**POLICY BRIEF**

**ETF – A KNOWLEDGE BROKER IN A TIME OF TURMOIL – LEARNING BETTER HOW TO FIND SOLUTIONS TO INTRACTABLE PROBLEMS**

1. **Introduction**

As we face multiple and accelerating crises and challenges in training and beyond, more than ever, the importance of our collective knowledge and the need to make the best use of it, remain paramount. For ETF this translates into our actions in policy learning, not despite, but because of the complex nature of policy life cycles.

This briefing firstly shows how critical knowledge management will remain for ETF in its operations, and how only by harnessing new methods, ways of thinking and working together will we be able to cope with the emerging and intensifying challenges.

ETF needs the strongest of knowledge practice across all of its work: strategic projects; thematic development, and country based work. This briefing presents a practical model for ETF leaders, managers, experts and project teams and all our wider partners, to be able to comprehend, apply and perform optimally within a new environment with these new tools and approaches.

1. **Rationale**

For ETF operational knowledge management is like a double threaded helix, a coded message detailing how to approach efforts in evidence based policy development. On the first hand, ETF embraces and promotes the development of a culture of practice and an awareness of evidence *as* policy. This translates in practical terms to the creation and nourishment of communities and networks across the partner countries with whom ETF has engaged in a process of knowledge sharing and mutual learning of the *why* and *how* of evidence in policy. The *Torino Process* and *Torinet* for example embody this part of the thread.

The second thread is knowledge management itself. Increasingly, the process of expertise development calls for new approaches and practice in how we deal with knowledge. Fertile policy learning requires strong strategies for knowledge management for ETF and its partners. It is a shared journey.

This is where ETF can contribute, even through modest resources, a significant step-change. At the same time as fostering policy learning, introducing as well KM strategy and practice. ETF can attain a unique position as trusted intermediary in sharing approaches and methods for best dealing with the complex and social nature of policy, multiple stakeholders and training governance.

ETF through shares its own experience in KM practice but also brokers that of others. This will be explanatory: why and what, and also practical and descriptive: how and when. ETF will move into action by applying tools and methods of KM whilst working together with partners. This will augment and enhance the mutual learning process, and though inspiration will give birth to and nourish new ways of meeting our challenges.

This approach of knowledge management remains faithful and fully consistent with ETF’s own successful institution building around the emergent concepts or peer policy learning and facilitation since its inception and especially during the phases where it has been a key player in supporting countries undergoing significant socio-economic transition. Finally the practices which we are developing are also robust enough to not be constrained by the growing disruptions in all our societies and economies.

**3. ETF – Knowledge Sharing in Practice**

Through a sequence of real activities, projections of ongoing work and newly planned activities for 2013-2014 this following section will provide a set of “real and rich pictures” of the conceptual rationale presented for KM being enacted in the many practical contexts of ETF work: countries, regions, thematic areas, strategic capacity and policy efforts.

They can perhaps best be presented through the following seven dimensions:

* Knowledge as Policy
* Knowledge as Networks
* Knowledge as Ideation (the process of forming ideas)
* Knowledge Brokering
* Knowledge as Collaboration & Cooperation
* Knowledge as Partnership
* Knowledge as Expertise

**Knowledge as Policy – Seeing policy as a complex social system –** The field of knowledge management has been increasingly influenced by complex adaptive systems thinking. This is especially relevant for the governance, policy and development of training. This way of thinking focuses on understanding the nature of the problem and how this influences the determination of the means of action, and not the other way round. It relies on the natural sciences more than the pure mechanistic ones and seeks to be informed by the nature of human organisations. The ETF Yearbook 2012 goes into more detail on this. Treating systems as complex ecologies where the role of the manager is similar to that of a gardener or a game warden – not a mechanic or a big game hunter, is very much the emergent and continuing role and identity of ETF, Complex adaptive human systems gives ETF a framework of its actions. These may be the strategic projects such as Torinet, regional or country work or thematic aspects in Particularly the scope for approaches involving narrative capture with signification is a very promising comparative addition to the quantitative approaches of data and statistics. 2013 should see progress in pilots in these areas.

**Knowledge Networks** By ensuring in the design and execution of projects, adequate attention is given to creating appropriate and sustainable networks, ETF fosters strong interchange of knowledge and access to expert sources for professional development, although often seen only as a means to an end (the project objectives), the self-building and repairing network is actually a potent knowledge mechanism itself. ETF has shown this time and time again from the National Observatories to the Qualifications, Social Inclusion, Torinet / Torino Process and regional, country communities it has conceived. It’s newest challenge is to promote these communities retaining linguistic diversity and challenging problems related to access to technology (also ability) and prohibitive costs on moving people to meet each other physically.

**Re-Thinking Thinking – ETF as a *pioneer in the practice of creating new ideas*. Ideation -** How to introduce tools and methods which encourage both creativity AND efficiency which are well grounded in theory? One role of the knowledge management (perhaps the most important to nurture) is the one that introduces at the conceptualisation and design phase of projects and then onwards into their execution, richer processes of reflection, critical action, thinking and learning. Here the key to good practice is example: pilot projects, well shared with deep insight and positively endorsed. This automatically leads to adoption of the same approaches by other projects. ETF is well designed for these practices having a knowledge workforce spread across multiple projects, regions and subjects. Word of mouth replaces the need for explicit dissemination. These *probes* need however to be performed by well qualified and versed ETF staff, externalisation of this form of advanced methodical facilitator is not wise – it is core business, as it is for ETF’s partners in their capacity initiatives. Projects introducing new skill sets to working practices need to be designed with capacity development objectives. This may alter their timing and approach. Deeper understanding of how we think and work on problems and how we reach consensus and develop new actionable ideas is a huge challenge. The problem is that knowing everything is no longer useful or desired but knowing how to solve (or at least approach) intractable problems like policy is urgent. Establishing itself as a thought leader in this domain is or should be one of ETF’s most critical desires. Examples have shown great promise by embedding km practitioners inside projects: Kazakhstan: Torino Process, Education-Business cooperation, Croatia: Study Visit and accession process; Regional Qualifications, Torinet: Gamification of Policy Learning, and future plans include lateral thinking/six thinking hats tools from the De Bono school of creative thinking.

**ETF the Knowledge Broker** - ETF maintains close contact and liaison with EU & International actions and projects promoting and enquiring into EBPD. Projects such as EIPEE/ EIPPEE; Know&Pol & other research projects occurring under EU social science, education and training, and evidence into policy areas. ETF acts as a both a full participant in these projects but more importantly as a multiplier and intermediary, relaying information and also performing a gatekeeper and synthesis role *back* to ETF’s partners. The knowledge broker role extends beyond EBP practice in training but also provides oversight on the trends and developments in education and learning itself: the knowledge of learning and the socio-technology co-evolution underway (Learning Skills and Learning Technologies). This interface-role acts then as both an capacity enabler and developer.

**Advanced Tools for Collaboration and Cooperation – leveraging the technology of knowledge.** The introduction and use of ETF Connections (social computing) is providing for enhanced interaction and leads to improvements which are also about efficiency and effectiveness. Encouraging projects to adopt ETF Connections for their communities provides common functional platforms for both internal and external communities. The blurring of organisational boundaries becomes actually an advantage to inter-organisational learning and no longer an obstacle! Tools such as ETF Connections are fast, lean and scalable, meaning they work for small project teams as well as for open and public platforms like the Qualification Platform or Social Inclusion project. Through small investment ETF maximises both return and sustainability. This is clearly an ETF operational priority for network and content development and is showing the capacity for exponential growth as well as supporting multiple languages. The re-invention of *social computing* or collaboration combined with fit-for-purpose tools will allow ETF to maintain its global reach with partner countries of such diverse nature. Currently ETF is moving towards a public access policy for many of its communities of practice.

**Knowledge and Partnership** ETF initiates specific actions to demonstrate and accelerate knowledge management practice in policy institutions and across the policy life-cycle. But this is done in partnership – ETF’s greatest asset. Sharing good practice and working together with countries can galvanise concepts into action. For example education and business workshops in the cities of Atyrau and Ust-Kamenogorsk and Astana, Kazakhstan channelled thinking and new interaction into the formulation of national policy and informed the Torino Process review work reciprocally. Knowledge management methods were developed together with the country to facilitate dialogue and reporting between groups of educationalists and businesses. Not only was this process much faster than usual, but it also encouraged far more participation and interaction. Secondly, the ETF team shared knowledge in EU evidence-based policy practices and developments, using knowledge management techniques to share knowledge itself.

**Expertise in Knowledge Transfer and Retention -** The greatest asset possessed by knowledge workers and the greatest source for positive change resides in the tacit knowledge they possess. Although much expertise can never externalised new methods can assist knowledge transition when changes occur in responsibilities, expertise areas, arrivals or departures. An example for the future will be the use of the ASHEN model which breaks down knowledge into components best understood as: Artefacts, Skills or Talents, Heuristics, Experience, Natural Talent and then maps actions according to the intrinsic nature of these parts which *behave* differently.

**Knowledge as policy and governance**

**Torinet network learning – the role of**

**knowledge in governance**

As presented conceptually above, the ETF knowledge management strategy was put into action during the November 2011 Torinet conference in Turin. The topic ‘Governance of Evidence’ allowed the role of knowledge to be actively demonstrated by a team of lead experts brought into Torinet and guided by the ETF Knowledge Management Team in the development of key knowledge management presentations and exercises. In this way the ETF performed the role of knowledge broker, sharing research project knowledge concerning evidence in policy making (EIPEE, Know and Pol) and presenting some key knowledge management principles and practice. The role of conversation was presented and applied around a core Torinet question: how might we improve the effectiveness of policy making? The nature of complexity in the policy life-cycle was presented using the Cynefin framework (Snowden, 2007–10) including an exercise looking at the key terms and components of the policy system: thinking, acting and sharing.

**Living knowledge – professional networks**

**and practice**

Also in November 2011, the ETF hosted a workshop for knowledge management practitioners from international organisations. This was held back to back with the Torinet event so as to allow ETF experts to meet knowledge management experts in both events. The intention of the workshop and its design for interaction was to allow the sharing of experience and practice in the development and implementation of knowledge management strategies in international organisations to cross over into the evidence-based policy work of the ETF. Participants presented and debated their institutional knowledge management strategies and highlighted what worked and what difficulties were encountered as a form of exchanging experience and network learning. The event now further nourishes ETF work as an online professional network.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This knowledge management policy consolidates concepts, strategies, practical implementation and reflections presented in the ETF Yearbook 2012 chapter on knowledge management. In the 2013+ workplan for knowledge management we see more numerous examples of innovations, wider application and most specifically a greater thematic, country and project demand for knowledge management. These are good signals as they underscore the strategy and demonstrate the value added of a cooperative knowledge approach across in and across country. ETF now faces the next challenge: how to demonstrate transfer of the concept to partner institutions and countries whilst dealing simultaneously with internal capacity.

What does the future hold for knowledge management in ETF? While sharing knowledge and expertise both as a practitioner and as a broker, the ETF has the chance to increase its own capacity to perform in an expert role. The partnership of practitioners, country experts and policy actors results in a very rich and productive learning environment emerging from, and based within, the network itself. This provides ETF with a unique identity for the way in which it operates, especially in the country partnerships. Consequently, the results can be considerable, despite the modest size of the resources available. By thinking and doing things differently, for example through the application of complex systems thinking to education and training and the evidence-based policy lifecycle, the ETF can continue to achieve its objectives in the process of acting and sharing with its partners despite the increasing challenge the environment presents. It will also further inter-organisational learning across countries, regions and cultures. A major achievement indeed.

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**Ian Cumming, ETF**

Technical Notes:

ETF Connections is based upon the commercially available IBM Connections ® platform developed by IBM ®

The ASHEN model and CYNEFIN Framework are methods developed by Cognitive Edge ™

Six Thinking Hats ® is a parallel thinking approach belonging to the De Bono Group LLC