

Curriculum InstitutionALE – Professionalisation of Adult Education Institutions

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Abstract:

Curriculum InstitutionALE is an orientation framework for strengthening Institutions of Adult Learning and Education. It provides basic guidelines for managing capacity and organisational development and suggests indicators and means of verification for organisational change and capacity development. It offers the basics for defining goals and criteria for capacity and organisational development, for collecting reliable baseline data, for designing and implementing processes of capacity and organisational development, and for assessing progress. Addressing leaders of Institutions of Adult Learning and Education and external advisors, it can be adjusted to fit various contexts and institutions across the world.

Keywords: Adult Education Institutions; Capacity Development; Organisational Development

1. Introduction

DVV International is the Institute for International Cooperation of the Deutscher Volkshochschul-Verband e.V. (DVV), the German Adult Education Association. DVV represents the interests of the approximately 900 adult education centres (*Volkshochschulen*) and their state associations, the largest further education providers in Germany. As the leading professional organisation in the field of adult education and development cooperation, DVV International has committed itself to supporting lifelong learning for 50 years. DVV International provides worldwide support for the establishment and development of sustainable structures for Youth and Adult Education. To achieve this, DVV International cooperates with more than 200 civil society, government and academic partners in more than 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe. In its work with partner organisations around the world, DVV International experienced repeatedly that the preconditions for the successful implementation of adult education varied greatly and that organisations sometimes operated inadequately because they lacked basic management skills. Curriculum InstitutionALE is to be understood against this background and was designed

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to inform the process of building and sustaining viable ALE¹ structures worldwide. The term ‘Institutions of Adult Learning and Education’ (IALEs) is used in this document to cover a broad range of governmental and non-governmental institutions or organisations providing ALE. The first elements of Curriculum InstitutionALE were developed in DVV International’s Middle East office in 2013 – motivated by the need to apply a more strategic, consistent approach to strengthening IALEs, and to create a clear, common understanding of goals, stages and responsibilities between all parties involved.

2. What is Curriculum InstitutionALE

Curriculum InstitutionALE offers guidance in organisational development worldwide, but needs to be carefully adapted to the specific context in which it is used. The specific goals, stages and tools have to be worked out together with the partner organisations, and might differ from country to country, as well as from institution to institution (DVV International 2021, 4).

Curriculum InstitutionALE basically works like a quality management system, which follows the classical sequence of ‘Plan-Do-Check-Act’ as a continuous improvement process². The sequence of steps is slightly different in Curriculum InstitutionALE but follows the same core approach of an analysis based on indicators, identification of weaknesses, strategic planning for targeted improvement of chess points and finally the evaluation of results. This process can be continued in a circular way, so that no fixed level of quality is reached, but that one’s own processes and procedures are critically interrogated again and again. The Curriculum InstitutionALE aims to achieve certain indicators in order to reach a minimum level of quality.

When implementing Curriculum InstitutionALE, it must be taken into account that competence and institutional development is a very sensitive process that must be supported by the organisations themselves, otherwise no sustainable change can be achieved. External consultants can and should even be involved in this process, but the responsibility for implementing the individual steps remains entirely in the hands of the respective organisation.

¹ ALE refers to the term ‘Adult Learning and Education’ with the following definition: «The ultimate goal of ALE is to ensure that adults, throughout their lives, can participate fully in societies, including the world of work. ALE includes three key domains of learning and skills: literacy and basic skills, continuing education and vocational skills, and liberal, popular and community education and citizenship skills. ALE enables people to develop the necessary capabilities to exercise and realise their rights and take control of their destinies. It promotes personal and professional development, thereby supporting more active engagement by adults with their societies, communities and environments. It fosters environmental and inclusive economic well-being and decent work. It is therefore a crucial tool in alleviating poverty, improving health and well-being and contributing to sustainable learning societies». This definition is based on the UNESCO Recommendation on Adult Learning and Education (RALE).

² <<https://der-prozessmanager.de/aktuell/wissensdatenbank/pdca-zyklus>> (2023-03-15).

Many institutions do not exclusively offer adult education programmes but a variety of other services that do not necessarily have anything to do with adult education. However, it is important at the beginning of this process to develop a common understanding of what the capabilities and tasks of an institution are.

Curriculum InstitutionALE assumes that adult education institutions have three core tasks: orientation, education and participation.

Orientation: In its many years of work, DVV International has found that many participants first need orientation before they are actually willing to engage with training offers. Many participants first need to reflect on their own situation and become aware of where they stand, but also what perspectives they want to develop for the future and how they can improve their concrete life situation. Educational institutions must first offer this kind of orientation before it comes to practical educational offers. This kind of orientation can take place in different ways, be it in individual one-to-one meetings or in group events.

Education: Ideally, an adult education institution offers a broad set of different educational opportunities that cover different areas of people's lives and aim at improving their life situation.

Participation: In many countries, it has been found that community actions result directly from education. Education should also contribute to social participation and reflection on social issues. Therefore, education also has this transformational claim, namely that people actively and participatively influence their living environment.

Based on these three core tasks of adult education centres, Curriculum InstitutionALE assumes the following steps in implementation.

3. Identifying Potential for Improvement (Step 1)

The first step is to assess the current status of the adult learning and education institution with regard to its core tasks and different cross-cutting capacities which are being outlined in the following section. This assessment can be done in different ways. For example, a self-assessment can be made on the basis of so-called Key Performance Indicators underlying the core tasks and cross-cutting capacities. However, peer review procedures or an assessment by external consultants are also conceivable. In any case, all core tasks as well as the cross-cutting capacities of an institution should be clearly assessed in order to identify potential for improvement, which should then be systematically addressed in the next step.

In total, there are seven key performance fields that are evaluated according to certain indicators. In the following, the key performance indicators will be roughly outlined, as a complete presentation would go beyond the scope of this

report. For a detailed presentation, please refer to the corresponding publication on the DVV International website³.

3.1 Cross-cutting Capacities (Key Performance Indicators) of Institutions Offering ALE

A. Strategy and Management

Adult learning and education provision should be guided by a strategy and a vision. This enables a systematic orientation of the teaching offers. In order to assess the institution, it is necessary to check whether corresponding documents (e.g. strategy) are available and how they are oriented in terms of content.

Indicator ⁴	Means of verification
The IALE has a clear vision and strategy for ALE, or ALE forms part of its strategy.	Strategy for ALE or general strategy including ALE.
The strategy reflects the major fields of work and competences of the IALE, as well as its values and ethics.	Expert assessment.
A quality assurance system is in place.	M&E guidelines, indicators list, M&E reports.

B. Needs and Market Analysis

In any case, educational offers should ensure that they serve a need of the target groups. Accordingly, the needs should be analysed beforehand. In the case of employment-promoting training offers, the market situation for employment must also be taken into account. Is there a demand for the targeted vocational skills on the local labour market?

Indicator	Means of verification
The IALE regularly conducts needs analysis as a basis for programme development.	Needs/market analysis report.
The IALE has defined a mechanism for needs analysis, which includes quality criteria and timeframe.	Needs analysis concept.

C. Marketing, Outreach to and Admission of Participants

Since adult education often receives little attention and is little recognised as an educational field, it is desirable to give more prominence to adult education as a field in its own. Accordingly, adult education and its successes should be well ‘marketed’. Clear access rules for participants should also be defined and implemented.

³ <<https://www.dvv-international.de/en/ale-toolbox/organisation-and-management/curriculum-institutionale>> (2023-03-15).

⁴ These are only examples, which are further elaborated in the corresponding publication.

Indicator	Means of verification
The IALE clearly labels its ALE services as such, and relates to relevant national terms and concepts.	Programme, flyers, website of the IALE, ALE strategy or similar.
The IALE applies a strategy for outreach to potential learners through various means that are useful and appropriate (newspaper, programme, leaflets, radio, Internet, social media, billboards, etc.).	Outreach activity documentation.
Clear admission and selection criteria have been defined and communicated to the target group.	Registration procedure announcements, registration, documentation, receipt of participants' fees.

D. Cooperation with Qualified Trainers

A basic prerequisite for successful adult education is the availability of sufficient teachers or volunteers who are trained both professionally and didactically so that they are able to respond to the specific needs of adults. This means that the relevant adult education institution has a pool of trainers who can be deployed as needed and in a professional manner. The following indicators have been formulated for this aspect.

Indicator	Means of verification
A cooperation system with volunteers and freelancers has been defined (including communication and reward system, team building, professional development...).	Cooperation concept.
Clear selection criteria and recruitment procedures for trainers/volunteers have been defined and communicated to potential trainers.	Criteria and procedure announcements, simplified application form for trainers.
Selection and recruitment are documented.	CVs, references, justification sheet for selection, contract, receipt of payment.
Trainers' performance is checked regularly.	Screening assessment of trainer's performance.

E. Networking and Referrals

An exchange with other institutions that are active in the field of adult education in a broader sense is therefore important, as good practice as well as dealing with challenges can be helpful for one's own work. The network of partner institutions can be very broad, e.g. decision-making bodies, schools, vocational training institutions, universities, NGOs, microfinance providers, businesses and business associations, use. In addition to the exchange with other institutions and the receipt of direct information, there is of course also the possibility of referring participants to other institutions where this appears useful.

Indicator	Means of verification
IALE has identified key networking/referral partners.	Strategic plan, list of key partners, existing agreements, database.
Range of contacts by sector (education, business, politics, sectors).	Stakeholder mapping.
IALE has established cooperation with partners.	Minutes of interview with the IALE Director, MoUs, reports of joint activities, media reports.

F. The Learning Environment

The learning environment naturally has a great influence on the motivation of the participants; therefore, the framework within which learning takes place is of great importance. This includes both the ‘hard’ equipment such as premises, inventory and other teaching equipment, but also ‘soft’ factors such as the staff, namely how friendly, attentive and welcoming the staff are towards interested parties and participants. It is about the first impression to attract new participants but also to keep participants and to win them for other offers.

Indicator	Means of verification
The IALE offers its programme on pleasant premises that are sufficiently lit/heated/cooled and appropriately equipped. Hygiene standards meet gender-specific needs.	M&E reports, facility audits, satisfaction surveys among participants, inventory.
The premises are easily accessed by the target group.	On-site visits, maps, public transport timetables, parking space, stairs/lifts, signs...
Regular maintenance plan is in place and is implemented.	Records of maintenance checks.

G. Funding

Adult education can of course only be carried out successfully if the appropriate resources are available. Therefore, it is the task of adult education institutions to develop as broad a portfolio of income sources as possible so as not to be dependent on a single source. It is not only sensible but necessary that the institutions include the question of resources in their strategic planning and try to position themselves accordingly broadly here.

Indicator	Means of verification
The IALE has identified diverse sources of funding.	Funding sources analysis.
A strategy has been developed for resource mobilisation and marketing, and is being implemented.	Strategy document and implementation records.
The IALE relies on a variety of sources of funding.	Budget, audit reports.

4. Defining Goals (Step 2)

The indicators presented so far serve to systematically assess certain fields of competence of institutions active in adult education. As already explained, this can be done in different ways, whereby the use of peer review procedures has the advantage that the assessing 'peers' look at the other institution in the light of their own institution, which usually leads to a reflection on the working methods and processes of their own institution.

By means of the systematic institution assessment based on key performance indicators, certain institutional weaknesses can be identified. Depending on the number of weaknesses identified, the respective institution must set priorities and decide which goals it wants to achieve concretely. These goals should be seen in the context of the institutional analysis.

5. Planning for Capacity/ Organisational Development (Step 3)

Once the objectives have been defined and the pre-identified weaknesses have been identified and prioritised, the next step is to plan concrete actions to improve specific weaknesses. As with all planning, a clear time frame must be set and appropriate resources must be made available. In development cooperation, DVV International usually provides very concrete support here to advance the institutional improvement of partners.

6. Organising Capacity/Organisational Development Process (Step 4)

This step is about the concrete implementation of the planned measures for institutional improvement. These measures can look very different. They can consist of improving the infrastructure, establishing or intensifying cooperation with other network partners or training staff specifically in certain fields. This can be classical training, where it is always important to consider how it can be determined whether the intended learning goals have actually been achieved. But staff can also go to other institutions to see the lived practice in other organisations.

7. Assessing Results

After implementing measures to specifically improve certain weak points in institutional management, it is important to get an overview of the results. If a demonstrable improvement has been achieved, the goal can be considered achieved and the next step is to look at improving other institutional areas. If the goal was not achieved, it is important to analyse what exactly caused this and how better results can be achieved in the next step.

Deciding on continued or future capacity/organisational development: as described at the beginning, this is a quality management system that is in continuous development. This means that over a longer period of time all identified weak points should be addressed. Thus, after certain areas have been success-

fully improved, the next steps are to address the other weak points. The aim is to systematically improve the overall management skills and processes of an adult education institution. However, this also includes the establishment of a quality management system (Key Performance Indicator 1), which critically questions the institutional processes on a regular basis in order to continuously review its own quality standard.

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