THE PIRL PROJECT
Partnerships for Inclusive Research & Learning

<u>**Blog 3 – PDF Version:**</u>
"On Knowledge Sharing and Communities of Practice for Inclusive Development"

February 2020

For over 6 years now I have been working with different groups of professionals in both low-income countries and in Europe and America in a variety of spheres. One of the key lessons I have learned so far is that working together is more fruitful than not working together.

Growing up and working in a context where knowledge is sacred and knowledge sharing is not the norm, globalization has drastically turned the tides and broken the barriers. People are beginning to feel more comfortable sharing knowledge, sharing practices, and learning from each other, shaping their ideas, and growing together.

This might sound so much like a myth in a context where nongovernmental organizations are in quest of funding and ready to protect their ideas as much as possible. In this context, knowledge sharing will meet with obstacles such as the protection of organizational interests, visions, and policies.

I was once told by a participant in a knowledge sharing workshop "Louis, you do not expect that we share our visions here, what if tomorrow we find out that people are already implementing our idea?" There has always been this tendency of fear of the unknown and that people will steal their ideas.

Some people think they are the ones that started the idea, so no other person should take it up or can be better up than they are. For instance, you could hear statements like 'we started disability inclusion'. Such thinkers fail to see that their vision is spreading if it is being implemented by other groups.

A useless idea will obviously die a natural death. Meanwhile, if your idea is going forward, then you should give credit to yourself and feel fulfilled. If the ideas propounded by great scientists were not propagated and further developed, the world will not be where it is today. The need for knowledge sharing and for working together collaboratively is so indispensable nowadays that it cannot be over-emphasized.

However, we do not think it is completely wrong to protect ideas and conceptions. There is the need for intellectual property rights to be respected and people have to be recognized for the ideas and concepts they have developed.

For instance, recognizing Wenger's contributions in developing the community of practice idea (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1996) does not stop you from innovating and going further with the idea, neither does it reduce Lave and Wenger's point. Rather using the concept of a community of practice builds on their ideas; the concept is propagated and developed further to be even more beneficial (Cockburn, Mbibeh & Awa, 2020; Okwen, Signe, Macpella, Mbibeh., & Cockburn, 2018; Pacholek et al, 2021).

There are people who conceive ideas, others can turn those ideas into measurable activities and goals, and others who will implement them in varying contexts. All these people do have different competencies and there is a need to recognize them. They are all important. Once you do not want to express your conceptions in the most professional way possible, you might sit and say people have "stolen your ideas".

Over time, learning and sharing knowledge in communities of practice has helped to break this myth of the shortage of ideas. We have experienced how people share their conceptions and how others help shape them into greater ideas permitting them to move ahead.

Others have been inspired by ideas developed or presented by their peers, and in so doing the ultimate goal is met: improving the wellbeing of persons with disabilities and building a more inclusive society. I am thinking that there is no knowledge existing if it is not shared. There is no knowledge if others have not used it in varying ways and above all if it has not had any impact in the community and on humanity.

It is thus imperative for professionals to work together and to share knowledge and practices. It is imperative that we not just shape the idea but learn even more from others. Along with studying in schools, experiential and practical knowledge is very important. It is easier to find this experiential knowledge within a context of a community of practice.

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We each have important contributions to make to creating and using what is called "research". No serious professional lives alone in a vacuum. There is a need for networking, sharing, and self-building.

The PIRL Network provides a platform for those interested in knowledge and research about disability-inclusive development to learn from each other and to grow in their profession.

Citations:

Cockburn, L., **Mbibeh, L.,** & Awa, J. C. (2019). The GRID Network: A Community of Practice for Disability Inclusive Development. Disability, CBR & Inclusive Development, 30(2), 84–94. https://doi.org/10.5463/dcid.v30i2.838

Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). Learning in doing: Social, cognitive, and computational perspectives.Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511815355

Okwen, M., Signe, J., Macpella, S., **Mbibeh, L.,** & Cockburn, L. (2018). Professional collaboration for vision and healthcare in Cameroon. African Vision and Eye Health, 77(1), 10 pages. doi:https://doi.org/10.4102/aveh.v77i1.434

Pacholek, K., Prostean, M., Burris, S., Cockburn, L., Nganji, J., Nadège, A. N., & **Mbibeh, L.** (2021). A WhatsApp community forum for improving critical thinking and practice skills of mental health providers in a conflict zone. Interactive Learning Environments. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/10494820.2021.1890622

Wenger, E.. (1996). Communities of practice: The social fabric of a learning organization. The Healthcare Forum Journal, 39(4), 20.

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