

# Information market – an interactive form of sharing and learning

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An information market looks like a weekly fruit or vegetable markets still known in many cities of Switzerland and in most villages and cities in development countries. The main difference is the goods and services presented: in this case, it is about information, experiences and knowledge.

When organizing an information market, we usually suppose that there are some persons, who have specific knowledge, experiences and information to offer, and others that are eager to know more about these issues. However, this is only half the truth: the person preparing a market stall (and thus information) is also keen on learning from others and adding value to his/her experiences. With other words, an information market is an interactive form of sharing and learning, where all parties contribute information and knowledge in order to create new and innovative ideas.

*An example: **The Information Market during a SDC seminar.** The 5-day SDC workshop for assigned cooperation office leaders in 2005 included a one-day 'Information Market'. Exchange of experience and networking were the two main activities of this day. A special mix was created to allow 'new' and 'experienced' coordinators to get relevant information from the different market stalls. Market stall owners were in this case different divisions of SDC and seco.*



## Specific features of an information market

- The goal is a gain of information and a better orientation within the information pool of the organization (who knows what).
- The interaction and exchange of information between the 'customers' and the 'market stall owners' are the main activities of the day.
- The 'customers' can find at each stall some 'ready-to-use' information for a quick overview, but most of the time and energy is spent on discussions.
- An information market is a debate platform, where the roles of information provider and customers are constantly changing. It enhances mutual learning, constructive face-to-face interaction and allows to build valuable networks for future collaboration.

## Preparation of the information market

1. A thorough preparation of the market stalls is half the success of the event.
2. The other half is being open and customer driven – for some a challenging attitude. It is important to generate an atmosphere of openness and willingness to learn. Information providers need to listen to the customers and give advice or opinions when possible; if not possible, help them to find the needed contact and / or information.
3. The information prepared has to be clearly focused on the possible needs and interests of the customers. One question that may help for preparing a market stall is: If I was one of the ‘customers’, what kind of information and support would I ask for?

*In the case of the SDC workshop we focused on relevant and actual information about the role of the respective divisions, how the divisions will support the Cooperation Offices in the future, and what kind of support / information is needed from the Cooperation Offices.*

4. Also the ‘customers’ of an information market should prepare their participation on the information market. They should have the necessary time to reflect on their information, learning and networking needs before the market day session starts. The facilitator can support this process actively through handing out an information-gathering sheet. The costumers can write down their supposed needs and use the sheet as a personal guideline during the market day. At the end of the day, their needs should be replaced with lessons learnt and new insights.

*In the case of the SDC workshop, it was the last opportunity for meeting many other persons before leaving for a Cooperation Office. The ‘customers’ were oriented with some guiding questions for the day: what kind of support will I need?*

*how will I get this support? what kind of information and support will I have to provide for others? In state of an information-gathering sheet, a ‘learning cube’ was used: On each side of the six sides of the cube, the participants should note one insight, information or lesson they wanted to get during the day. During the market day, the participants had their own guide (their cube), which allowed at the end a personal evaluation of the day’s success (Did I get the expected information?).*

## Highlights of an information market

- Foster creativity and enhanced learning through an open space or debate corner. A debate corner (a stall without any ready-for-consumption-information) is an attractive complement. People are keen to share and discuss, not just to ‘consume’ information. Furthermore, market stalls should be attractive to visit: use the different atmospheres of corners, small and big rooms and so on for improving the appearance of the market stalls.
- Prepared games or quizzes make a visit to an information market stall attractive: learning through participating!
- During such events, we usually observe, that many participants start to discuss and create new thoughts, ideas and solutions together.



## Lessons learnt and insights gained

- A daylong information market is a place to interchange, chat, talk, laugh, get to know new things, try new things, establish new contacts and end with a new list of questions for further shopping (not all questions can be answered; maybe new questions arise).
- Not all people know what is meant with an information market day; it is important to explain the dynamics and expectations before starting. An information market day is certainly interesting, but also tiring.
- Do not plan any parallel events. The information market day in itself needs a lot of concentration and energy.
- Time: At the beginning, it seems like a lot of time and people just stroll around during the morning. However, this is a normal behaviour for getting to know the whole offer. Usually in the afternoon, there remains a 'not enough time' feeling. Therefore, good organization and facilitation is helpful; share some time concerns with the participants.
- Sharing information offers a very different quality of learning than one-way delivery and consumption, but it also requires more time! A whole day is necessary for a market session with five to six market stalls and around thirty 'customers'.

In short, an information market is a debate platform, where the roles of information provider and customers are constantly changing. It enhances mutual learning, constructive face-to-face interaction and allows to build valuable networks for future collaboration.

More information about organizing market days for learning and sharing information is available at [eza@agridea.ch](mailto:eza@agridea.ch) or [daniel.roduner@agridea.ch](mailto:daniel.roduner@agridea.ch).