

SNAPSHOT OF ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT IN PEACEBUILDING PROGRAMS

What are the key challenges and recommendations for implementing adaptive management in peacebuilding programs?

Case Study Review
January 2018



**Alliance for
Peacebuilding**

Advancing sustainable peace and security worldwide

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About Alliance for Peacebuilding

The Alliance for Peacebuilding (AfP) is the institutional home for the peacebuilding community – a network of over 100 organizations working to resolve conflict and create sustainable peace in 153 countries. Our members include some of the world’s largest development organizations, most innovative academic institutions, and the most powerful peacebuilding groups – and our partners span a range of sectors, including environment, education, unarmed citizen protection, business, media, the arts, and more – all working toward the shared goal of peace. AfP amplifies the voices of peacebuilders worldwide, tackling issues too large for any one organization to address alone.

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Snapshot of Adaptive Management in Peacebuilding Programming

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Executive Summary

The Alliance for Peacebuilding developed the report *Snapshot of Adaptive Management in Peacebuilding Programs* with support from Humanity United. This report examines how existing organizational programs are designing and learning from adaptive management in a conflict affected and fragile states. It further provides practical recommendations for applying adaptive management to peacebuilding programs based on synthesis of ten case studies collected through interviews with subject matter experts.

Successful peacebuilding programs require structures as adaptive and fluid as the contexts in which they operate. Peacebuilding programs are often implemented in fragile and conflict affected environments, where conflict dynamics are not static and do not take a linear path. Programs must swiftly, appropriately, and ably adjust to these changes to ensure they prevent, manage and mitigate conflict and build peace. Before programs can adapt, however, they must be able to detect and diagnose environmental shifts. Yet, standard design, monitoring, and evaluation (DM&E) practices, including non-adaptive log frames and post-hoc evaluation methodologies, remain relatively inflexible. Current DM&E frameworks frequently prioritize results-based management over adaptive management, linear thinking over systems thinking, and rigidity over flexibility. The peacebuilding evaluation field needs to adopt adaptive management as standard practice to ensure programs are equipped to make course changes and better reflect the complex realities in which they operate.

Adaptive management involves three elements: understanding the necessity of experimentation to understand what works, creating mechanisms for collecting and sharing information about the context, and adjusting activities, operations, plans, and strategies based on this information.

This report seeks to provide practical guidance to help realize a paradigm shift toward integrating adaptive management in peacebuilding programming. It includes key recommendations and lessons learned that center on three themes: developing a program structure, securing buy-in to build an enabling culture, and defining technical requirements.

To develop a program structure that allows for flexibility, adaptive management must be integrated into program design at the earliest stages. It cannot simply be tacked on once implementation is already underway. Additionally, organizations must ensure adaptive management is a foundational element of the program. This approach requires greater alignment between implementers and donors and a clear definition of roles.

Successful implementation of adaptive management processes necessitates organizational buy-in that allows individuals working at all levels of the program to work adaptively and be accountable to an adaptive practice. A core element of this culture-shift is building the comfort level of donors and implementers with the technical, programmatic, and philosophical elements of an adaptive management approach. It also requires donor organizations and senior management to empower field staff with flexible reporting templates and timelines, freedom to reallocate funding and update budgets, and the ability to make decisions rapidly. Donors and implementers also need to be comfortable with identifying an activity or program that is not working and adapting.

Lastly, the report finds that the technical requirements for what constitutes adaptive management must be clearly defined. Adaptive management must be established as a distinct professional field with specific associated technical knowledge. Evaluators must be well-versed in this methodology and be committed towards adaptive management principles, rather than retooling existing approaches and deeming it as adaptive management.

Findings from these case studies will be applied to help inform and support a field wide shift toward more adaptive and learning-focused peacebuilding DM&E.

Introduction

By definition, peacebuilding takes place in complex, volatile, conflict affected and fragile contexts. Peacebuilding programs must be highly responsive to these shifting contexts, yet current monitoring and evaluation frameworks are often too rigid and linear to allow for adaptive learning and programming. Current standards and practices in design, monitoring, and evaluation are too often divorced from thinking about the systems in which projects operate and do not often leave room for iteration and adaptation. This gap is especially prevalent in fragile and conflict-affected environments. In these contexts, standard practices of evaluation, including non-adaptive log frames and post-hoc evaluation methodologies, do not give programs the flexibility they need for course changes and project re-alignment in periods of rapid change. These changes must occur not only in the technical elements of monitoring and evaluation, but in the relationships between donors and implementers, with a greater understanding of how to manage risk and trust in rapidly shifting environments.

A systems approach to learning and adaptation needs to become standard practice in the peacebuilding field. The relatively new sub-field of peacebuilding evaluation¹ may offer a window of opportunity for design, monitoring, evaluation, and learning processes and practices to be shaped more by systems thinking, complexity theory, and adaptive management than by results-based management paradigms borrowed from the international development sector. Peacebuilding may also provide a unique opportunity for re-envisioning and remodeling traditional design, monitoring, and evaluation processes to be more responsive to learning and adaptation.

To document progress on adaptive management, the Alliance for Peacebuilding is exploring how several current organizational programs are designing and learning from adaptive management. This snapshot paper provides a brief overview of adaptive management, analyzes challenges and progress emerging from semi-structured interviews with subject matter experts (both program managers and evaluators), and provides some key recommendations and lessons learned for those interested in implementing adaptive management within their own work.

Ten case studies are included in this paper: seven cover programming occurring in seven specific countries, two discuss multi-country programming, and one presents institutional approaches to adaptive management that transcend individual programming. Criteria for consideration was evaluated on a case-by-case basis, with the goal of reviewing direct peacebuilding programming. However, since this approach is new we also included programs that were being implemented in fragile and conflict affected countries that were addressing grievances and prevention but not peacebuilding programming specifically. Because of confidentiality concerns, detailed identifying information on the case studies has been removed from this document.

Overall, findings from the ten case studies are focused around three themes, with supporting recommendations, including:

1. Developing a program structure;
2. Securing buy-in to build an enabling culture; and
3. Defining technical requirements.

"Adaptive management needs to be structured to get real learning. The parameters need to be clear to get the kind of information that's needed - not just communications-style success stories."

Many in the aid and peacebuilding community have been working on ways to intentionally shift processes and practices to support adaptive management, demonstrating a clear interest and momentum. The

¹ Scharbatke-Church, C. (2011). *Evaluating Peacebuilding: Not Yet All It Could Be*. Retrieved from http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/scharbatke_church_handbook.pdf

experience of these organizations that are grappling with the design and implementation of adaptive management provides multiple opportunities for learning. However, many organizations are struggling to implement adaptive management and are confronted with the reality that it can be a difficult process.

“Adaptive management looks like a struggle along the way. Where you will end up as a team or a program cannot be clear at the beginning, which is uncomfortable and means it’s hard to know if you’re on the right track as you go along.”

Key findings from this research are clear - **from the initial phases of a project, adaptive management must be a key element of program design and not simply an add on.** People interviewed cited this as a significant problem when implementing adaptive management. One organization discussed how adding an adaptive management component to their program was a good idea in theory, but it was not well

“Well-intentioned doesn’t cut it. Need to design adaptive management well, and make sure anyone in a primary role for that work is skilled in fostering it”

thought out and there was never a meeting of the minds between the implementers and the evaluator as to what they wanted to accomplish with this approach. The adaptive element of the program never added a benefit to the program, resulting in this component just fizzling out during the life of the program. The organization stated “it was not well thought out and put on the project after it was designed. More importantly the program managers never really understood the evaluator’s role and the evaluator never understood his role.” Another organization stressed how alignment on how adaptive management is carried out (i.e. what approaches like developmental evaluation will entail) should happen early on between implementers and donors or even between in-country donors and headquarters-based donors. Adaptive management involves such a paradigm shift that an encouraging culture must be built up to support it at every stage of the design and implementation process and among staff from all involved organizations. Internally, program staff, organizational leaders, and M&E specialists must work together to make adaptive management a foundational component of monitoring and evaluation, and not simply an optional add-on. At the same time, adaptive management must be specific, and not used as a catch all phrase, or a loose framework for program design.

Another key theme is that **the enabling culture for successful implementation must include: new mindsets, trust, capacity and competencies, and crafting a group narrative around engagement in and support for working adaptively and engaging with systems.** Securing buy-

“This requires a certain degree of trust in your people and in your staff, so you can create an environment where people feel confident to try different things, admit that in certain cases an approach was not the correct approach without feeling they are discredited.”

in to build an enabling culture that allows for change in the organizational culture is a key challenge, because these challenges are as much cultural, organizational and philosophical, as they are technical. It is critical to create a responsive environment to adaptive management -- with buy-in at all levels -- because adaptive management can be costly in financial resources and staff time, elements that are already scarce in most peacebuilding programs. This

will require the donors and program implementers, including leadership at the implementing organizations, be comfortable with both the technical elements of working with systems approach, as opposed to linear log frames, and the more philosophical issues around attribution, risk, failure, and trust inherent in adaptive processes. Multiple respondents highlighted trust from their donor organization and senior management as the fundamental requirement for successfully implementing adaptive management. Examples of this trust included having flexible reporting templates and timelines, less restrictions on budget changes and reallocation of funding, greater empowerment for

the field team to make decisions without multiple levels of bureaucracy, and recognition and support for individual level thinking informing organizational management. Most importantly, to reap the substantial benefits from adaptive management, organizations must be accountable to the process, and must invest the necessary resources to employ adaptive management fully and effectively. This can only be done with outright intent and commitment at all levels.

The final theme identified in this research highlights **the need for building and defining technical requirements for adaptive management**. There is no single tool that will work best for every program. However, there needs to be basic guidelines for good adaptive management, as outlined in this report; otherwise, this approach can easily lose its purpose and focus. For example, it is critical to find evaluators who can implement adaptive management evaluation methodologies in an intentional, and technically accurate way, keeping an arms-length distance from the actual programming, and not simply relabeling their standard methodologies as “adaptive management.” People cited many technical examples of problems starting with identifying and hiring evaluators who understand what adaptive management is and how to implement it. Many evaluators believe they are doing adaptive management but in reality are simply retooling their own traditional approach. Others noted that the M&E workforce is so often trained in results-based management that focusing on unchanging indicators set early in the project cycle are seen as the main means to track success. Some M&E professionals are also indoctrinated to look mainly for successes and to weed out valuable information about failures that would be crucial to adaptive management. Participants in this study gave examples of technical problems they encountered, including conflicts of interest where the evaluator became part of the program they were meant to be evaluating. Additional technical issues encountered focused on communication and how best to keep communication lines open between program and evaluators. Many participants stated that on the outside adaptive management looks easy but in practice, to do it right, there needs to be guidelines and promising practices outlined. One participant stated that she wished she would have read this paper prior to starting the adaptive management component of their project because she would have done everything differently.

“Ongoing process, not a one-off...adaptive management is not a new sexy toy but a minimum for operations”

What is adaptive management?

Adaptive management involves three elements²:

1. Recognizing that **experimentation** is needed to find what works through trial and error;
2. Establishing a **flow of information** about the context (through monitoring and/or other data); and
3. **Changing activities, operations, plans, and/or strategies** based on this information.

Adaptive management is most useful in complex environments when:

1. Needed information about the systems one is trying to influence is unavailable or impossible to gather, and
2. There is not a clear idea of the best pathways for influencing these systems.³

Sometimes adaptive management is assumed to be the opposite of accountability, but this depends heavily on how one defines ‘accountability’. If accountability is about ensuring program quality and

² Mercy Corps. (2014). *Navigating Complexity: Adaptive Management at the Northern Karamoja Growth, Health, & Governance Program*. Portland, Oregon: Amir Allana.

³ Ibid.

delivering against program objectives, adaptive management can be helpful in bolstering accountability in complex environments.

The Theory of Adaptive Management

Ideas about making space for learning that leads to iterative changes and adaptations are not new. In 1983, recognition that certain aspects of international development work were uncertain, led Dennis Rondinelli, a professor and researcher of public administration, to advocate for an adaptive approach. However, a drive toward demonstrating value for money, measuring performance, and evaluating program effectiveness led the field to prioritize results-based management around that same time.⁴

Results-based management and the related emphasis on logical frameworks and indicators tended to center around linear change and trying to attribute results to singular projects or efforts. The focus on measuring performance and program effectiveness led the monitoring and evaluation (M&E) field to focus more on outputs, and to inappropriately consider outputs as representations of outcomes and impact, which were harder to attribute to a single actor and/or track through linear causal pathways. These more linear approaches to development work best in areas where solutions are well understood and the context is stable – uncommon characteristics of the contexts in which peacebuilding programming is normally focused. These linear approaches begin to become less useful when used in complex environments where little can be known in advance and situations change rapidly.⁵

Around the turn of the 21st century, the peacebuilding field turned its focus to evaluating project outcomes and impacts and to contributions of projects or organizations to “peace writ large”. At the same time, another focus surfaced around the need to shift impact assessments from the project and personal level to the strategic level. Although these pathways were not totally aligned, they both acknowledged that peacebuilding works on complex changes that go beyond the scope of a single project. This led to a greater focus on strategy, theories of change, and rigor in peacebuilding evaluation.⁶ While the peacebuilding field is becoming increasingly professionalized, with a stronger focus on developing evidence-based practice and more developed capacity for measuring impact, it still has significant work to do to change the culture around design, monitoring and evaluation. The next challenge for the peacebuilding evaluation field is to foster a more rigorous culture of monitoring and evaluation—and to gather, test, analyze, and synthesize the lessons that emerge from evaluations, to create more consistent and evidence-based standards of peacebuilding practice to show the impact of peacebuilding programming and build a culture of utilization. The Peacebuilding Evaluation Consortium believes that adaptive management is an approach that will serve the peacebuilding field well, given that the complex and conflict affected environments in which peacebuilding programs operate are not static and need a highly adaptive approach – from the design phase, all the way through the programming.

The current system of peacebuilding and development assistance, created by implementers and donors, are not yet designed to engage openly with the complexity in which they operate. Current critiques of peacebuilding and development assert that, when working in fragile or conflict affected situations at the levels of governance and/or social change, a focus on ‘best practice solutions’ driven

⁴ Wilson, Gregory. (2016). *What is adaptive management?*. Antylles Articles. Retrieved from https://antylles.com/2016/10/17/adaptive-management/#_edn2

⁵ Hunt C.T. (2016). Avoiding Perplexity: Complexity-Oriented Monitoring and Evaluation for UN Peace Operations. In Brusset, E., Coning C., Hughes B. (Eds.) *Complexity Thinking for Peacebuilding Practice and Evaluation* (pp. 79-109). London: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ Scharbatke-Church, C. (2011). *Evaluating Peacebuilding: Not Yet All It Could Be*. Retrieved from http://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Handbook/Articles/scharbatke_church_handbook.pdf

by external actors, like peacebuilding and development organizations, is flawed. Other critiques posit that starting from a place of predetermined problems, with standardized responses, ignores local institutional and social realities that are crucial to peacebuilding.⁷ In the past five years, implementers and donors have begun to try and understand that violent conflict is actually part of larger ‘wicked problems’, but the field has not developed the tools necessary to work on the systems-level change that could lead to more sustainable peacebuilding.⁸ The recognition of ‘wicked problems’ in the development and peacebuilding fields prompts different programming approaches that work better with the rapid and unpredictable nature of change.⁹ However, this work is still in the beginning stages.

Recent traction among donors holds promise for the future direction of peacebuilding and development policy and funding mechanisms, increasingly focusing on complexity and adaptive management. At USAID, the newly revised ADS Chapter 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy¹⁰, demonstrates a greater focus on collaboration, learning, and adaptation, and makes room for adaptive management and complexity-aware M&E. This regulation seems to indicate a shift in donor thinking towards the utility of adaptive management, particularly in complex environments, and it could serve as an example to encourage more donors to support, both financially and through program requirements, adaptive management practices. However, this regulation was not put out with guidance on how to develop an adaptive management approach. This gap has left organizations to start implementing this approach without an understanding of best practices when implementing adaptive programming.

Donors, even in large agencies, are seeing that while the end goals of development and peacebuilding activities may remain the same, the paths for achieving them will need to become more adaptive and flexible. Encouraging trust at all levels – between M&E staff and program staff and especially between donors and implementing partners – is critical to supporting this shift. Promoting transparency and learning creates an environment where disclosing failure or changing program design does not lead to ‘hand slaps’ from senior management or lack of trust from donors, but rather allows for collective learning as the peacebuilding field moves toward evaluating collective impact towards peace.

There are other promising examples of donors moving toward an adaptive management approach. DFID and USAID are partnering on the Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) program¹¹ which aims to foster “greater use of robust evidence and [monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL)] systems for adaptive management within global development communities, and greater supply, demand and quality of MEL services available for adaptive development programmes”.¹² GLAM demonstrates how donors are working together to explore questions they have in common

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Engineers Without Borders Canada. (2014). *Shifting Aid Models to Manage for Systemic Change*. Retrieved from

https://usaidlearninglab.org/sites/default/files/resource/files/EWB_Canada_Briefing_Paper_Feb2014.pdf

⁹ Wilson, Gregory. (2016).

¹⁰ USAID. (2017). *ADS Chapter 201 Program Cycle Operational Policy*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

¹¹ USAID. (2016). Special Notice for Early Market Engagement Event for USAID Global Learning for Adaptive Management (GLAM) Program. Retrieved from <https://www.fbo.gov/index?s=opportunity&mode=form&id=9b8f0e95f357d35edd7e8c16c0fc29b5&tab=core&cview=0>

¹² DFID. (2016). Global Learning for Adaptive Management – Contract Summary. Retrieved from <https://www.contractsfinder.service.gov.uk/Notice/26191789-dcb4-4d7d-9ac2-4ccdbc8ea49b>

about how adaptive management can be done well, what technical assistance can best support it, and how it could be bolstered by monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

Besides GLAM, there are several other initiatives led by implementers, donors, or a mix of both that are tackling change management focused on more systemic, adaptive, agile, and/or locally-driven programming. These include Smart Rules led by DFID; Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA) out of USAID; and ADAPT from Mercy Corps and the International Rescue Committee.¹³ Mercy Corps has also openly and transparently shared their organizational evolution toward more agile and adaptive programming.¹⁴ ACCORD, UNSSC, UNITAR, USIP, GCSP, and PeaceNexus Foundation have further collaborated on a virtual scenario-based simulation game that prompts mid-career professionals to practice context analysis, stakeholder engagement, and adapting programming.¹⁵

Additionally, in Europe, ODI has shown interest in adaptive management through the Doing Development Differently initiative, which focuses on new approaches that are “problem-driven; iterative with lots of learning; and engaging teams and coalitions, often producing hybrid solutions that are ‘fit to context’ and politically smart”¹⁶. Bond has also focused on what adaptive management means for civil society organizations¹⁷.

Case Study Review Methodology

Fifteen initial adaptive management case studies were identified for this report if they met two criteria: 1) being engaged in peacebuilding programming, and 2) showing an intentional experimentation with adaptive management. Criteria 1) was evaluated on a case by case basis, and some peacebuilding-related development programming in fragile and conflict affected situations were included. Ten case studies were finally included: seven cover programming occurring in 7 specific countries, two discuss multi-country programming, and one presents institutional approaches to adaptive management that transcend individual programming. Four of the case studies were at the direct implementation level of peacebuilding programs, two were at the meta-evaluation level of peacebuilding activities, one was at the peacebuilding organizational level, and three were peacebuilding-related development programs. The case studies were explored in-depth through semi-structured interviews with subject matter experts. Their responses were synthesized into the themes covered in the tables that follow. Guiding questions included:

- Why did you choose to use an adaptive management approach?
- How did you integrate adaptive management into program design?
- How did you create an enabling environment for adaptive management?
- How did you bridge the gap between program staff and monitoring/evaluation/learning staff?
- How are the technical elements of adaptive management approaches interacting with cultural elements like leadership, organizational culture and/or contextual culture?

13 Green, Duncan. (2016, June 9). Where have we got to on adaptive learning, thinking, and working politically doing development differently etc? Getting beyond the People's Front of Judea. Retrieved from <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/where-have-we-got-to-on-adaptive-learning-thinking-and-working-politically-doing-development-differently-etc-getting-beyond-the-peoples-front-of-judea>

14 Mercy Corps. (2017). *Agility and Evolution*. [Kumu Presentation]. Retrieved from <https://mercycorps.kumu.io/agility-and-evolution-f8eb7880-144f-4aeb-be44-d9628593825c>

15 Mission: Zobia - Winning the Peace Online Simulation Game. Retrieved from <http://www.accord.org.za/news/mission-zobia-winning-peace-simulation-peacebuilding-game-launched/>

16 ODI. (2017). Doing Development Differently: Case Studies. Retrieved from <https://www.odi.org/projects/2857-doing-development-differently>

17 Bond. (2016). *Adaptive Management: What it means for CSOs*. London: Michael O'Donnell.

- What advantages are there to practicing adaptive management? What has worked well?
- What challenges are associated with practicing adaptive management?
- Would you practice adaptive management again? If so, how might you change your approach?

Case Studies

The ten case studies used to surface common challenges and learnings below took place in Mali, South Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, Uganda, Lebanon, Morocco, Libya, and other fragile and conflict affected countries throughout the MENA region. These projects focused on preventing and countering violent extremism, inter-religious action, civil society, media, governance, resilience, community driven development, natural resource management, reconciliation between former combatants, women's socioeconomic empowerment, and youth led coexistence of refugee and host communities. Funders included USAID, GHR Foundation, Humanity United, Carnegie Corporation of New York, and the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Findings

Overall, findings from the ten case studies that were explored in depth are focused around three themes, with supporting recommendations including: Developing a program structure; Securing buy-in to build an enabling culture; and Defining technical requirements.

Developing a program structure

1. **Foundational, Not an Add-on:** Adaptive management is a foundational component of monitoring and evaluation and should not be seen as an add-on that can or cannot be applied.
2. **Minimum Degree of Rigor:** Adaptive management cannot be used as a catch all phrase or substitute as a loose framework for program design.
3. **Apply What Has Been Learned:** When employing adaptive management practices, a program must be accountable to the process by applying and incorporating their learnings into future activities.

Securing buy-in to build an enabling culture

4. **Define Roles Clearly:** Roles need to be clearly defined as close to the beginning of an intervention as possible. These roles should then stay as stable as possible.
5. **Involve Everyone:** Unlike traditional, siloed M&E roles, fully utilizing adaptive management requires that everyone on the team – from donors to senior management to programming, operations, and M&E staff - is involved in the process.
6. **Ensure an Enabling Culture:** Adaptive management involves such a paradigm shift that an encouraging culture can and should act as its backbone. Enabling culture involves mindsets, competencies, and crafting a group narrative around engagement in and support for working adaptively and engaging with systems.

Defining technical requirements

7. **Build Capacity:** Learning how to do adaptive management well and as a team is about more than just learning about different potential tools. It can involve unlearning traditional approaches, learning collaboratively for joint buy-in, and tailoring adaptive management approaches to the team. It is also critical to find evaluators that can actually implement adaptive management and do not simply want to adapt their own evaluation methodology and become part of the program.
8. **Basic Guidelines:** There is no single tool that will work best for every program and, in fact, using a variety of tools and techniques simultaneously appears to be a promising practice.

However, there needs to be basic guidelines as outlined in this report, otherwise this approach can easily lose its purpose and focus.

9. **Stagger Timing:** Adaptive management relies on cycles of learning and retooling. These cycles should not all last for the same amount of time and should be set up to occur sequentially and with space in between to allow for reflection and adaptation.

Each table below elaborates on each theme and includes: what helps bolster each practice, challenges that arise when focusing on that theme, and recommendations from those involved in programs on how to surmount those challenges.

1. Foundational Component, Not an Add-on	
Adaptive management is a foundational component of monitoring and evaluation and should not be seen as an add-on that can or cannot be applied.	
What Helps	
1. Shifting from viewing adaptive management as an advantage or add on to an integral program component: Begin framing a value proposition for adaptive management, arguing that the more embedded these practices are in the day to day management, the greater value will arise from them. These practices are foundational to how a program operates and lead to better and stronger management at all levels.	
Challenges	Recommendations
1. Adaptive management is seen as an add-on to programming: Adaptive management practices do not always have buy-in from all levels, including donors, where this is seen as something nice to have, but not critical to programming.	1. Shift the narrative to discussing the value add of adaptive management. By being able to respond to changes and knowing the direction of how a program should be adapting, a program will have continuous improvement through double feedback loops and sustained learning. Programs will be able in real time to see where things are going well or not, propose viable options, and have a greater understanding of adaptations' impact on programming and outcomes. Additionally, when working with so many variables, keeping a better eye on them and where a program is responsive to them could better help address the nuances of conflict.

2. Minimum Degree of Rigor
Adaptive management cannot be used as a catch all phrase, or substitute as a loose framework for program design.
What Helps
1. Minimum project documents and workplans: While practitioners must be agile and responsive to complexity, they still need a minimum level of program design that incorporates adaptive management within a clear framework establishing potential leverage and change points.

Challenges	Recommendations
1. Risk that everything in a project could be thrown open to change: When pivoting from an intense focus on results/outputs towards impact and adaptive paths of change, you must be wary of leaning to the other extreme where everything changes, we don't know what will arise, and as such, it is impossible to plan with such uncertainty. It cannot be a completely loose framework.	1. Frameworks and parameters are necessary to maintain a minimum degree of accountability to donors while adapting to the situation and your approach. A program needs to focus on rigor and accountability while balancing agility and responsiveness to complexity. We are not moving the goalposts – just the strategy for moving down the field.

3. Apply What Has Been Learned

When employing adaptive management practices, a program must be accountable to the process by applying and incorporating their learnings into future activities.

What Helps

- 1. Identifying realistic timeframes and budgets to apply learnings:** Practitioners must be agile and responsive to the needs of the organization, stakeholders, and staff, and adaptive learning does not happen without intentional design. Establishing realistic timeframes and budgets for incorporating lessons and learnings into future activities is just as critical as creating time and budgets for the initial learning.

Challenges	Recommendations
1. Emphasis on the process not the output: Commonly lessons learned from this process (through reflective practices, group meetings, journals, etc.) are simply recorded and not applied or incorporated into future activities rendering the work pointless.	1. Senior management and donors advocating for adaptive management must be responsive to the outcomes of it by allowing for flexibility in program design and timeframes. Additionally, program budgets need to have funding for both the process and the response.
2. The process is not clearly documented: These practices will be conducted but documentation of the event will not be captured, or it is captured, but never shared outside of the participating group.	<p>One must respond to these processes - they cannot be just about self-awareness. You must be accountable to the change you have identified and take steps to enact that change.</p> 2. Clearly document learnings and ensure that they are shared amongst program staff, senior management, donors and across programs.

4. Define Roles Clearly

Roles need to be clearly defined as close to the beginning of an intervention as possible. These roles should then stay as stable as possible.

What Helps

- 1. Supportive leadership:** Leadership needs to be supportive and championing of adaptive management efforts, especially since they send many signals (sometimes unknowingly) to staff

about what they value in the team. This also means they are well-informed about adaptations, ensure they align with program priorities and strategy, ensure funds are appropriately (re)allocated, follow up on results, and close loops to ensure field teams and/or affected populations can see actions taken to adapt. It helps when leaders show open communication channels with an open-door policy, adapt the way they manage as needed, and admit failure and learning transparently.

2. **Technical support for adaptive management:** This will likely be needed as long as adaptive management is practiced in a less widespread fashion in this field. While M&E staff may be more familiar with adaptive management, operations staff will also need support to see how their role can contribute to team problem solving. This support should happen early in the process and in a sustained manner to help refine and answer the question "how does this team do adaptive management?"
3. **A separate, robust Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) role:** Those with MEL roles can be situated in many ways (either as drivers of adaptive management processes or as those focused exclusively on quantitative or qualitative data), but there is a key role they play in adaptive management. It can be helpful for MEL staff to see themselves as service providers for program staff. It is critical that MEL staff work side by side with program staff to avoid silos and promote understanding and buy-in this work. Keep in mind that MEL staff may be more accustomed to evaluation practice and less familiar with rigorous monitoring practices, or may be more monitoring or evaluation experts than learning experts. One team found it useful to provide equal staff resources to the MEL and programming teams.
4. **Bringing researchers in-house:** While MEL roles should be separate and robust, research and M&E functions may best be conducted in-house. This can help ensure easier availability of context knowledge, ownership and uptake of results, and adaptation on the part of program staff.
5. **Connecting remote field staff with MEL staff:** When remote monitoring and project implementation is necessary, remote staff should be in close contact with MEL staff. In this way, MEL staff can help connect new information and developments to technical and strategic directions based on their birds-eye view.
6. **A healthy donor-implementer relationship:** In fast-paced, conflict-affected, and/or complex environments, it is especially important that donors and implementers work together to creatively streamline contracting and procurement processes. One example is using a "yellow lighting" process, allowing donors to encourage implementers to start moving forward on an adaptation before an official "green light" is given.
7. **Extensive donor involvement, flexibility, and trust:** This is required and may be a new way for donors and implementers to interact. It is very important that donors be involved in the process so they can better understand the impacts of adaptive management on program cycles and M&E activities. The closer the two can be, and the more openly they can share, the more likely adaptive management will be successful.

Challenges	Recommendations
1. Conflicts of interest: Some adaptive management approaches can tend to blur the lines between the MEL function and programming functions, making the MEL function less objective. This is especially likely to happen when the project is under-	1. A project cannot simply be well-structured, adaptive management must be designed well and make sure that anyone in a primary role is fostering that role exclusively. Making sure that the program has a clear budget, sufficient resources and staffing,

<p>resourced and looking for help wherever it can get it, when there is a slow start-up, and/or when the person in the MEL role is knowledgeable about the programming.</p> <p>2. Evaluators overclaim familiarity with adaptive management: The roots of adaptive management are vast, and it is not always clearly defined internally within organizations, donors, or even the professional evaluation field. Commonly evaluators claim they practice adaptive management, but they may not actually be versed in the proper tools and techniques that a program is looking to employ.</p> <p>3. Misalignment among donor staff: Remote management in fragile and conflict affected states can mean that there are two donor staff members from the same organization who have similar functions but are in different locations. The distance and interplay between these staff can make it harder for everyone to buy in equally to adaptive management.</p> <p>4. Origins of AM come from afar: If the idea to apply adaptive management does not arise organically but instead from many degrees away, especially from donors or headquarters – it is less likely to work.</p>	<p>defined roles, and clear and informed timelines can help prevent conflicts of interest.</p> <p>2. A project must clearly define the roles and expectations for each participant in the process. Additionally, tools and methodologies for adaptive management need to be more rigorously tested and explored within the professional evaluation field so this does not become a catch-all phrase but has a clear field of well-trained professionals who understand and practice this process.</p> <p>3. Begin conversations with donors at various levels as early as possible, even before contracts have been approved. Trying to change systems requires investment and enthusiasm on all sides; accordingly, finding or cultivating pockets of staff who are invested within all levels can be as important as doing the adaptive management work itself.</p> <p>Also consider how strategically important people at different levels of donor organizations (including boards and leadership) need to be educated and inspired by this style of work.</p> <p>4. In-country donor organizations should consider using their role and long-term presence to embrace adaptive management internally to help make decisions around funding and priorities as the environment changes. Additionally, in-country staff are commonly the best placed implementers of adaptive management with the greatest knowledge. However, encouraging and harnessing this has been severely unrecognized, but devolving power to where strategic and delivery decisions are made more locally could create greater buy-in and ownership.</p>
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5. Involve Everyone

Unlike traditional, siloed M&E roles, fully utilizing adaptive management requires that everyone on the team – from donors to senior management to programming, operations, and M&E staff - is involved in the process.

What Helps

1. **Involve buy-in support from senior management:** Having support and buy-in from all levels of programming, including senior management, is critical to success. Adaptive management forces an organization to grapple with the question of what does learning mean to its work today? How are new processes integrated? What are the differences between individual and organizational learning? etc. Having executive buy-in for this process is critical to promote resource allocation, support new processes and integration of new programming methodologies, and promote the importance of this work to donors and funders because it changes the way programming and reporting is conducted.
2. **Recruiting carefully:** To set the stage for team buy-in, recruitment should focus on candidates who are comfortable having adaptation, flexibility, openness, and a questioning culture at the center of the organization.
3. **Adapting in all spheres, not just programmatic:** The team should consider how everything (internal processes, procurement, strategy, leadership, practical elements of program delivery, and/or contracting) can adapt to help the program be successful in a rapidly changing environment. Room for adaptation should be included in program documents and processes from the beginning to minimize potential barriers to adaptation. This also means intentionally creating space for decentralized decision making at all levels.
4. **Adaptive management practices that fit the team:** Since everyone is involved, technical support will be needed to get everyone on the same page. Once that is done, the team needs to work together to make these practices their own and incorporate them into team practices and processes.
5. **Looking outside the organization:** Openness to sharing with and learning from local communities, other implementers, program stakeholders, and other donors provides a fuller picture and helps make sense of what changes and new learning means for programming for all parties.
6. **Sitting with project, not functional teammates:** Having teams physically seated by project-based teams rather than separating MEL staff, programming staff, and contracts / finance / operations staff allows for more natural information flow. This allows the team to think out loud and problem solve together throughout the day. It also allows the MEL staff to be integrated early in the design process, which is crucial for making sure conditions for adaptive management – like ways to collect useful information – are included early.

Challenges

1. **The time it takes:** Involving all staff takes time from all staff! When working in a fragile or conflict-affected environment, adaptive management can seem like a luxury. This environment – which frequently includes groups with widely varied perspectives – also means more time is needed to make sure information is reliable. By the time reliable information is

Recommendations

1. Recognize that in environments where less space can be made for adaptive management, more pressure will push staff to focus more on meeting deliverables rather than looking more deeply at outcomes, impact, and the systems and context in which the project operates.

<p>established, the necessary adaptations may be irrelevant or impossible. When donor requirements include 'heavy', prescribed M&E standards, there can be even less room and flexibility for adaptive management. Time is a major resource, especially with many project cycles focused on 18-month to 36-month time horizons.</p> <p>2. Applying learning requires a leap: A challenging element of adaptive management is applying learning once information has been gathered, processed, and even learned from. If the final step in the process does not occur, then efforts spent to learn from experience are not effective.</p> <p>3. Promising more adaptation than is possible: An important element of working iteratively and adaptively is leaving open options of how to address issues through programming. Especially when learning from local communities and working with them to adapt, it can be tempting to try to leave an open menu of programming options. This can create frustrations and trust issues with communities when only some of the available options can or will be acted upon given donor policies or implementing organization experience. This narrowing of options may occur when locally-led, systemic adaptive management work begins intersecting with pressures related to accountability and impact.</p>	<p>Manage expectations about how much adaptation and information gathering will be possible within set project timelines. Be realistic about how much adaptive management can be done with the staff that are in place or consider adding additional staff as necessary. Recognize where programming and processes should not adapt and do not waste resources testing various approaches for 'simple' aspects.</p> <p>As much as possible, document and share widely the benefits that adaptive management, on any scale, brings to a project so that the case can be made for devoting more resources to these processes.</p> <p>Promote longer project cycles that encompass learning to focus resources on the most impactful and successful avenues of a project.</p> <p>Understand that these processes take a lot of time (focus on long-term goals). Think about changing the approach as the context changes – how to align shifts in the field and long-term goals and impacts.</p> <p>2. Ensure the team agrees on who is responsible for leading each needed adaptation through to completion. Develop approaches that hold your team accountable for these adaptations and incorporate them into current operating procedures.</p> <p>Commit to smaller, more digestible, and timely final evaluations and to using them when developing something new. One program that had smaller activities had final evaluations that were no longer than 4 pages.</p> <p>3. Recognize that not every piece of learning can lead to decisions or changes and be transparent about what options are available given known constraints. Be honest with internal and external stakeholders about what parts of the system may push back against adaptive management work and where there is the possibility for change.</p>
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6. Ensure an Enabling Culture

Adaptive management involves such a paradigm shift that an encouraging culture can and should serve as a backbone. Enabling culture involves mindsets, competencies, and crafting a group narrative around engagement in and support for working adaptively and engaging with systems. While working in complex and fragile states, peacebuilders have more responsibility to be tactful, strategic and intentional in the programming that is being implemented.

What Helps

1. **Clarifying that “data” includes what people already know:** When adaptive management includes all staff as well as partner organizations and local actors with varied backgrounds, it is important to de-mystify M&E and “data”. Much of adaptive management is just getting staff on the ground or from many different roles to bring up what they are learning in a meeting, verify it with others, find ways to validate it as needed, and designing measurement accordingly. This process helps explain why adaptive management tools tend to be more focused on qualitative, field-based data.
2. **Focus on process:** Many may see adaptive management as a way to arrive at important documents, like evaluation reports, after-action reviews, lessons learned documents, and action plans. While these deliverables are important, it is perhaps even more important to value the processes used by teams to arrive at the conclusions and decisions in these documents. While some processes may be formal and tangible, others may be quite informal. Hallway conversations or check-in calls may be the key to sparking adaptation rather than a formal presentation to decision makers or donors.
3. **Collective curiosity:** This is related closely to openness, respectful dissent, humility, and a team narrative of experimentation and trust. This includes curiosity about how to practice adaptive management in the way that works best for the team.
4. **Openness to ideas and influence from new sources:** Part of enabling adaptive management is letting go of top-down control and attachment to ideas of how to reach end goals. Making space for ideas, particularly locally-led ideas, and being attentive and adaptive can also strengthen rather than bypass the decision-making power of affected communities, which is crucial in fragile and conflict-affected situations. In this way, adaptive management can work alongside programming goals as a reinforcing process, principle, and even as its own intervention.
5. **Shared understanding of adaptive management:** Each culture and history has and does interact with analysis and learning differently. Sometimes there is a clear link between the way actors from various backgrounds think about adaptive management. Sometimes it takes more effort to find common ground around its importance and how to take it on. In either case, adaptive management will likely involve a shift in how international NGOs and/or donors interact with local actors. In some contexts, once it’s clear that analysis, learning, and ideas for adaptation is welcomed by international NGOs and donors, local actors are eager to engage. In all cases, ethics are an important part of adaptive management work, including ensuring shared values and agreeing upon what learning about systems change might look like.
6. **Thinking long-term:** Even though adaptive management focuses on being agile and iterative, daily developments in fragile and conflict-affected environments mean that the focus of adaptations should be built to last beyond the fast-changing environment. Neglecting to think

long-term and stay focused on an end objective can let smart adaptation slip into constantly-shifting chaos.

7. **Balancing trust and risk between donors and implementers:** Trust is an important factor in adaptive management, between M&E staff and program staff, and especially between donors and implementing partners. We must ensure that disclosing failure, or making program changes, does not lead to a “hand slap” by senior management, or lack of trust from donors. We must also have open discussions about “risk” in the context of adaptive management.

Challenges	Recommendations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emphasis on one-way communication: When pivoting from an intense focus on results/outputs toward impact and adaptive paths of change, related cultural shifts need to be made. One of these is placing more value on dialogue, learning, and collaboration than on “reporting out”. This move needs to be embraced by all (especially senior management) and has implications for changing how meetings are run, how interactions with partner organizations are designed, and how donors and implementers interact. 2. Sensitivity to open sharing: Especially in conflict settings, there may be a very valid sensitivity toward being asked questions, opening pathways for honest feedback, and/or for sharing candidly with donors. 3. It can look like a struggle along the way: Change comes with growing pains no matter how ready an organization or team is to take it on. People come from and exist in very different institutional realities and come with varying levels of comfort in terms of being reflective and letting learning drive M&E. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Socialize values around learning and transparency within program teams. This can start with focusing on creating an environment that encourages conversation and “thinking out loud”. Recognize where honest, analytical work happens most easily. Learning that leads to adaptation may not be naturally written up in regular reporting tools. This may need to happen more through phone calls or other more informal interactions, but effort should be made to find creative ways to capture these interactions. 2. Recognize the importance of gaining trust, ensuring confidentiality, and thinking carefully about who is asking questions about the outcomes and impacts of programming. This process may include diversifying field staff so that affected populations with various identities feel comfortable sharing openly. See local communities as partners and remember to close loops on what adaptations have resulted based on their feedback and which ones have not and why. This could further lead to increased mutual trust. 3. Be kind to one another, celebrate successes, and step back when possible to reframe narratives to help create a positive team dynamic around open learning. Recognize that implementation will also be a capacity development process that requires consistent mentorship.

7. Build Capacity

Learning how to do adaptive management well as a team is about more than just learning about different tools. It can involve unlearning traditional approaches, learning collaboratively for joint buy-in, and tailoring adaptive management approaches to the team.

What Helps

1. **Building capacity early and often:** Especially during the 1-1.5 years of a project, there will likely need to be substantial capacity among all staff that addresses the various roles in gathering information, processing it, and enacting adaptive changes. Start slowly with this capacity development and start from the bottom up, while keeping connected with champions at all levels. Alongside support from experts and/or headquarters staff, the team will need time to tailor adaptive management practices and processes to best suit their team. Setting aside time for periodic reflections on how adaptive management can best serve the team will allow for evolutions as the project progresses.
2. **Borrowing from other sectors:** Certain areas of international development, like market systems work, have experimented with tools to aid adaptive management for some time. Drawing from past work and experience, and adapting these tools to the peacebuilding context, can help advance adaptive management practice and break down silos in multi-sectoral programs.
3. **Donor and implementer learning together:** It is important that both donor and implementer have the same idea of what adaptive management is, how it can be useful for the project, and how to practice it. Learning together can allow for joint ownership of adaptive management and will pave the way for consensus when inevitable changes in programming and processes arise. As much as possible, try to work on adaptive management with donors who are courageously entering implementation spaces they are less comfortable in but that they recognize are necessary to change systems.
4. **Check that adaptive management fits the context:** As knowledge grows among team members on what adaptive management is and how it will work, checking in on whether it fits with the context can help the team avoid a mismatch. Much of the work in fragile and conflict-affected states is complex where there is incomplete or imperfect information available on the systems the project is trying to influence and there may be no clear path because of unpredictability. However, this may not mean that all aspects of programming are or will always be complex. For these elements of programming, adaptive management may not be the best fit. Even when adaptive management does fit, it is important to ensure there is enough flexibility in the context (including the funding context) to make changes based on learning.

Challenges

1. **Field tendency to focus on results-based management skills:** “Standard” trainings have been so singularly focused on reporting results that bias or even overt censoring of honest feedback can creep in. Each layer of interpretation of messages opens opportunities to emphasize positive and/or expected results and minimize important information about unintended and/or negative results that is crucial for adaptive management.

Recommendations

1. Focus on hiring a team with capacities and mindsets that are aligned with or at least open to adaptive management. For the MEL staff, try to ensure they have a background and experience in applying the adaptive management tools that the project needs.
2. Support the project on adaptive management in country by hiring a Deputy Chief of Party (or equivalent) that has a background and skills in MEL.

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| <p>2. Unexpected need for headquarters support: When taking on adaptive management for the first time, there can be a need for more ongoing support than is normal or expected.</p> | |
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8. Use a Variety of Tools and Techniques

As adaptive management begins to be used in peacebuilding and other programming in fragile and conflict-affected situations, many options for how to facilitate adaptation will surface. There is no single tool that will work best for every program and, in fact, using a variety of tools and techniques simultaneously appears to be a promising practice.

What Helps

1. **Employing a mix of more and less formal tools:** There are many ways to carry out adaptive management and using several different approaches gives the space to adapt at various levels of programming. Programs continuously used more than one of the following:
 - a. **Site visits** by remote staff
 - b. **Journaling exercises** for programming and grants staff
 - c. **Learning networks:** Discussion forums with other implementing organizations that provide an opportunity to share learning that is outside the scope of individual projects
 - d. **Pause and reflect exercises**
 - e. **Community dashboards:** Quick reference guides based on community-led context scans, used to: 1) check for tacit knowledge by field staff when making decentralized decisions, 2) facilitate information flow to senior management, 3) share knowledge among implementers to avoid duplication of information
 - f. **Lessons learned tracker:** A streamlined tool where programming staff document lessons, M&E staff see where narrower and deeper learning is needed, and senior management identify where follow-up on adaptive decisions would be helpful
 - g. **Rigorous theory of change tracking** at several levels: Articulating a theory of change for each small activity, for each grouping of similar small activities, and for the overall project strategy; examining how they link to each other; and testing their appropriateness regularly as the project progresses
 - h. **Results chains:** A non-linear theory of change tool that examines multiples levels of results, including results related to systems changes the project is aiming to influence.
 - i. **Rolling research assessments** to inform potential strategy shifts
2. **Keep rules and processes around tools to a minimum:** If staff can make tools their own and find the best ways to use them for adaptation, they are less likely to see the tools as imposed or as extra work.
3. **Use different tools at different times:** Some tools to aid adaptive management are more useful earlier in a project and may become less useful as the project evolves.

See Additional Resources for more on overall approaches to adaptive management and tools.

Challenges	Recommendations
<p>1. Unclear guidance on how to conduct adaptive management: With little direction in the peacebuilding field or for the team on how various approaches to adaptive management should be done, it can be hard for some to envision how processes will work. While this leaves room for teams to customize their adaptive processes and find what works best for them, it can also lead to confusion and misaligned expectations.</p> <p>2. Internal adaptive management processes become too heavy: When using a mix of tools and emphasizing the usefulness of documenting information and decision-making throughout, too much of a good thing can lead to an overwhelming system that slows down and/or ultimately hinders decision-making.</p>	<p>1. Focus on what information will be needed to make decisions at different levels and in different time periods and choose a mix of tools accordingly.</p> <p>Recognize when formal and informal tools or follow-up actions will best surface needed information.</p> <p>Once chosen, set clear parameters for what information is needed from each tool.</p> <p>2. Narrow down the number of tools used or how often various tools are used if processes and internal systems become too taxing.</p> <p>Keep in mind that adaptations ,even in how adaptive management is practiced, can and should be made periodically.</p>

9. Stagger Timing

Adaptive management relies on cycles of learning and retooling. These cycles should not all last for the same amount of time and should be set up to occur sequentially and with space in between to allow for reflection and adaptation.

What Helps

1. **Adaptive management cycles of varying lengths:** When using a variety of adaptive management tools for several levels of programming (e.g. for small activities, clusters of similar activities, internal processes, and strategy), matching timing of information gathering with decision-making is important. Programs explored in this snapshot tended to use three or more of the following:
 - a. **Weekly individual and/or team reflection**
 - b. **Monthly discussions** (e.g. focus groups with community members)
 - c. **Quarterly reflection meetings** with implementers, partners, and donors when possible
 - d. **Semi-annual strategy reviews** where rolling assessments and information on outcomes and impacts are used to shift strategies as needed
 - e. **Ad-hoc or activity-based reflections**
2. **Rolling activity start times:** Beginning various, smaller activities that work toward the same goal at different times can allow space for learning from one activity to be applied to another.
3. **Deciding on geographic and/or thematic staggering:** When there is less certainty about what specific activities will lead toward overall goals, arrange smaller, shorter activities that work toward different but related types of activities. This way, more successful activities can be adapted and replicated and less successful ones can be learned from and discontinued.

When there is less certainty about whether a type of activity will work in various communities or geographic areas, stagger start times of similar activities in different areas so learning from one can be applied to and adapted for subsequent communities.	
Challenges	Recommendations
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Limited time for higher-level adaptations: While smaller shifts in operations or activities can take place during short one to 3-year funding cycles, longer-term reflections and strategic shifts may not be as feasible unless projects last 5 years or more. Funding shifts based on context changes: Even when space for adaptive management is built into projects, rapid changes in fragile and conflict-affected regions can shift funding toward humanitarian needs and strain resources for adaptive management and peacebuilding programs. Staggered timing is misaligned with rigid workplan schedules: If formal processes for rewriting workplans in collaboration with donors happen only during certain times, learning and preparing to adapt on different timelines can have limited effects. Using small, short grants can limit local capacity and job security: Although short grant cycles seem promising for adaptive management, they can strain local partners who rely on these grants for job security and discourage the best candidates from engaging. These smaller grants may also leave little room for capacity building or built-in sustainability. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> When possible, focus adaptive management efforts (especially ones focused on systems-level change and learning) within longer programs that are closer to 10 years long. Even when working in longer time scales, it may be helpful or even necessary to have budget revision phases every two years. Documentation that is part of the adaptive management process can be used to make the case for continued funding in further resource-constrained environments. Thinking ahead to this potential possibility can help teams make the case for prioritizing adaptive management and rigorous documentation within their programming. Keep many audiences in mind when developing materials on what has been learned and its potential implications. Focus duly on a humanitarian audience when there is potential that funding will be redirected to humanitarian needs. Ensure the donor and implementer both understand how and when adaptive management could occur in the project. Have an honest conversation about potential misalignments with current donor processes and problem solve together around what to do in these cases.

Conclusion

This paper sets out some of the basic requirements of adaptive management, and suggestions for building a more robust culture around adaptation – and the monitoring, design, systems analysis skills, and leadership necessary for true adaptive processes. As we become more sophisticated in using adaptive management, we must also start to embrace both the technical elements of working in systems contexts, as opposed to linear log frames, and the more philosophical issues around attribution, risk, failure, and trust inherent in adaptive processes. Adaptive learning and management have immense potential for making peacebuilding programming more complexity-aware and responsive to stakeholders and conflict environments, but design and implementation continue to be an ongoing struggle as our field wrestles with building this new culture.

As adaptive management continues to be used more frequently in peacebuilding, many options for how to facilitate adaptation will continue to surface. When employed with intent, adaptive

management can provide an organization the space to workshop, problem solve, address, reflect, and respond to specific challenges and problems to focus on continuously improving the impact of peacebuilding programming. Wicked problems require creativity, systems understanding, and continual sensing and reprogramming to create sustainable positive change. We are at the cusp of exciting innovations in our ability to influence these complex systems, with adaptive learning as a powerful tool.

Employing adaptive management is not a one-size fits all approach and must be tailored and designed to each program's needs, appropriate buy-in must be sought to enable a culture conducive to adaptive management, and the process must be clearly defined. Therefore, the next step that needs to be developed are basic guidelines and best practices, as outlined in this report, otherwise this approach can easily lose its purpose and value.

Additional Resources: Adaptive management approaches and tools used among early adopters

These descriptions of adaptive management approaches are by no means an exhaustive list. They merely represent examples of approaches that have been used by early adopters in the peacebuilding and international development fields and are meant to give a rough idea of what adaptive management approaches could look like or entail.

Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation

Problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) starts by focusing on “locally nominated and defined problems”¹⁸. It then works on creating an empowering context of experimentation, seeking ‘positive deviance’, and centering decision-making locally. Experimentation then progresses through quick feedback loops and rapid learning through small interventions to address problems. PDIA engages diverse actors so that changes are relevant, seen as legitimate, and sustainable.

Developmental Evaluation

This approach to adaptive management involves facilitating rapid feedback of information to program staff that leads to a continuously adapting programming loop. Developmental evaluation (DE) works best in programming that is innovative, addressing complex issues, working in crisis situations, expects radical redesigns and/or is being replicated in many contexts.¹⁹ Peacebuilding programming often takes place where many or all of the conditions for developmental evaluation are met. It is therefore not surprising that one of the most extensive applications of this approach took place within an evaluation of USAID/CMM’s People-to-People Reconciliation Fund.²⁰

DE does not prescribe any particular method or tools, instead focusing on having the particular context and its unique challenges dictate how it is carried out. This dictates that the methods used for developmental evaluation must be flexible and dynamic alongside the projects themselves.²¹ This opens up the DE process to “transcend the widespread perception that M&E is a foreign, imposed and linear concept which constrains peacebuilding activity”.²²

Tools to support adaptive management

While adaptive management can be practiced using overarching approaches like PDIA and DE, a wide variety of tools or methods can be used to support adaptive management and reinforce an adaptive culture (see Finding 8 for examples from programs). Tools can be focused on adaptation at different levels of programming and should be well suited to how often change occurs at each level – with

¹⁸ Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & M. Woolcook. (2012). Escaping Capability Traps through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). United Nations University Working Paper. Retrieved from <http://www.gsdr.org/document-library/escaping-capability-traps-through-problem-driven-iterative-adaptation-pdia/>

¹⁹ Sette, Cristina. *Participatory Evaluation*.

²⁰ Social Impact for USAID/CMM. (2014). *Evaluative Learning Review Synthesis Report: USAID/CMM’s People-to-People Reconciliation Fund, Annual Program Statement (APS)*. Washington, DC : Development Experience Clearing House.

²¹ Wilson-Grau, R., Kosterink, P., & G. Scheers. (2015). Outcome Harvesting: A Developmental Evaluation Inquiry Framework Supporting the Development of an International Social Change Network. In. M.Q. Patton, K. McKegg, & N. Wehipeihana (Eds.), *Developmental Evaluation Exemplars: Principles in Practice*. (Chapter 10). New York: Guilford Press.

²² JWhite. (2012, Dec. 3).

more in-depth tools focused on elements of programming that stay more constant and light-touch tools used where continual changes occur. Figure 1 below, drawn from “Navigating Complexity”²³, shows an example of how the timing, level of programming, and tools can align.



Figure 1 - Tools and processes must support reflection and learning at all levels of the program: from day-to-day operations to higher-level theories-of-change

²³ Mercy Corps. (2014).

Additional Resources: Other ideas and definitions that intersect with adaptive management

As donors and implementers begin to focus more on adaptive management, a variety of related terms and concepts are surfacing through different initiatives. While this is a promising sign of progress, it has the potential to create confusion about what donors and the field at large mean by each term, how these various terms interact with one another, and what they mean for programming, operations, and management. Below are quick definitions of concepts or areas of practice that are related to adaptive management:

Adaptive learning

This is sometimes used interchangeably with adaptive management and is also used to describe the learning used for adaptive management. Adaptive learning focuses on organizational learning processes that help shape what has been learned through success and failure to make iterative improvements – thereby leading to adaptive management of a program. There is ongoing debate about whether adaptive learning only describes smaller, continuous changes that are largely reactive and based on changes in context, or whether adaptive learning also involves going deeper to focus on underlying assumptions, theories, and transformation.²⁴

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is about looking at the whole to better understand the parts. It stands in contrast to analytical thinking, which breaks up the whole to analyze its parts.²⁵ Systems thinking is as much a large field of diverse practices as it is a way of looking at the world in a way that is less focused on linear causes and effects and recognizes shifting interactions, relationships, dynamics, and diverse perspectives. Utilizing systems thinking to better understand an entire system, through systems mapping or other exercises, can allow for the identification of leverage points and entry for implementation of peacebuilding programming. By continuously monitoring a system and employing systems thinking when reflecting upon a specific context, opportunities for course corrections and adaptive management can arise. Systems thinking allows for greater understanding and capturing of unintended consequences and a more holistic view of any one context – particularly useful when working in complex environments that have the potential to change day to day.

Complexity

Complexity can be thought of as elements of situations where there is both uncertainty, even among experts, about 'best practices' and little agreement among stakeholders about how the end results should look. Another view on complexity is that it is a part of a situation that is unknown or unpredictable so that linear causes and effects can only be determined after they occur.²⁶ Complex elements of programming are well suited to being addressed through adaptive management, because it allows for continuous monitoring and responds to these complex elements in real time rather than ex post or the end of a project cycle.

24 Global Partnership for Social Accountability Team: The World Bank. (2015). *'Learning Journeys' for Adaptive Management - Where Does it Take Us?*. (GPSA Note 12). Washington, DC : Charlotte Ørnenmark.

25 Ibid.

26 USAID Office of Learning, Evaluation, and Research. (2016). *Complexity-Aware Monitoring Discussion Note*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

Complex Adaptive Leadership

This concept is about rethinking leadership as “leadership of the many by the many” in a way that is inclusive, adaptive, complex, and sometimes seemingly chaotic.²⁷

Lean Start-Up

This approach includes avoiding intensive design in favor of trying small batches of ideas and failing fast with many of them before scaling up those that worked. It is useful in complex environments, when trying something new, or attempting to pilot projects between different environments. It leads to rapid learning, feedback, and early (but not necessarily continual) adaptations.²⁸

Adaptive Programming

Commonly used interchangeably with adaptive management, adaptive programming is when an organization has integrated adaptive management practices and learning in all elements and at all levels of their work. This further means transferring strategic and delivery decision making power from above to a more local or program orientation in order to respond and be accountable to learning.²⁹

Organizational Learning

In organizational learning literature, there are three types of learning involved: single-, double-, and triple-loop learning (see table below, drawn from Eilertsen & London, 2005³⁰). Single-loop learning happens when failures are found and corrected without prompting changes to goals, assumptions, or policies. Double-loop learning calls goals, assumptions, and policies into question and may lead to changing them. Triple-loop learning is working through individual and organizational means to achieve both single- and double-loop learning, effectively “learning how to learn.”³¹

²⁷ Obolensky, Nick. (2010). *Complex Adaptive Leadership: Embracing Paradox and Uncertainty*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

²⁸ Kenya Market Trust and Engineers Without Borders, Canada. *Adapting Lean Thinking to Market Systems Development: Principles and Practices for Donors/Funders*. [White Paper]. Leanne Rasmussen.

²⁹ Green, Duncan. (2016, Sept 13). How do you do adaptive programming two examples of practice experience help with some of the answers. Retrieved from <http://oxfamblogs.org/fp2p/how-do-you-do-adaptive-programming-two-examples-of-practical-experience-help-with-some-of-the-answers/>

³⁰ Eilertsen, S., London, K. (2005). *Modes of Organizational Learning*. Kollner Group. Retrieved from <https://le2oa.wikispaces.com/file/view/Modes%20of%20Organisational%20Learning.pdf/532776262/Modes%20of%20Organisational%20Learning.pdf>

³¹ Ibid.

Table 1. Three types of organizational learning

Type of Organizational Learning	Type of Work (Change)	Appropriate for What Kind of Situation?	Results in a Change of Action?	Challenges your Assumptions and Mental Models?	Challenges your Learning Framework?	Focus of Learning Type?
<i>Single-Loop Learning</i>	Technical	When tackling routine, repetitive issues	Yes	No	No	Improving
<i>Double-Loop Learning</i>	Technical/ Adaptive	When tackling complex, non-programmable issues	Yes	Yes	No	Understanding and Improving
<i>Triple-Loop Learning</i>	Adaptive	When you want to learn how to learn	Yes	Yes	Yes	Transforming, Understanding, and Improving

Action-research

This process involves learning in a rigorous and systemic way by engaging in action and learning while doing.^{32,33}

Participatory Evaluation

This process involves integrating stakeholders of a program into the evaluation process. This integration could occur at almost any stage of evaluation, including design, indicator creation, data collection, monitoring, and even analysis of the program. When practicing participatory evaluation, it is critical to consider the purpose of stakeholder involvement, inclusion of stakeholders, and how best to involve stakeholders to maximize the effect of participatory evaluation.³⁴ Participatory evaluation processes can support adaptive management by providing direct stakeholder involvement to align program objectives and goals with the stakeholder needs and sustain organization learning and growth.

³² JWhite. (2012, Dec. 3). Reflective peacebuilding as developmental evaluation part 1: developmental evaluation. Retrieved from <http://www.peaceportal.org/ca/blogs/-/blogs/reflective-peacebuilding-as-developmental-evaluation-part-i-%3A-developmental-evaluation;jsessionid=F41A146A3453E0C561ED042A5EC588C5>

³³ Francis, Diana. (2005). Applied Conflict Transformation studies: Action Research. *Responding to Conflict*.

³⁴ Sette, Cristina. *Participatory Evaluation*. Retrieved from http://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/participatory_evaluation