'LEARNING JOURNEYS' FOR ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT-WHERE DOES IT TAKE US?[1]

Learning-by-doing and adaptation happens all the time at the frontline, and as a means of survival. So how can it be reflected across the sector as a whole – from individual citizen through to international donor through adaptive management?

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INTRODUCTION

In development initiatives, learning happens all the time through continuous information inputs, interaction, action, assessment and adaptation to solve complex problems. Even so, traditional project cycle management and accompanying knowledge initiatives often compartmentalize such learning into 'lessons' or 'success stories' at the end, or do not sufficiently take into account the various learning needs among the wide spectrum of actors involved. For instance, while clients and practitioners on the ground may hope to influence the sector as a whole to do *development differently* – a concept which has recently gained momentum[2] – uptake of projectized learning tends to be difficult in large funding institutions on the grounds that it is too specific or small-scale. Conversely, restrictive donor behavior can hamper learning in operations. And citizens may be left out of the learning process altogether once information or feedback has been 'extracted'. Knowledge communities of different kinds (communities of practice) seek to break compartmentalized learning silos, but may lack themandate to integrate it into established institutional frameworks. Consequently, it comes as no surprise that 'learning for development' could be seen as a rather insular or introspective exercise, relevant only to a small number of academics or development practitioners, instead of being a driver of social change towards increased impact.

So how could we frame the 'learning agenda' going forward so that continuous, learning-oriented adaptation is inclusive and seen as a driver towards large-scale impact? And how does this challenge affect existing knowledge management practices, and what have we learned to date?

Looking across the existing and growing body of literature both in 'systems thinking', behavioral theory and adaptive management practices for development, this GPSA Briefing Note seeks to clarify some of the underlying concepts and how they are and/or could be applied in practice. It also suggests some additional practical steps, going forward.

[1] This GPSA Learning Note was written by Charlotte Ørnemark, GPSA Knowledge & Learning Team, World Bank. February, 2015.

[2] See: www.doingdevelopmentdifferently.com

I. WHY IS ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT RELEVANT TO SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY?

In social accountability, information or feedback from different stakeholder groups are used as triggers to improve services and set up engagement mechanisms where citizens can hold service providers or decision-makers to account. With a multitude of interests and incentives at stake, it is a very unpredictable process, even when the end goals are shared between citizens, civil society and government actors. For it to work, all parties will have to act and learn, trying alternative paths towards joint problem-solving.

"Behind every policy is an assumption about human behavior. (...) Sometimes the assumptions can be wrong."

World Development Report 2015 on "Mind and Society"

There are many reasons why change happens. To adapt, however, we need information or experiences that make us question our existing behavior. Yet all information is screened through mental models shaped by many socio-cultural factors and past experience. Predicting behavioral response is therefore nearly impossible. It has to be continuously tested. This is true among our own peers at an individual level, and even more so when we seek to influence change in contexts different to our own where the response of one actor in an interdependent system also influences that of another. This, among other things, was discussed in the World Development Report (WDR) 2015, focusing on *'How a better Understanding of Human Behavior Can Improve Development Policy'*. It outlines different "frames" through which we see the world, and how we fill in missing information based on default assumptions rather than on questioning our mental models and look for evidence.

GLOSSARY

Lost in translation? This is what the dictionary says...

Knowledge: Facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject.

Knowledge management: Efficient handling of information and information resources within an organization or system.

Learning: The acquisition of knowledge or skills through study, experience, or being taught.

Adapt: Make (something) suitable for a new use or purpose; modify.

Loop: A structure, series, or process, the end of which is connected to the beginning

Feedback loop: The modification or control of a process or system by its results or effects, for example in a behavioral response.

Tacit knowledge: Unwritten, unspoken, and hidden vast storehouse of knowledge held by practically every normal human being, based on his or her emotions, experiences, insights, intuition, observations and internalized information.

Explicit knowledge: Articulated knowledge, which is expressed and recorded as words, numbers, codes, mathematical and scientific formulae etc., and which is easy to communicate to others via books, on the web, and other visual and oral means.

http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/
http://www.businessdictionary.com

Relevant information (in the form of timely and relevant 'feedback' and data) can, according to the same behavioral theorists, help to break through existing mental models and open up for new response mechanisms and forms of collaboration. This will in turn lead to learning-by-doing and move issues forward towards more systemic change.

The issue, then, is how to accommodate learning needs by making better use of various efforts to open up governance, generate channels for timely knowledge exchange, and ensure citizen engagement in the co-creation of solutions that lead to social accountability. The focus on local, iterative problem-solving has inspired efforts such as the Doing Development Differently movement to look at how we learn through problem-driven iterative processes in development[3] . Others have looked at complexity theory and have translated systems thinking into practical efforts to learn and adapt alongside other actors in order to increase the effectiveness of their interventions[4].

It has also been argued that processes where a lot is already known about cause and effect (e.g. 'people who sleep under a bed net to avoid mosquito bites are less likely to get malaria, therefore we distribute bet nets to families') may be better suited to a more linear implementation model than those where many different implementation paths are possible, and where there is a higher degree of interdependency of actors to achieve a specific objective. Yet, even so-called 'predictable' interventions may backfire due to a lack of contextual or social variables being taken account, as we all know (e.g. 'distributed bed nets were sold by the poorest' or 'women getting up from bed before sunrise for food preparation and get exposed to mosquitos then'). Without the means to engage in learning-oriented monitoring along the way, it would lead to program inefficiencies or larger-scale failure.

Contrary to short loops of experimentation and learning from "failure" that can lead to incremental adaptation and efficiency improvements, large-scale failure can be devastating institutionally and often lead to sanctions in terms of cut funding. It's 'learning too late'.

Just like specific interventions or projects need to be regularly assessed, monitored and reassessed, organizations are also constantly transforming entities that adapt and change depending on the individuals inside them (their skills, capacities and learning), the policies and processes that guide them, and their interactions with their operating environment. Most such systems of human interaction are 'nested' or placed in larger systems of e.g. public sector reform or social change. The way one actor in such a system behaves or interacts with others can potentially affect overall system performance. In other words, incremental changes and learning has to happen at multiple levels simultaneously for a more systemic shift forwards, towards a desirable development outcome.

II. WHY IS ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT A TIMELY TOPIC?

Combining or complementing increasingly open governance processes for participation and data generation with cyclical citizen-driven feedback opens up new avenues for learning and adaptation. It also departs from citizen feedback as being a largely 'extractive' exercise where information goes primarily one way (from user to provider) based on perceptions alone, rather than engaging in an increasingly informed dialogue on alternatives for action. In processes of complex change with many actors (as opposed to those with high causal predictability), the '*ability to act on information*'

[3] Andrews, M., Pritchet L., Woolcock, M., Escaping Capability Traps through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA), Harvard University, June 2012

[4] Ramalingam, B., Aid on the Edge of Chaos: Rethinking International Cooperation in a Complex World, Oct., 2013

of all in the system then becomes important. Without action, no learning. What is 'actionable' may differ between different interdependent actors across the system, and will certainly differ from an independent citizen to a large international development agency. How information is used again affect overall system performance. This goes into a much more nuanced, and often political, understanding of what types of knowledge inputs different actors may need, and when, in order to take a change agenda forward.

For instance, being asked to give feedback on a service may in itself be an empowering action for some citizens that could spur further engagement, but may not necessarily lead – in itself – towards any paths of alternative action or incremental behavior change at an individual level. If it does, the 'action potential' may differ depending on whether they are men or women, middle class or marginalized etc.

A more learning-or action-oriented approach can be seen in e.g. the GPSA funded project in the Philippines targeting a sub-set of beneficiaries of the national conditional cash transfer program, the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps).Existing mandatory information sessions with the poorest are being used to both teach them about their rights and help them try these concepts out in real life by monitoring their own children's health and education attendance and engaging with local public officials on local service delivery needs. But even with this innovative practice in place, the actual learning and change in behavior of cash transfer beneficiaries needs to be monitored from a 'learning' and 'action' perspective in addition to fully comprehend how this approach lead to learning and changed behavior of beneficiaries. This would be in addition to the more formal compliance monitoring that the government and external funders are interested in.

Beneficiaries from the conditional cash transfer (CCT) program implemented by the Philippines Department for Social Welfare review their self-evaluation forms about their children's educational and health status. Involving people in both self- and third party monitoring of local services is an innovation of the GPSA-funded project aimed at improving the integrity and compliance of the CCT. (Photo: C. Ørnemark, GPSA/World Bank).

III. WHAT ARE THE ORIGINS OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT AND HOW ARE CONCEPTS BEING USED IN DEVELOPMENT?

The concept of adaptive management refers to a process that promotes flexible decision-making that can be adjusted in the face of uncertainties as outcomes from actions and other events become better understood. This requires careful, learning-oriented, monitoring and the systematic incorporation of stakeholder feedback as an integral part of the overall management of an organization's or system's operations. Adaptive management underpins an operational definition of learning as a relatively permanent change in behavior potential, resulting from experience. This is in contrast to 'latent learning' which refers to learning that is not necessarily reflected in overt behavior change.

The concept was first developed and applied in the natural resources sector in the late 1970's and 1980's[5]. It recognizes the high degree of variability and interdependency in ecological systems, and the need to apply a 'systems approach' and close monitoring of any external intervention in a system to understand better how existing holding patterns (or 'equilibrium') will be affected and/or lead to change in overall systems performance. (Just like the introduction or removal of a species can disrupt an ecosystem equilibrium).

Lately, this concept has gained traction also in other areas of development particularly in highly unpredictable processes of change where power and politics influence existing governance deficiencies. Using systems analysis and monitoring over time, existing 'holding patterns' that hinder system effectiveness can be revealed and observed, and usually goes beyond the life-span of an individual project.

Some have defined adaptive management as an approach where *"management is treated as a deliberate experiment for the purpose of learning"* [6], whereas others put emphasis on its utility for exploring alternative ways to meet objectives, and adapting project or process management practices based on a combination of knowledge and 'real-time' learning-by-doing. It is also aimed at making decision-making more inclusive at all levels, drawing extensively on two-way sharing of information, and getting feedback from stakeholders in an iterative manner.[7]

In other words, adaptive management as it was originally conceived, was not designed to find out 'what works best' to solve a particular development problem, but also to holistically understand system behavior in relation to the problem being addressed.

An implication for social accountability initiatives could be to place specific public sector problem-solving interventions in a broader systemic perspective to ensure that feedback is inclusive of those who are currently marginalized and/or who have a vested interest to resist change to better understand systemic holding patterns (including gender inequalities and marginalization).

Another implication – and one which the GPSA has sought to at least partially address through its knowledge and learning component including the GPSA knowledge platform – is to engage in a continuous dialogue both with peers and funders about lessons on a more continuous basis, bridging practitioner learning with

[5] Holling, C. S. 1978. Adaptive Environmental Assessment and Management. Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons., and Walters, C. J. 1986. Adaptive Management of Renewable Resources. Macmillan, New York.

[6] See: www.greenfacts.org

[7] U.S. Department of the Interior

funding agencies' internal learning systems and incentives. Knowing how 'learning journeys' happen in practice could also help to focus a more substantive dialogue around how to do development differently through a more adaptive management approach as a means towards achieving joint objectives (see e.g. **a recent GPSA World Bank Brown Bag Lunch discussion**[9] on the subject, featuring guest speakers from the Overseas Development Institute).

Other related concepts

Often used as shorthand for learning for adaptive management, 'adaptive learning' generally refers to organizational learning that focuses on past successes and failures to make incremental improvements to their offerings in response to their changing environments. It is easy to get lost in semantics between those who argue that adaptive learning implies continuous 'coping' with the environment through a multitude of smaller scale course corrections (without necessarily questioning underlying beliefs and regulatory frameworks), and those who believe that incremental course correction constitutes only one step towards more deep-going learning leading to transformational change.

In the logic of 'transformational change', individuals or organizations may course correct, but such course correction will only lead to system transformation if they go through several loops of scrutiny where external feedback complements other evidence and knowledge to repeatedly challenge the dominant discourse, mental models, and key assumption (see figure 1, Section 5).

Pioneered by Peter Senge in the 1990s, and still used today, is the organizational learning literature highlighting the need to "tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at every level in the company", drawing on dimensions such as (i) systems thinking, (ii) personal mastery, (iii) mental models, (iv) building shared vision, and (v) team learning. It goes back to the notion that it needs more than individual or project-specific course correction to have a transformational impact on the whole organization or system or sector. Practically, it helps to think of different 'learning systems' and who would need to be part of such a system in order for more deep-rooted changes in values or discourse to occur.[8]

> ***"Organizations are either learning or they are dying. (...) Learning is a process that enhances knowledge, and knowledge is the capacity for effective action."***
>
> Peter Senge, on what it will take for the World Bank to always evolve through learning, from "The See-Saw of World Bank Learning", J. Haynes, IEG, Aug. 25, 2015

Finally, the concept of 'feedback' and 'feedback loops', useful as it is to illustrate the iterative nature of interactions between service provider and service user, can also cause some confusion. Some disciplines[10] refer to it as a means to give citizens 'voice' in decision-making that affects them as both a means and end in itself. Others – such as in behavioral economics, epidemiology or psychology – refer to it as a specific response mechanism based on a behavioral response or action at different levels. Finally, in monitoring and evaluation, it is more commonly used as a means to an end – namely to enhance internal learning through regular 'reality checks' as a part of the ongoing monitoring and learning process. The below box explains further.

[8] Peter Senge. The Fifth Discipline. 1990
[9] http://www.thegpsa.org/sa/event/bbl-doing-development-differently-politically-smart-and-adaptive-approaches-address-governance
[10] E.g. in relation to public sector or administration reform.

BOX 1

FEEDBACK LOOPS: WHAT THE PRACTITIONERS SAY

Feedback loops in behavioral economics, epidemiology and psychology etc.: The concept is used to refer to the response mechanisms by an individual, group or larger societal system based on four distinct steps of: (i) information input or 'trigger' (data, a specific experience, story, etc.), (ii) relevance and emotional connection to that information input, (iii) understanding of consequences with options for behavioral response, and (iv) action. It links use of informational triggers to a behavioral change or adaptation. Assessing and reflecting over such behavioral responses (at individual or system levels) can lead to repeat behavior if successful – either maintaining the adapted behavior or relapsing into the earlier patterns. The 'information trigger' at the beginning of every new feedback loop is different from the actual feedback, which refers to the response mechanism itself and how that information was processed and responded to (by the individual, the collective, or the system).

Feedback loops in social accountability and service delivery: 'Feedback' can be one-off or cyclical, and in many development interventions refers to the interactions between service provider and service user around needs or the satisfaction with a particular service or output. Simply put, 'feedback' mechanisms are about listening to the experiences and preferences of the people who are expected to benefit from change efforts. 'Closing the feedback loop' refers to services being responsive to user feedback with dialogue or engagement mechanisms in place for dialogue (taking it from one-way feedback to two-way communications, engagement, and delivery on mutual commitments). A more advanced interpretation of feedback loops includes the notion of shifting power dynamics between organizations/authorities and their primary constituents. For a good overview of different uses of the term, see this blog by Irene Guijt: http://betterevaluation.org/blog/feedback_loops_new_buzzword_old_practice

Feedback loops in project or program monitoring: The notion of feedback loops is also central to monitoring and evaluation where learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation typically seek to build cycles of internal and stakeholder learning and reflection into ongoing monitoring efforts, seeking feedback from relevant stakeholders. External validation of feedback collected on a more ongoing basis in the monitoring is then done through mid- and end-term evaluations. Some may also refer to this as 'learning loops' (see main text), as it is closely related to the institutionalized mechanisms for organizational performance and learning.

IV. AN EVOLVING FIELD- SOME TRENDS

The focus and renewed interest in adaptive management for development has shifted the learning discourse from learning as a 'good thing to do' (but perceived by some as a bit of a luxury when dealing with pressing development needs) to linking it more clearly to performance and results – i.e. learning as a driver for change and impact at scale, rather than as an add-on or afterthought to operations. This clearly has an impact on how we perceive and do knowledge management as well.

For one, the increased demand for real-time learning and experimentation means that we are increasingly moving away from the notion that knowledge can be managed or stored centrally, then disseminated and magically acted upon. This represents a more classical model of extracting and then (much later) disseminating findings once they have been 'packaged' and analyzed by a smaller group of people, often experts. Even in development research, what goes into such analyses are being increasingly stored on open sources, using open data formats or is more widely accessible so that there could be multiple interpretations using the same data set, with opportunities for 'socializing' knowledge and information along the way.

This trend of 'democratizing' data usage, blending it with citizen feedback and perception polls on specific services, is an area where development agencies' (including the World Bank's)

open data, open governance processes and social accountability converge – particularly when it comes to filling gaps for granular data at subnational levels. There is scope to expand on this in the context of involving citizens in providing feedback – not just on services as users – but on some of the underlying barriers to inclusive service access and use.

Another trend is that – contrary to the past – many funders (philanthropic and international aid agencies) in the social accountability field in particular are truly interested in investing in learning as part of the implementation process. There is also overall recognition of the fact that such funding streams need to reach those at the frontline of action, where learning-by-doing is happening close to the ground and where 'collective voice' through organized groups of civil society is in the focus. This is reflected both in the new strategies of the Ford Foundation and the Hewlett Foundation where it is linked also to their own learning agenda (see quote box).

> ***"We want to understand how best to support subnational groups, such as teachers' and parents' associations, youth groups, women's organizations and school management committees; how to avoid having such groups captured by elites; and how these groups are (or are not) engaging in useful ways with national-level civil society organizations."***
>
> Hewlett Foundation, Transparency, Participation & Accountability Grantmaking Strategy, Dec. 2015

From a donor perspective, the need for iterative, context-relevant learning is also reflected in the Smart Rules for Better Programme Delivery[11] adopted by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development. The Independent Evaluation Group of the World Bank has also recently researched the World Bank's own learning practices, reflecting critically about how to become a more adaptive learning institution (see Section 6). The challenge will be to connect meaningfully this renewed investment in 'frontline (or grassroots) learning' with mechanisms for adaptive management based on learning strategies in larger development institutions.

As a sector, however, our knowledge management approaches and tools still are not at par with the complexity of problems we are trying to fix. Therefore, we need to continue to better understand the full spectrum of knowledge approaches and functions, as well as how they relate to different aspects of social accountability. This could schematically be described as spanning from simply managing information (building up your own or your institution's knowledge repository), to disseminating information, socializing and interpreting information through exchange, through to experimenting with how it is possible to relate to and finally adapt behaviors and attitudes in concrete action (see Table 1 below).

V. A WIDE SPECTRUM OF APPROACHES AND LEARNING LOOPS

Albert Einstein has allegedly and famously said that imagination is more important than knowledge since "knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces (...) all there ever will be to know and understand." A parallel can be drawn to the area of knowledge and learning – knowledge being about what we know, or know that we don't know (with training to fill those gaps). Learning on the other hand, involves a more complex set factors to unlock what we do not even know that we don't know – much like imagination is needed to push the limits of what is known. Acting on this knowledge takes us even further into behavior theory.

[11] DFID, UK, 2014. See: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dfid-smart-rules-better-programme-delivery

Yet, in many organizational contexts, these two concepts are usually lumped together managerially without trying to understand where across the range of approaches we operate, and for what purpose. A somewhat simplified classification is outlined in the table below.

WHAT	Knowledge hoarding (for dissemination)	Knowledge generation (using existing data)	Knowledge exchange (socialization)	Learn to relate (preparation)	Learning to adapt (experimentation)
HOW	Amassing information and making it availlable	Interpretation and sense -making	Making 'Aha moments' possible leading to reinforcement or unexpected revelation	Relating information and knowledge to own concept	Trial and error
MAIN TOOLS	Data-bases, portals, gateways, knowledge repositories	Research	Networking, interpersonal and peer-to-peer exchange, focus group validation	Adult education principles, case-based discussions, experience-based	Behavioral feedback loops (evidence, action, consequence, reaction)
FOR WHOM?	Unknown	Cluster of interested audience	Usual or 'unusual' suspects interacting, often facilitated	Groups	Individuals and/ or interconnected (complex adaptive) systems
MOTTO	'It's all about the data'	'It's all about the analysis of data'	'It's all about the interaction around the data'	'It's all about the relevance of data put into practice and context'	'It's all about input, action, assessment & reaction'

Table 1. 'Simplified' overview of a range of knowledge & learning approaches

Looking across the various approaches outlined in Table 1, it is clear that we need all of these categories, sometimes simultaneously, sometimes in a phased way, or adapted to different settings and learning needs among our various stakeholder groups. For instance, 'knowledge hoarding' for later dissemination without engaging in some socialization of the information could be seen to drastically reduce the usefulness of the information to local stakeholders and peers. Likewise, trial and error on its own without combining it with a feedback and an evidence-based tracking approach could be seen as wasteful and irresponsible.

The recent focus on adaptive management and learning also cuts across the different categories outlined above since knowledge generation or some form of information trigger is usually necessary for engagement between actors to take off in joint processes of problem-solving.

Even so, many knowledge management initiatives tend to get stuck primarily in one category or another (in line with the 'mottos') or look at the various actors involved in social accountability processes and divide up the tasks rather artificially. One potential trap is that 'upstream' funders take on the task of amassing large datasets

that are divorced from language and context that is relevant for implementation, or commission less timely research pieces, while we look to frontline practitioners to do the learning-oriented adaptation in a vacuum of useful knowledge support.

Given that we operate in aid management frameworks where learning is 'projectized' rather than seen as a continuum towards longer term change processes, important 'learning journeys' are rarely invested in, nor documented. Moreover, traditional knowledge management tends to confound learning with a series of knowledge products, where information is 'managed' (in large knowledge repositories, databases or 'interpreted' by experts before it is released) rather than being put to instant use for continuous learning at multiple levels of engagement. Learning-oriented adaptation, on the other hand, puts a far bigger emphasis on information usage and action.

An adaptive approach to learning furthermore acknowledges that lots of small and incremental changes at multiple levels, by multiple actors, can accumulate into a tipping point that challenges existing 'holding patterns' (such as power, politics, gender roles etc.) that blocks change in a system. Consequently, learning and adaptation has to happen at multiple levels simultaneously through a series of interwoven relationships, and inspire deeper transformational processes of learning that can also question the current way things are done, the operating framework and 'rules', as well as the dominant mental models and discourses (see reference to single-, double- and triple-loop learning below).

Single, double and triple-loop learning

As mentioned, 'feedback loops' – the way it is being used in behavioral disciplines – is useful to analyze how different information stimuli may or may not lead to an alternative behavioral response, or adaptation. A feedback loop is simply a loop (small or large) of action, information, and reaction. When the reaction is measured or assessed, a new loop begins and so on. Positive feedback loops lead to a reinforcement and alignment of interests towards a constructive common goal or agenda (even if actors' motivations or incentives to achieve that goal differ), whereas negative feedback loops can lead to increasing divisions between actors or sub-groups, tensions and ultimately chaos and backlash (taking a certain change agenda backwards rather than forwards towards positive results achievement). Also, all feedback loops can be said to comprise four stages: informational input or evidence of some sort (not necessarily numerical), relevance, consequence and action in systems of human interaction[12]. Similarly, the idea of 'learning loops' applies the ideas of iterative 'loops' to individual or organizational (or 'system') learning and are geared to achieving specific results.

These ideas are also not new. In fact, the concept of 'single' and 'double loop' learning was developed by Chris Argyris already back in the 1970s, and have later been added to and further developed in different contexts. In adaptive management and learning, it's worth revisiting these concepts to better understand how different types of learning can occur, and to be able to adapt the knowledge management response accordingly. Rather than just talking about 'closing the feedback loop' (though a response or action), it connects this to a transformational learning process in order to achieve results.

[12] There is an extensive literature on this related to behavior theory. Another resource is 'Triggers' by Marshall Goldsmith and Mark Reiter, Crown Publishing Group, New York, 2015

BOX 2

"'Single-loop learning' refers to learning and corrective action within the same goal-structure and rule-boundaries. This is a simple feedback loop, where outcomes cause adjustment of behaviors, like a thermostat. It is generally in operation when goals, beliefs, values, conceptual frameworks, and strategies are taken for granted without critical reflection.

A higher order of learning is when the individual questions the goal-structures and rules upon detecting an error. This is more like 'coloring outside the lines' to solve the problem or error. This is referred to as 'double loop learning'. This is more creative and may lead to alterations in the rules, plans, strategies, or consequences initially related to the problem at hand. Double-loop learning involves critical reflection upon goals, beliefs, values, conceptual frameworks, and strategies."
Source: www.lifecircles-inc.com/Learningtheories/constructivism/argyris.html

A third level has also been added to widen the single, and double loop to a 'triple loop' where learning is embedded in context and questions how current rules and priorities are being set. This is a larger, system-wide feedback loop where existing holding patterns and power inequalities come into play, and where external stakeholder feedback can help as a reality check to stay grounded. There are many ways to interpret this approach and to apply it to organizational, project-specific or 'system level' learning. Some key questions for each stage, also illustrated in the graph below, could be:

Single loop learning: 'Are we doing things right?' (within the boundaries of our current framework)
Double loop learning: 'Are we doing the right things?' (or do we need to change processes or strategies?)
Triple loop learning: 'How do we decide what is right?' (in the unique context in which we operate, what are our current basis for decision-making?)

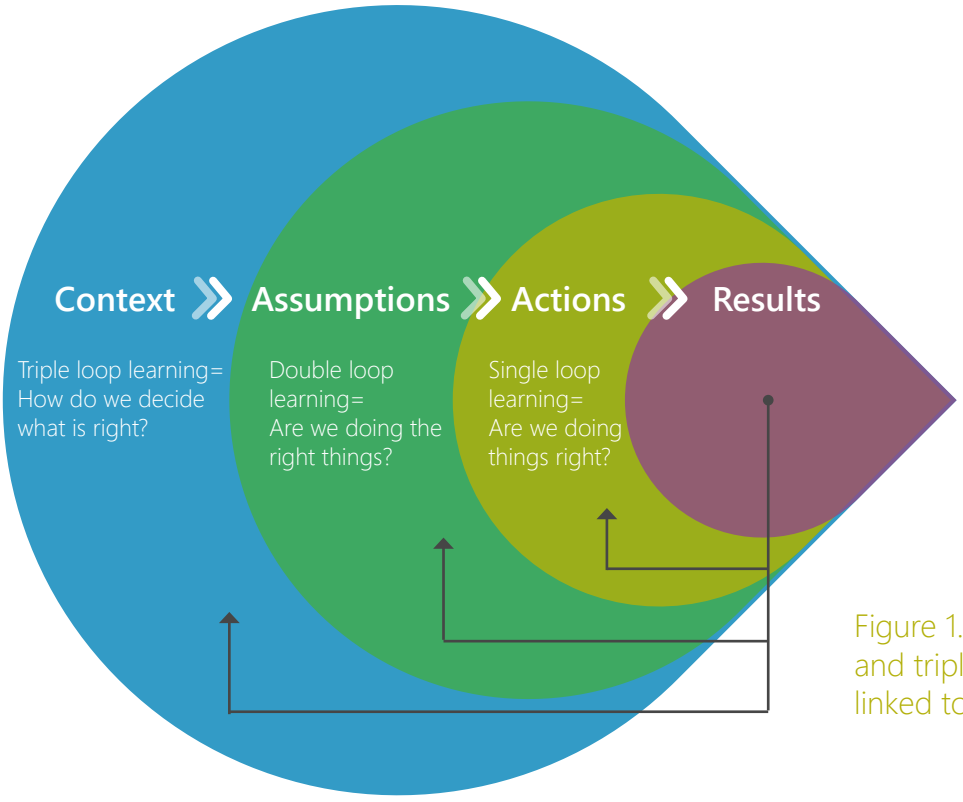


Figure 1. Single, double and triple loop learning linked to results

The above figure seeks to illustrate that working in adaptive systems involves learning at all levels of implementation in an iterative process, and is closely linked to managing for results. This goes beyond just project-specific corrective learning (are we doing things right?) or programmatic learning where we question underlying assumptions or strategies (are we doing the right things?). Regularly scrutinizing how we decide what is right in a given context, means tapping into different streams of knowledge, challenging existing mental models and listening to feedback from the ground as well as partners and non-partners (the use of 'unusual suspects' have been used as a break-away from always talking to the same people, instead listening to those who are likely to have a different opinion or who are unexposed to dominant ideas and thought frameworks). Clearly, this needs to be closely linked to existing monitoring and evaluation processes to link learning and adaptive management with results frameworks and monitoring practices.

Looking at existing practices of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) against this learning paradigm, it has been argued that while there will always be a dimension of upstream accountability to donors (are we doing things right?) and a dimension of downstream accountability to end-users (are we doing the right things?) based on assumptions that needs to be tested, a third dimension is that development agencies increasingly are asked to be accountable also to partners and peers in what has been referred to as 'triple accountability'[13] . The fact that development agencies are increasingly opening up its own data processes and incorporating, systematically, stakeholder and citizen engagement and feedback mechanisms about its own performance can be seen as part of this trend of 'shared accountabilities' across partners – national and international.

Knowledge and learning for adaptive management needs to be closely aligned to a project or organization's own performance monitoring, embedding learning loops close to the ground for quick stakeholder feedback in order to remove uncertainties and expose 'blind spots' (what we don't know that we don't know) in relation to achieving the desired results. Learning-oriented monitoring seeks to focus on learning at multiple levels by asking the question 'who needs to change (and learn) how in order for desired change to happen' (including the implementers themselves). In learning-oriented approaches – such as for example Outcome Mapping and Outcome Harvesting – attitude or behavioral change, rather than activities and outputs, are the focus of any internal tracking mechanisms. By merging learning loop thinking with the role of knowledge management, we can better track how to use of information, knowledge and learning in order to increase the uptake and external response to a specific intervention.

Making monitoring the 'learning engine' of any externally funded initiative should be a priority...

Without such flexible learning mechanisms in place that will systematically feed information into adaptive management processes, you could say that whole project cycle becomes one big behavioral feedback loop with little scope or room for adaptation before it is over (except for possibly in relation to a mid-term evaluation, but by then there is already a lot to lose if it comes out negatively). Re-thinking monitoring to become the 'learning engine' of any externally funded initiative should instead be the priority.

[13] Engel, P., Keijzer, N., Ørnemark, C. 2007. 'Responding to change: Learning to adapt in development cooperation'. (Policy Management Brief no. 19). Maastricht: ECDPM. http://ecdpm.org/publications/responding-change-learning-adapt-development-cooperation/

VI. LEARNING TO ADAPT WITHIN THE WORLD BANK

There is a pronounced commitment to knowledge generation and exchange by the World Bank Group's (WBG) leadership, as demonstrated in the desire to "capture all the best experiences from around the world and then putting that information in a form countries can use and try in their own local settings to improve on their own service delivery." This was explained by President Kim in a 2013 interview (UN News Centre 2013), reflecting his conviction that one of the central responsibilities of the World Bank as a development agency is to increase the flow of knowledge and learning across the world. Work on learning from 'trial and error' in lending operations that are more adaptive have fed into this line of thinking[14], along with efforts to more effectively 'harvest' learning from internal communities of practice that span across and go beyond individual projects. Implementing this vision in practice may be more difficult, however.

In 2015 the Independent Evaluation Group of the WBG published a substantial research piece[15] aimed at better understanding internal learning and adaptiveness in its lending operations. It found, among other things, that Bank staff are keenly aware of the importance of informal learning and group work, often referring to mentoring, learning from peers and using personal networks. While this could be a good thing, it also tended to reinforce mindset biases, with a perceived difficulty of challenging status quo since informal learning involves a large element of copying others' behavior. This is also where external feedback and other sources of evidence can help to off-set a paradigm of 'group think'—i.e. a state where group consensus can be an obstacle to innovation and paralyze critical self-reflection and learning.

Nevertheless, many of the staff who participated in the IEG internal survey believed that the World Bank's role in facilitating contacts as a knowledge broker between countries was working well, particularly in some regions. On the topic of using knowledge generated outside the Bank for learning and for providing 'cross-sector knowledge' to meet client needs, the picture was less clear, however. And while most interviewed staff believed that it should be possible to adapt based on lessons within the span of a single project, there was overall agreement that intra-project adaptiveness was lacking. Some also noted that most Bank-generated knowledge was focusing on the 'what', as in 'what works'. Yet "the solutions that governments seek are often operational in nature – they are about the 'how', not the 'what'".[16]

> ***"The only way to scale impact is to make regular people do extraordinary things. For that you need to develop the systems that allow them to learn."***
>
> NY Times columnist Tim Friedman at the launch event of the World Bank Open Learning Campus, 12 Jan. 2016

'Safe space' for questioning and critically learn also seemed to be largely lacking since less than one third of the IEG survey of Bank staff felt that they could openly discuss with their management what is not working in a lending operation. In one case where successful adaptation was noted, it was led by strong Bank facilitation and responsive high-capacity partners combined with innovative use of mechanisms to harvest ideas from field staff. In another case, the project departed from each of the good practice principles which World bank studies

[14] Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock, 2012.

[15] Learning and Results in World Bank Operations: Toward a New Learning Strategy, IEG, 2015.

[16] IEG, 2015, p.63.

and guidance had recommended as a blueprint, instead letting the local context drive the need for flexibility.[17] The IEG report lead author[18] also stressed that Bank staff perceived the lack of institutional incentives as one of the biggest problems for learning and knowledge sharing, calling for a system of both financial and non-financial rewards to ensure learning behaviors at scale. This, she meant, should go hand in hand with sufficient time and budgets set aside for learning and knowledge sharing.

And in the context of the GPSA

The Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA) was designed to invest in and link practitioner-based learning from its civil society grantees[19] and partners to broader processes of sector-wide and institutional learning across the World Bank[20]. Capacity-building is provided to the civil society grantees to continuously share knowledge, self-assess and adapt. To date, the concept of 'adaptive learning' has primarily been used to refer to grantees' ability to continuously course correct in their individual projects, linking learning closely to results achievement. This was explained in an earlier GPSA Note[21] where a sample of 40 of 644 applications were analyzed to see how applicants responded to the question of how they would incorporate learning for improved results. In line with subsequent proposal assessments, it illustrated that many grantees faced challenges to fully grasp the link between learning and results and to turn this into actionable components for the knowledge and learning provisions in the budget. Overall, few proposals reflected learning-oriented monitoring practices to continu ously test their own assumptions against actual learning of key stakeholders. Rather, proposals generally contained activities geared at how others could learn from them.

Even though the GPSA grant application format specifically asked applicants to develop a rationale for knowledge and learning that is linked to their own learning, integrated in ongoing program management practices (such as in their monitoring and evaluation), there was a tendency to reduce knowledge and learning to a set of training tools, workshops or publications of 'best practice' (rather than the learning process of determining what makes such practice the 'best'). This was, however, not surprising since donors are often at fault for reducing knowledge and learning to a set of pre-determined activities and tools rather than a focus on learning outcomes for different audiences, including implementers and organizations themselves. Showing 'what works' and how they are certain about it, seemed to be instead what many of the civil society organizations from around the world were used to include in proposals submissions.[22]

The grantees from the first couple of rounds of Calls for Proposals (2012 and 2013) were, subsequent to their grants having been approved, asked to draw up individual Knowledge & Learning (K&L) plans including different aspects of knowledge management practices such as knowledge generation, knowledge sharing, exchange visits and feeding learning continuously into internal planning processes and reviews as well as into GPSA activities (knowledge platform).

[17] The cases refer to WB loan to the Department of Social Welfare in the Philippines and to small enterprise access to finance project in Turkey. IEG, 2015, p. 65-66.

[18] Soniya Carvalho.

[19] Currently funding 23 grantees in 17 countries based on two Calls for Proposals (2013 and 2014), with a third Call completed in early 2016.

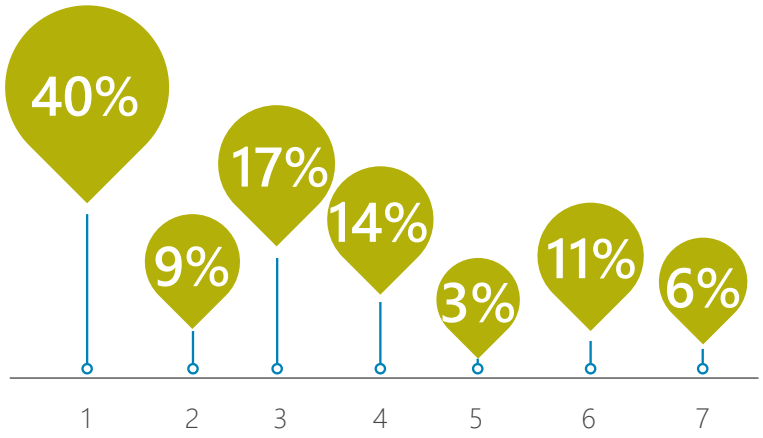
[20] By, among other things working closely with the Citizen Engagement Secretariat for Bank operations.

[21] Gurezovich, F., Poli, M. : Are We Ready for Strategic Social Accountability? Note 5: Adaptive Learning

[22] Ibid.

An internal stock-taking exercise of the K&L plans in 2015, however, found that although quality of these plans varied, overall there were gaps in the area of making projects more learning-oriented by integrating various learning and knowledge approaches into the work. Rather, learning was often seen as a separate 'add on' to the main operations. At the same time, much of the practical learning took place through day-to-day implantation When asked during an interactive polling of around 70 representatives from grantees and some of their government counterparts at GPSA grantee workshop in 2015, who they thought would learn most from their GPSA projects, most agreed that it would be the project implementation team itself (40%). Less than one in five thought beneficiaries would be the main learners with 'government' being seen as the least likely to learn the most from the experience. While this is hardly surprising, it opened up for an interesting discussion about how to broaden the spectrum of learning-by-doing in actions that are dependent on mutual learning and co-creation of solutions among several actors.

Who do you think will learn the most in the course of the project?



1. Project implementation team
2. Knowledge and learning staff
3. Beneficiaries
4. Project Partner CSOs
5. Government
6. GPSA team
7. World Bank

Souce: Poll taken at GPSA Grantees Workshop, May 2015

A bigger lesson was also that a specific budget allocation for knowledge and learning – which is a good start – is not enough for shifting towards more adaptive management practices based on mutual learning alongside others without providing clear guidance as to how GPSA frames the concepts of knowledge and learning for improved results, with an emphasis on learning alongside others for more adaptive management, with other knowledge products to support the behavior changes they seek to obtain (e.g. a more responsive service provider to citizen's needs). A shift to focus more on how to document and support grantees' 'learning journeys' towards adaptive management will be explored in response.

Importantly, the learning potential of the World Bank in the field of citizen engagement and social accountability has also come into focus since the WBG's Strategic Framework for Citizen Engagement was adopted in in FY 2013/14, making citizen engagement mandatory in all World Bank financed operations where beneficiaries can be clearly identified. This has opened up a new internal demand for learning in this field, which the World Bank's Citizen Engagement Secretariat and a network of citizen engagement focal points across Bank operations are trying to address, and with whom the GPSA is collaborating as an internal knowledge and learning resource.

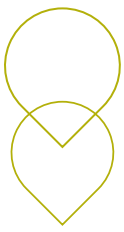
Increasingly 'connecting the dots' between the GPSA, the citizen engagement agenda and open governance is being used as a strategy to maximize learning – from those at the frontline to the sector as a whole. However, more can still be done, particularly around how continuous learning and adaptation for optimal social accountability outcomes can be achieved, and how this in turn can help improve governance effectiveness in specific sectors.

VII. SOME PRACTICAL STEPS FORWARD

An often stated pre-requisite for 'group' and organizational learning is that questioning is safe, that learning is welcomed by senior management, and that learning-oriented behavior is rewarded. That would be ideal. The reality in many (if not most) settings, however, is that conditions for learning are not perfect. 'Thinking outside the box' among employees may hypothetically be welcomed, but inadvertently discouraged in practice. And yet, amazingly, adaptation, evolution and change happens all the time in large as well as small organizations. Given that learning is a continuous process that happens at multiple levels, what might start out as individual learning may attract a cluster of like-minded. Improvements in performance or results may win other stakeholders over.

Innovative knowledge management can help connect otherwise parallel information or evaluative streams...

There are several concrete ways in which grantees and donors alike can seek to make processes more learning-oriented and adaptive. An important place to start is to add an explicit learning dimension to operations, including the theory of change, along with existing monitoring practices and frameworks, but also to increasingly use innovative knowledge management practices to connect otherwise parallel information or evaluative streams. Some ideas for possible action areas are outlined below.



In relation to intervention design& set-up

Make learning assumptions explicit

Interactively analyze a particular project or longer-term initiative's intervention logic and overall change agenda to reveal and spell out learning objectives and assumptions around learning (for whom, how, with what effect) for each deliverable or milestone. To do so, identify (i) the learning assumption that is associated with each expected behavioral change among different stakeholders, (ii) whether the management systems are suitable for regularly monitoring and nurturing such learning, and (iii) whether outputs are likely to be context-relevant and significant enough to trigger a positive adaptive response by relevant stakeholders (based on evidence, action, assessment and reaction), and (iv) how this aligns (or not) with the overall change theory of the project.

By mapping out implicit learning assumptions related to key outputs (by individuals, organizations and the overall stakeholder system) it is possible to track and verify such assumptions along the way. Otherwise it is possible to end up with a situation where all deliverables have been produced, but where no real learning has occurred. Mapping out the expected (and real) 'learning journeys' in longer-term processes can also help to highlight over-simplifications of how learning and behavior change occurs, and by whom.

For instance, if we assume that 'citizens' will learn to hold public officials to account, it is important to break down the different learning and information needs among different sub-groups of citizens and to test if our intervention can provide them with relevant information triggers that can lead to increased knowledge and learning along the way. Conversely, are the informational triggers and learning process for targeted public officials relevant enough for them, and are the consequences for e.g. not responding to citizen feedback clear enough to help cause a response? Also, if our aim is to influence the development sector more broadly, we also need to map out how we intend to serve existing 'learning needs' at that broader, international level (which is different from assuming that 'good practices' will spread and scale on its own).

Regularly adapt plans based on changing and emerging learning needs

In doing so, it is important to keep in mind that actual learning needs (e.g. what internal or external actors will need to know or learn) is not necessarily known at the outset of a project or process. This also means that knowledge and learning plans need to be flexible enough to accommodate for changing needs and put a bigger emphasis on information uptake and usage at different levels. Often, this may mean a shift away from more predictable or 'traditional' knowledge outputs such as publications or data-bases unless it is clear how they will be used. Likewise, capacity needs assessments, useful as they are, tend to focus on known, rather than unknown capacity gaps at the outset of a process. Adapting in systems of complex change means that learning needs will change based on the actions of others in the system. In the logic of adaptive management, capacity needs assessments would therefore need to be regularly revisited and linked to monitoring of actual learning outcomes as well as of emerging learning needs.

In existing knowledge & management practices

Review knowledge management strategies from a learning perspective

A review of existing knowledge management practices and outputs could inquire into whether they actually lead to learning and drive change forward – internally and/or externally. For instance, is the primary knowledge approach stuck in the mode of 'amassing knowl-

edge' in large databases or producing publications that will at some point be shared and hopefully inspire learning by others? Or is the project using knowledge generation, sharing, socialization and internalization strategically to help achieve key outputs? (See Table 1). Is the balance right between targeting external and internal stakeholders for learning? Another question could be whether learning happens at more than one 'level' of operations, and how do we know? While 'operational learning' may be reflected in the regular reporting, our influence and relevance to peers and the sector as a whole is often assumed.

Clearly articulate the knowledge management approach upfront

At organizational level – or in view of a particular intervention or project – clearly articulating the approach to knowledge management and its role in relation to multi-stakeholder learning (internal and external) can be helpful. This can help to articulate how knowledge and learning is integrated into operations, how it complements and connects knowledge streams across stakeholders, and how it is being used to maximize knowledge uptake that leads to action at multiple levels in broader systems of change. Clearly stating the organization's 'philosophy' about knowledge and learning may also help internal and external stakeholders to be more constructively self-critical and learning-oriented in its interactions and/or reporting.

Clearly spell out and monitor learning objectives alongside each output and outcome

Often, the learning objectives are unclear or not spelled out, and monitoring of learning outcomes as a part of overall progress and performance monitoring is often lacking. Monitoring of learning objectives would need to go beyond assessing the extent to which external stakeholders are learning, and inform also our own role in that process. What can we do to make information triggers more relevant? What about the timeliness and abilities for stakeholders to put their new knowledge into practice? How will we test and learn from what we think will work? It would also be important to closely align learning objectives and their monitoring with existing results frameworks, in order to avoid setting up parallel processes internally.

In relation to current monitoring and evaluation (M&E) practices

Link learning to monitoring & evaluation and organizational strategy

Having learning-oriented monitoring mechanisms in place would be a helpful first step towards integrating a learning dimension to what can otherwise be a routine practice of data hording in M&E databases. But we also need an 'inquisitive mindset' to make monitoring and learning part of day-to-day operations. If learning is seen as an important part of the organizational strategy and something that the senior leadership puts emphasis on, it will help to create this 'culture of learning' which is closely linked to performance improvements and results.

One suggestion would therefore be to start with the strategic plans, operational plans and work plans, and see how and where learning is part of the regular reporting and tracking internally. Is it rewarded, is it mentioned, is it visible? Are there openings and opportunities for feeding learning back into the organizational memory? Both monitoring and evaluation will have multiple functions, but which function is dominant in a particular project, organization or setting: the accountability function, the learning function or the communications/fundraising function? How 'narrowly' are monitoring results shared and discussed internally? As for external programmes and results frame works – even if they are rigid in their format – what

would be the 'learning dimension' of each indicator to be measured? Who would gain from that learning? How can things be adapted to widen the learning circle to include more stakeholders – e.g. by shifting the learning paradigm closer to the ground?

Separate Monitoring from Evaluation – and make 'monitoring' about learning...

Monitoring and evaluation could be seen as two sides of the same coin. However, often stringent reporting formats or results-frameworks that correspond to donor's accountability needs – rather than to the learning needs of implementers or users – mean that the M&E process usually is linked neither to learning, nor to adaptive management. One way around that could be to set up an organizational monitoring system that responds to both donor requirements and internal learning needs, using innovative ways of involving those closest to the ground (and thus most likely to adapt through learning-by-doing) in regularly tracking key behavioral or attitude changes where it most matters. Building and rewarding learning 'from below' at the frontline as part of the delivery mechanism, is something that funders may well both accept and wish to invest in. So while monitoring and evaluation should stay linked, it may be helpful to look at monitoring as the internal learning aspect of what will periodically be validated (or contested) through external evaluation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This note has looked at the role of adaptive management in the context of how we use knowledge and learning in processes of complex change (as opposed to interventions with high causal predictability), particularly focusing on the field of social accountability, and drawing on some observations and lessons from the GPSA.

It has argued that the 'ability to act on information', as an important complement to information access and the production of knowledge products that are largely extractive, should be a growing concern for our knowledge management (KM) practices. It could be particularly relevant in the field of social accountability where progress is dependent on incremental attitude and behavioral changes of many actors.

Another key concern is to understand what type of information or knowledge input is needed when, for whom, to contribute to the desired changes outlined in our theories of change. A key question to ask would be 'who is expected to act on this information how' for each knowledge product or process, knowing that timeliness and relevance is needed to close any behavioral feedback loops. Some feedback and behavioral change loops are instant – often relating to a simpler decision-making process with fewer actors involved or dependent on the outcome. Such incremental changes could be important to track and build upon as they can accumulate to larger shifts in attitudes, discourse or behavior. Others take place at more systemic level before leading to concrete change on the ground.

Internal monitoring and evaluation efforts tend to track project outputs and keep track of tangible knowledge outputs produced. To more effectively use and integrate knowledge management, however, such behavioral and attitude changes – if they were integrated into learning-oriented monitoring – could help us better understand information uptake, learning, knowledge and adaptation much more consistently across operations

The paper has suggested that the discussion around behavioral change and feedback loops is relevant in the context of adaptive management and learning as it illustrates the need to constantly test assumptions around behavioral response at different levels (individual, organizational, system). It is relevant in the field of so-

cial accountability for a couple of reasons:
(i) to see how we most effectively use 'informational triggers' (such as citizen-driven data and other data sources) to put into motion incremental behavioral responses among all stakeholders required for horizontal and vertical social accountability systems (from citizen, government through to international donor agency), and (ii) to understand how knowledge management can better support the adaptive process among multiple stakeholders involved in citizen-driven social accountability.

Finally, it has sought to take the discussion around learning away from the more insular field of introspection to one where it is framed as a key driver of change and managing for results, with some suggestions for practical ways forward.