DEFINING FEMINIST APPROACHES TO STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT

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Acknowledgement

The author acknowledges that the work for this project took place on the Unceded ancestral lands of the xwməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Stó:lō and Səl̓ílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil- Waututh) Nations.
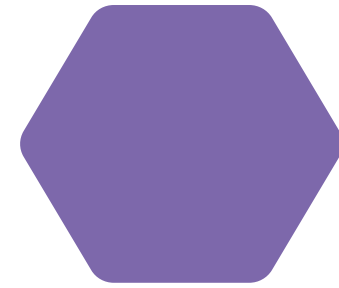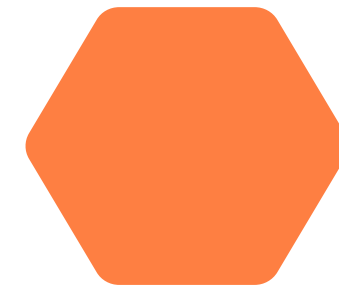
Disclaimer

Outline of Sustainability Scholar Report

1. Introduction

2. Objectives

3. What are the approaches and practical resources guiding organizational/programmatic/funding strategy development?

4. Which of these (principles/tools/approaches) best align with feminist principles?

Objectives

THIS PROJECT IDENTIFIES

Evidence-based approaches to strategy development based on feminist principles that will ultimately contribute to improving strategy processes in the international development sector. This summary highlights some of the key findings from this work.

CO-DESIGNING APPROACHES

Process

Environmental scan and Key informant interviews

Preliminary findings

Internal Workshop

Validation of recommendations with internal team

Draft report with recommendations to improve practice

Final Report
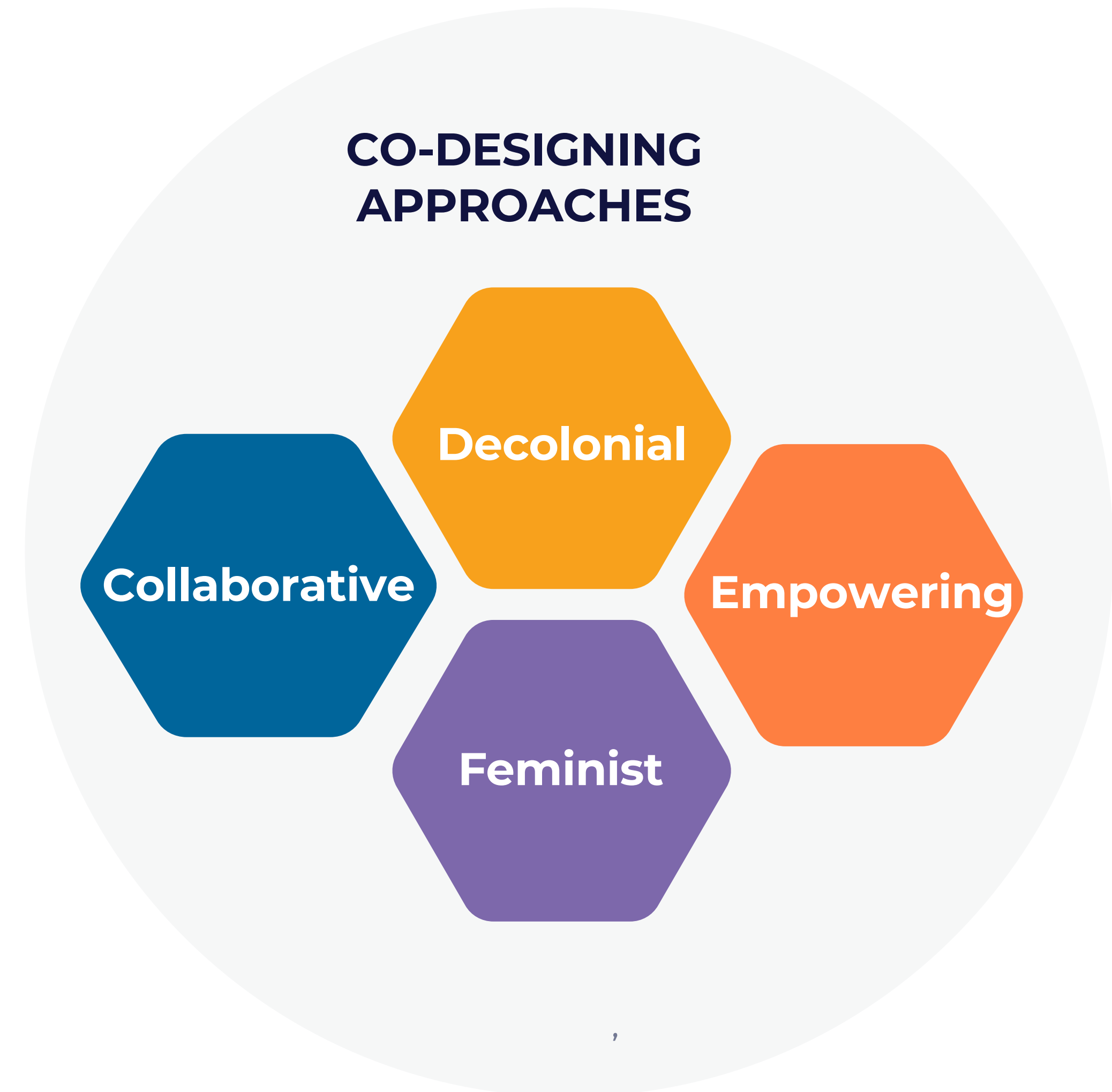
Research Questions

1. What are the principles underpinning organizational/programmatic/ funding strategy development?
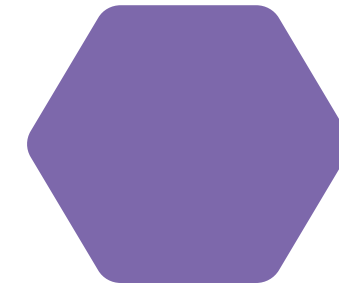
2. What are the theoretical/conceptual frameworks related to organizational/ programmatic/funding strategy development?

3. What are the methodologies/approaches and practical tools/resources guiding organizational/ programmatic/funding strategy development?

4. Which of these (principles/tools/approaches) best align with feminist principles?
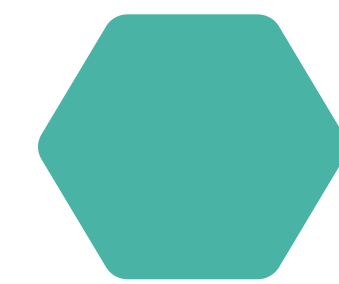
Methodology

1 **Environmental Scan**

Of over 70 pieces
of literature and resources.,
Including theoretical frameworks,
existing tools and approaches
from
consulting firms, INGO websites
and academic journals

2 **Key Informant Interviews**

With 3 independent consultants,
3 leaders in consulting firms,
2 INGO representatives

Feminist Principles

1. INCLUSION

2. DECOLONISATION AND LOCALISATION

3. PROMOTION OF GENDER EQUALITY

4. PRIORITISING THE WELLBEING OF PARTICIPANTS

5. LEADING WITH EMPATHY AND HUMILITY

6. ELEVATING OTHERS DOING GOOD WORK.

7. PARTICIPATION (NOT EXTRACTION)

8. ENSURING SAFE AND BRAVE WORKING SPACES

Finding 1: Approaches to Strategy Development

There is some standard 'formulas and processes for strategy development which are not explicitly feminist, but include an opportunity to make it feminist.

There are also a number of strategy development approaches that have been used for decades. Some examples are: the Five Forces Framework (Deliberate strategy), Emergent Strategy (Realized strategy), Resource Based View (RBV), and the Blue Ocean Strategy

GAP

GAP
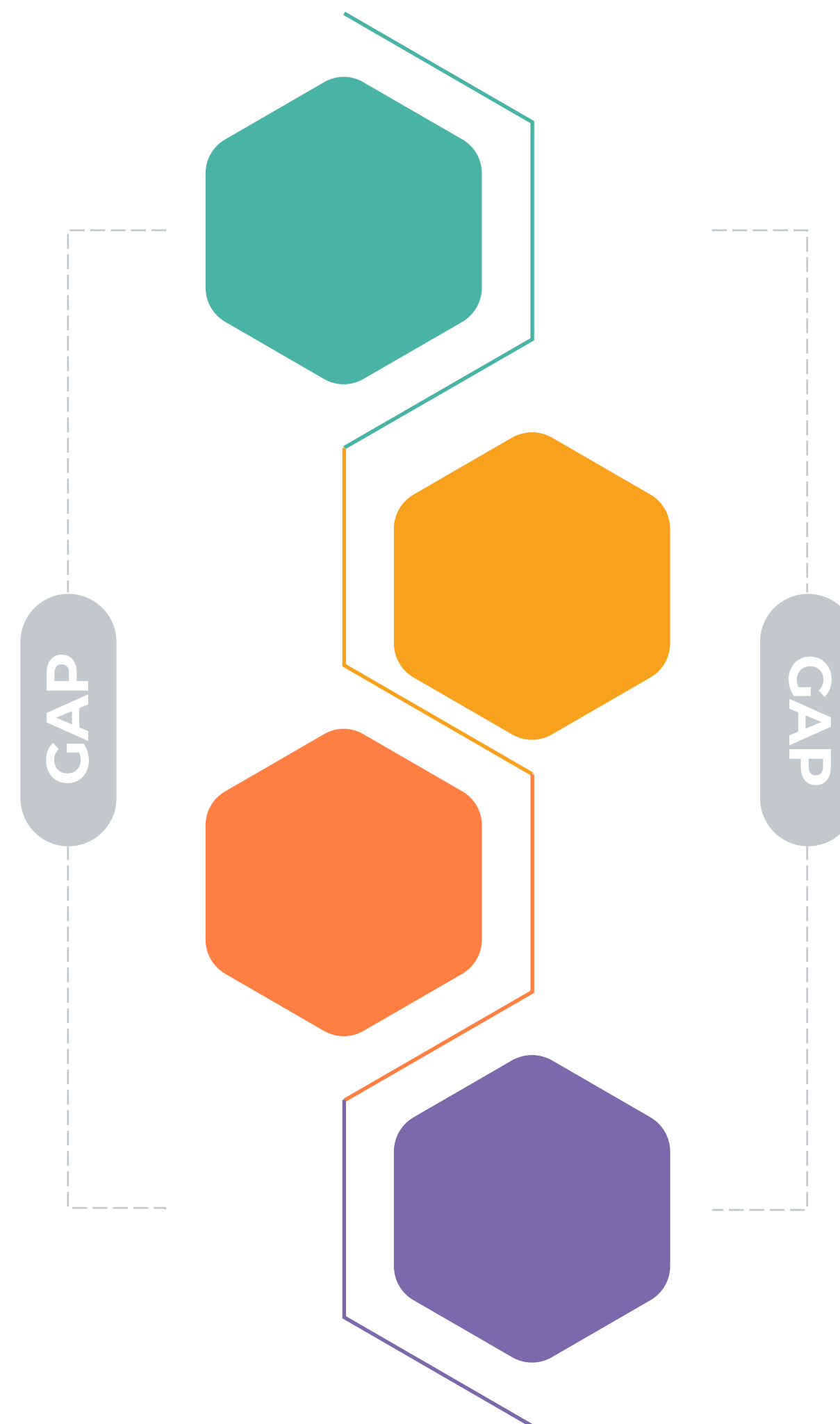
Many tools used commonly in the sector are not explicitly feminist. Practitioners emphasized that how processes are facilitated and how tools are designed makes them feminist or not.

Other approaches have gained traction in recent years with some practitioners viewing them as inherently aligned with feminist principles. Examples are: Human Centered Design, and Appreciative Inquiry.

Finding 2: Principles Underpinning Strategy Development

ALIGNED PRINCIPLES

There is some alignment in the sector with feminist strategy principles. Some of the principles emphasized include: self-care, vulnerability, and individual ethics, keeping the strategy process focused, clear and understandable, reducing complexity and jargon.

FURTHER PRINCIPLES

Highlighted by key informants to ensure that strategy processes do not replicate inequitable systems: Considering who is facilitating the process and analyzing the findings, having an anti-racist perspective, challenging White supremacy culture and considering linguistic inclusion.

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

Stressed as critical for designing effective strategy processes. These include: being flexible, designing strategies based on the internal and external environment, being adaptive to change, emphasizing ongoing learning rather than the strategy document, and investing in outside help to facilitate the process.

Finding 3: The importance of feminist leadership

Practitioners noted that organizations that use feminist leadership approaches tended to have strategy processes that are more feminist. However, there is limited consensus on what this looks like in practice, as well as a lack of resources and best practices. They emphasized the need for organizational culture to actively promote feminist approaches.

On the other hand, the literature on strategy development highlights the importance of senior leaders driving strategy processes and making decisions along the way. Some key informants highlighted the tension between needing senior leadership ownership of strategy processes and principles related to participation and feminist leadership.

Finding 4: The Importance of Self-care

Practitioners rountinely highlighted self-care as a feminist practice. This includes the self-care of participants and of those leading strategy processes.

They pointed to burnout and being 'consulted-out', the emotional labor shouldered by strategists, as well as the need to have support networks.

While self-care was a common theme throughout the key informant interviews, there were limited details on how to build this into a strategy process and the concept was rarely reflected in existing tools and resources.
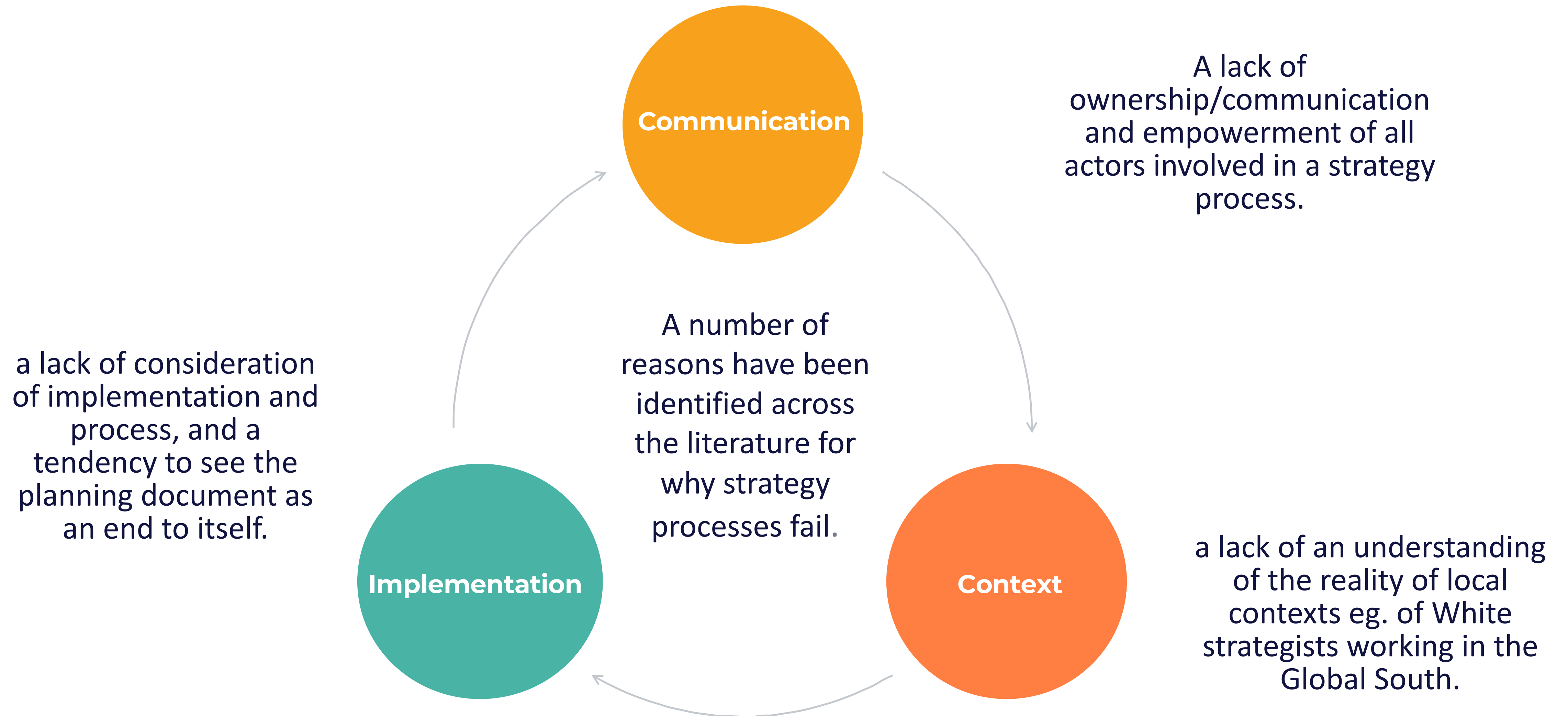
Strategy practitioners emphasized that effective strategy processes often start with the personal before turning to the institutional.

Finding 5: Common Strategy Pitfalls

Communication

A lack of ownership/communication and empowerment of all actors involved in a strategy process.

A number of reasons have been identified across the literature for why strategy processes fail.

a lack of consideration of implementation and process, and a tendency to see the planning document as an end to itself.

Implementation

Context

a lack of an understanding of the reality of local contexts eg. of White strategists working in the Global South.

Finding 6 : A gap in the sector

This work highlights an appetite in the sector for feminist approaches to strategy development and accompanying tools and resources.

All key informants stressed the need for this work and interest in the sector.

They also suggested that there are limited examples of organizational strategy processes that have been truly (and explicitly) feminist.