

IDRC Project

Activity Report

Open Data Leaders Network: Cohort 2 *27th-31st July 2015* *London*

Executive Summary

The second cohort of the Open Data Leaders Network convened at the ODI from the 27th-31st July 2015. Its aim was to build on the successes of the first cohort (held February 2015), connecting together a further seven open data leaders from governments around the world. The group was even more diverse than that of the first cohort, with participants being not only from distinctly different geographical locations but also holding different professional roles across national, state and city government levels.

Overall the second iteration of this programme proved a success, with participants forming strong personal relationships that should be conducive to sustaining a professional network. Comments at the end of the week explicitly noted how the format of the programme promoted strengthened peer relationships ***“If your objective was to have built a stronger network than otherwise could have been built [at a conference] then you have achieved it”***.

Participants left feeling refreshed and reinvigorated ***“All of us will go back and have a lot of problems to attend to, so it’s great to know we are part of a much bigger family”, “This group is a source of renewal and energy... a way to step back and say ‘you’re not alone’”***.

The following report details the programme’s objectives, methodology, daily activities and participant feedback. It concludes with lessons learned in order to reflect on the effectiveness of this approach and inform future interventions.

Objectives

The concept of the Open Data Leaders Network is based on the hypothesis that achieving more open practices in government will only be realised via changing the culture of these institutions. By bringing together some of the most talented of these open data leaders the ODI hopes to incubate a peer leadership network (identified as one of the best ways of building leadership capacity, increasing social capital and sharing knowledge among members).

Hence this programme had four central objectives to be evaluated:

1. To develop participants knowledge of the latest theories and developments in open data and its use
2. Equip leaders with the ability to design strategies to solve implementation challenges in their initiative and solve problems creatively
3. To form strong and sustainable links with other participants which may be relied upon for future advice, inspiration and support

4. To integrate this cohort with the first cohort in order to make participants feel connected with the global open data movement

Methodology and Approach

Building on the success of these methods in the first cohort's programme, the weeks schedule employed a number of training and facilitation methodologies to invest in relationship building. This entailed a predominantly a mixture of:

- Facilitated discussions for reflection and feedback on participants' ideas and strategies
- Opportunities for abstract thinking and critical problem solving
- Presentations from participants to their peers and external audiences
- A range of methodologies for thinking through problems (e.g. the use of business canvases, one on one coaching, action learning sets)
- Filmed interviews

Even where the programme featured more traditional "lecture" style sessions from expert ODI trainers, these were framed in a participatory way. Participants were encouraged to critically engage with the material they were being shown; through Q&A sessions or direct feedback on the resources.

Preparation

Feedback from the first cohort emphasised the importance of carefully selecting participants. This process ensures that all participants are comfortable engaging with a diverse group and range of challenging activities. Participants were identified at international conferences (such as the International Open Data Conference in Ottawa) and through mutual contacts. Prior to the week Skype conversations were held to get a sense of the challenges each leader was facing in their context, and to assess whether they would be appropriate candidates to join the Network.

In preparing the structure and flow of the week the team took into consideration the experiences of the first programme:

- A number of the most popular sessions run by ODI staff were re-employed. These included updates on the latest thinking in Open Data, a case study on the UK's data.gov.uk experience given by International Director Richard Stirling and input from CEO Gavin Starks.
- Andrew Stott was asked to return and give his input as an 'expert coach'
- The nature of BCG's input was re-negotiated in order to be more constructive for the participants: presentations were given by participants themselves rather than consultants from the Centre for Public Impact.
- Additions to last year's programme included an increased focus on innovation (via Wednesday's Innovation Day) and promoting creative problem-solving.

Monitoring and evaluation

In order to assess the success of the programme in achieving its objectives, both qualitative and quantitative feedback were collected. Following the same process as the first cohort, written feedback was captured at the beginning of the programme and at the end of every day. Repeating the baseline survey at the end of the programme gave an

indication of how far objectives had been met. Capturing feedback in relation to the specific objectives of each day's sessions meant that facilitators could take note of and respond to the participants experiences throughout the week.

Further to this, ODI team members captured verbal quotes from participants as the sessions were running in a set of detailed notes and observations (see [a summary here](#)). These notes meant that the trail of thought in each session can be recounted more easily. Despite there being no formal space in the timetable for verbal feedback, some of the most constructive feedback was given via comments at the end of the final day. Participants were very willing to be candid about their experiences of the programme and the informal feedback session on the final day was very useful for capturing the opinions.

Narrative report/ Results

Day 1 “Open Data Now”

The first day introduced the participants to each other and the ODI. Participants identified their current objectives and challenges in their regions. Sessions focused on allowing time to think conceptually about open data. Gavin Stark CEO's presentation introduced the Generation Open concept, setting the tone for the week and giving participants a sense of the wider global movement they are part of. The “Open Data Masterclass” given by Dave Tarrant (Senior Trainer) and Ben Coulston (Trainer) featured material from the ODI's “Open Data in a Day” course.

Main Learning Objectives:

- Improve understanding of the latest thinking and theories in open data around the world (**96.67%¹**)
- Increase ability to define open data, identify key examples and assess the success of country initiatives (**93.33%**)

Evaluation:

- Participants felt that the first day was pitched correctly in the sense that it “Covered everything from the macro right down to the fundamentals”.
- The high score on the first LO was reflected in the high energy felt in the room at the end of the day and in comments that “**This kind of training is an oxygen**” and “We're revolutionaries!”.
- Written and verbal feedback showed that **most valued parts of the day were the concrete tools leaders could use** in communicating open data to colleagues. These included the **data spectrum, data definitions, open data certificates**.
 - A need to “**Re-organise training**” in their offices was the most popular takeaway from the day.
- Upon reflection the ODI team have questioned whether in future more should be done to ensure that participants end the **day inspired by the ODI's position at**

¹ Average of participants scores (how far they agreed this LO had been met)

the forefront of open data as a whole, beyond simply training and education tools.

Day 2 “Leading Change”

Tuesday featured a number of different presentations from ODI staff, and aimed to focus on the participant’s roles as open data leaders. The case study given by Richard Stirling (International Director) gave a detailed insight into the growth of open data initiatives in the UK. Presentations were given by participants to explain their current contexts. Further inputs were given by ODI staff on the ODI’s research into change management frameworks and Open Data Certificates. Andrew Stott (UK Transparency Board) returned to the ODI to give his presentation on open data leadership, followed by one-to-one coaching.

Main learning objectives:

- Critically reflect on the challenges of managing open data in my context **(76.67%)**
- Improve understanding of strategies for managing culture change in government, and apply them to my context. **(80.00%)**

Evaluation:

- Written feedback again showed that participants liked hearing the practical experiences of Richard and Andrew : “[**Hearing**] **success and errors based on real experiences was great**”. Participants also engaged critically with more theoretical material, providing verbal feedback on the [Change Management Framework](#) and [Open Data Certificates](#).
- Short presentations by each leader on their work were added into the schedule at the request of the participants. However these presentations ranged in content and many focused on current successes and challenges rather than specifically on change.
- Feedback on Andrew’s 1:1 coaching was given at the end of the programme, with some participants commenting that this had **not been the most constructive** or efficient way of thinking about their own context, with Andrew being “**more focused on the technology**”.
- On average the scores for this day were the **lowest of the week**. Participants had been presented with a lot of content, perhaps to the detriment of energy levels.
- During ODI team debriefs it has been noted that the day drifted uncomfortably to an end as participants waited for their 1:1s.

Day 3

Wednesday was distinctly different from the previous two days in its aims and objectives. Briony Phillips (Programme Manager - Open Data Challenge Series), facilitated an extremely engaging day of activities and discussions which employed more active styles of learning. Taking inspiration from the Open Data Challenge Series, participants spent time creating and refining innovations to tackle common problems that they were facing.

A range of exercises were used during the day, from startup-style business canvas planning to role-play presentations.

Main learning objectives:

- Inspire participants to think creatively about problem solving (**97.14%**)
- Increase understanding of different approaches to promoting innovation (**91.43%**)

Evaluation

- Excellent written and verbal feedback on the innovation workshop confirms how participants were inspired and energised by the session. **The overall satisfaction in end-of-day feedback was the highest of the week (at 97.14%)**. Five participants listed this day as their “most useful”.
- Participants successfully came up with a number of creative solutions to the open data challenges they were facing ([see flipchart page](#)).
- One of the most popular innovations (Jedi Labs) was intended to inspire others in government **via “a training session just like today”**.
- Participants also valued experiencing a new style of facilitation: one written comment requested **“a session on the methodology used delivering the whole day”**.

Day 4 “Putting it into Practice”

Thursday focused on innovation in practice, with inputs from startups and reflections on the previous day being used to create new strategies for each participant’s specific context. Participants enjoyed hearing from the experiences of start-ups and formulating “elevator pitches” to give to their ministers. The afternoon’s session of peer-to-peer coaching was particularly constructive in helping participants to formulate more tangible strategies for leadership in their return to work.

Main learning objectives:

- Improve awareness of the potential for open data and innovation in start-ups (**76.67%**)
- Develop an action plan for addressing a challenge within my open data initiative (**80.00%**)

Evaluation:

- Talks from two startups (Opensensors and Vizicities) were well received by participants, with three mentioning them in written feedback. However this was not reflected in the score given to the learning objective. In future a **wider range of startups with more experience engaging with governments** may be more constructive.
- Using the peer-to-peer coaching along with the action learning methodology was deemed valuable, indicating the development of peer connections and trust. The atmosphere at the end of the afternoon was **supportive and energised**.

- The lower score given to the second learning objective may have reflected the lack of opportunity for participants to **consolidate this peer reflection time** and produce a concrete action plan or other takeaway.

Day 5 “Commitments”

The final day provided an opportunity for participants to present their work to an external audience of consultants and academics at Boston Consulting Group’s Centre for Public Impact. Participants seemed to enjoy the experience of getting outside of the ODI’s offices, even if discussion following the presentations could have been more constructive. Upon returning to the ODI’s offices, Liz Carolan facilitated a discussion on the future of the network and participants gave some verbal feedback on their experiences. Participants ended the week with plans to take on a number of projects collaboratively and a positive outlook on their experience of the week.

Main learning objectives:

- Share challenges and open data work with an external audience
- Produce an action plan for the future of the network

Evaluation:

- The external visit to Boston Consulting Group and resulted in three very interesting presentations from ODLN participants. These were intended to give an opportunity to develop participants’ presentation skills and demonstrate the work that participants do in their individual contexts to an external audience.
- Participants gave very interesting presentations, with the opportunity to present externally obviously working positively to ensure that they are and with leaders sharing new material and stories. The audience, however, could have been more appropriately chosen. In future may look for alternative partners to provide an external audience for participants.
- A number of concrete proposals were reached in a facilitated discussion at the end of the day. These included plans for continued communication within the network and for collaboration on future projects (detailed in “outcomes” below).

Outputs

Many of the written and verbal comments of participants show **plans to change behaviour** as a result of participating in the programme:

- Having been inspired by the skills gained in the innovation day, one participant reported in end of day feedback that they had altered the way in which they were now thinking about the problem: they were going to “**Stop trying to change individuals and change the culture of whole government instead**”
- The focus on culture change throughout the week also changed participants perspectives on projects they were currently working on. One participant creating an “Open Data Manual” in his region commented that after conversations with his peers he has realised “**This is not a manual about managing open data but more a manual about feeling enthusiastic about it**”. Others also said that they would “**Change my message of communication**”

- Many participants made comments that showed learning directly from their peers; one leader commented that “***I need to start working professionally just like [the participant from Buenos Aires] is, and create an action plan... Just get the commitment to release data, stop focusing on the technology***”

There was an **increase in confidence scores across every area** identified in the baseline survey from the first to final day². Evidence that a **network has developed** is already visible:

- Participants are able to help each other answer questions and share success stories (as is seen in these [Twitter interactions](#))
- Email exchanges continue to share news stories and encouragement
- A WhatsApp group continues to provide day-to-day support
- The Member’s Directory of leaders from the first and second cohort now contains profiles and contact details in order to support new connections

Finally a number of more **tangible outputs** can also be seen:

- A commitment to work together to realise one of the “innovation day” ideas (Jedi Labs)
- An agreement to support the participant from Buenos Aires on his handbook for open data leaders
- A number of related blogs by [Paul Stone](#) and [Emma Truswell](#) on theodi.org
- Interviews with [Ivy Ong](#) on the SciDevNet website
- An ODLN video, which is currently in production

Project Management

Costs, team and resources

Organisation of the programme was given to one individual (Dawn Duhaney, the ‘ODLN Project Manager’) and supported by other members of the ODI team. Managing a project of this type presents many challenges in coordinating internal, external and international participants. There are many opportunities for unexpected issues to arise and the ODLN Project Manager exhibited a high degree of dedication and attention to detail. Delivering the week was very demanding on the Project Manager’s time and represents a significant staffing cost. That said, other team members spent substantially less time on this iteration of the programme than the previous cohort. This suggests that there are efficiency gains with replicating each cohort. Over time, it is reasonable to expect staffing demands could be further streamlined as the week’s content is refined. Having a clear sense of the programme’s aims and the intended flow of the week was key for ensuring efficient project management. This clarity is also important for ensuring that large chunks of delivery can be shared with different facilitators.

Partners

The vast majority of facilitators used were internal to the ODI, providing efficiency in terms of cost and ease of management. Presentations given by external experts continued to

² See raw [feedback](#) for full scores

be popular with participants. The opportunity to give presentations to an external audience proved valuable, however in future the ODI team may look to organise speaking opportunities to a more specialised audience.

At present the positive feedback and strong personal relationships which formed during the week indicate clear benefits of continuing the programme. The ongoing success of the network as it grows will be key to calculating the cost-benefit analysis of running further cohorts.

Recommendations for future practice

Area	Successful elements to retain	Elements to consider revising
Concept and Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Bringing leaders into the same physical space for five days ● The selection and invitation process, which continues to provide a very engaging group. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Including of more creative or active activities on the first day (such as an “Open data scavenger hunt” or videos made by participants) to set the tone of the week. ● Ensure there is a good balance of material and breaks to sustain energy levels. ● Increasing the number of opportunities to engage with the wider open data community and time spent unsupervised by the ODI
Content	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Continuing to utilise a range of methods (case studies, presentations, skills building exercises etc.) ● Most popular sessions included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The “Innovation Workshop” ○ Startup flash-talks ○ Examples of the ODI’s training methods ○ Peer to peer support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Our partnerships with external organisations for visits and presentations ● The “coaching” element given by external partners ● Selecting startups who have experienced working with governments ● Including further soft-skills building sessions (for example in advocacy and communications)
Project Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assigning a lead individual to project management, drawing in team members where required 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The programme requires a significant time investment, the cost-benefit analysis of which should be continued
Feedback and Evaluation Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collecting written feedback at the end of each day and verbally at the end of the week 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Some questions in the end of day survey were repeatedly misinterpreted

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Capturing participants quotes and conversations in notes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Less written feedback was captured in this cohort than the previous. Emphasising the usefulness of these questionnaires as participants are completing them may be helpful.
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Conclusion

The overall formula and concept behind the programme proved once again to be a success. The formula of the week is being refined with each iteration of the programme, with this cohort already requiring less organisational input from the wider ODI team, despite still representing a significant demand on time for the programme lead Dawn Duhaney. Further refinement of content provided during the week is in some sense of secondary importance to the successful facilitation of relationships and discussions that are so integral to developing peer-to-peer networks. This was very well achieved amongst this group of leaders; the value of the network for participants is clear from the feedback and comments captured in this report.

Next steps

Now with two cohorts worth of ODLN members (totalling 14 individuals from governments around the world) there are a number of actions that will intend to link and build the network further. The first will be to establish channels of joint communication (an integrated WhatsApp group, mailing list and Twitter interactions). This will be aided by all members hosting their details in a shared “Members Directory”, a version of which it is hoped will eventually be made public in the form of member profiles on the ODI’s website.

As the network grows further (into third and fourth cohorts, scheduled for next year) the robustness of these methods of communication will need to be evaluated. It may be found that certain platforms are not appropriate for larger groups and alternatives will need to be found to sustain connections between all members.

Annexes

Annexe 1: List of Participants

Leader	Country	Role
Rudi Borrmann	Buenos Aires, Argentina	Director of Open Government and Innovation, Buenos Aires
Paul Stone	New Zealand	Open Data Programme Leader, National Government Programme New Zealand
Carolina Pozo	Quito, Ecuador	Secretary General, Planning and Open Government, Quito
Nkechi Okwuone	Edo State, Nigeria	Open Data Manager, Edo State Open Data Portal, Government of Nigeria
Radu Puchiu	Romania	Head of Department for Online Services and Design, Government of Romania
Ivy Ong	Philippines	Outreach Lead
Mwanaidi Mahiza	Tanzania	National Bureau of Statistics

Annexe 2: ODLN 2 Agenda

Monday Open data now	Tuesday Leading change	Wednesday Innovation	Thursday Putting it into practice	Friday Commitment
Breakfast				
<p>Welcome!</p> <p>Generation Open: Gavin Starks CEO</p>	<p>Data.gov.uk: lessons learned with Richard Stirling</p> <p>Managing change</p>	<p>Innovation day with Briony Phillips</p>	<p>Meet the startups</p> <p>Making innovation real in government</p>	<p>Free time</p>
Lunch				
<p>Open Data Masterclass with Dave Tarrant</p>	<p>Open data leadership with Andrew Stott</p> <p>One-to-one coaching</p>	<p>Innovation day with Briony Phillips</p>	<p>What next for my initiative?</p>	<p>Presentations at BCG</p> <p>What next for the network?</p>
<p>Optional dinner</p>	<p>Drinks</p>	<p>Dinner</p>	<p>Free time</p>	<p>Drinks with ODI staff</p>