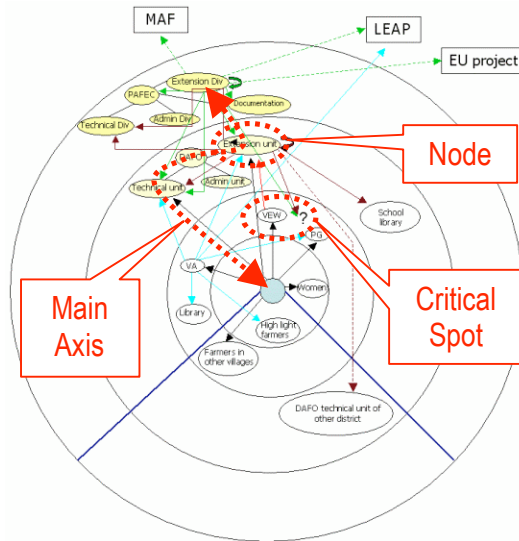
 | The following categories were distinguished for the analysis of criticial fields to evaluate the achievements in knowledge management:

- Strategy, Institutional Anchoring & Top Management (Incentives)
- Organisational Culture of Sharing
- Work & Support Processes, Roles, Responsibilities & Structures
- Social Capital: Identifying right person, which HR are mobilised?
- What are useful aids and means for aiding?
- Dealing with experiences (Innovations, LLs, Good Practices, Coherence)
- Virtual Forum & Electronic Platforms

Interviewees imagined how ABC would act and based on these assumptions and associations identified ways of managing knowledge, strengths and weaknesses as well as potentials and risks (ie. at the same time they analysed the passed project period and sketched opportunities for future action).

On the basis of CIT interviews with KM leaders / responsibles and project documentation, original expectations of the project were defined. These were contrasted with the various perspectives extracted from the interviews with the different contrast groups.

This differentiated picture allowed a consolidated opinion on the performance and relevance of the project, lessons learnt and recommendations for future knowledge management ventures. | Emic/self-sufficient solutions have been discovered in the process of discussing the critical incident. The scenarios are probable and seem doable to the women. They realize that they have sources of knowledge and strategies which help them to overcome seemingly impossible situations. |