Learning About Learning: Lessons on Implementing a KM and Learning Project from the USAID KDMD Project

Adaptive Management: Accountability

What we mean by Accountability:

Accountability entails doing what you said you would, or being honest and transparent when you cannot. Adaptive management requires a great deal of accountability due to the changing nature of this approach. In terms of project management, it should be considered on two levels: contractual and practical implementation.

Why it matters:

Contractors are accountable and responsible to accomplish the goals and meet the objectives set forth in the contract. At the project level, staff is accountable for completing their tasks.

Accountability is critical in adaptive management because it builds trust and allows for learning from mistakes.

How it works:

Contractual accountability should be managed carefully as it is legally binding and delivering on the terms of the contract is non-negotiable. Hence, project leadership should work together early on to define and agree on accountability points before and during program implementation. This becomes part of the project plan whereby key deliverables and expectations are highlighted and an approach to achieving those results is solidified. At this stage, it's necessary to clearly define a scope, build timelines, select activities, and establish roles and responsibilities. Although it's essential to meet contractual obligations, the fluid nature of an adaptively managed implementation process will likely lead to adjustments and shifts along the way. Being responsive to those changes and communicating them immediately is of critical importance. During implementation, the team should conduct regular check-in meetings, manage change, and report on the status of the contract with the aim to deliver quality in every way possible. By maintaining an open dialogue about the status of project implementation, the need in some cases to revise existing approaches, and how those shifts occur can prevent tensions and surprises.

> *What it looks like:*
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> The KDMD Project found that using a project management system (Basecamp) helped to ease the burden of accountability. By maintaining "to do" lists, posting messages, maintaining timelines and calendars, and uploading draft and final versions of deliverables to the site, everyone working on any given activity could see the status of and progress towards various tasks. This allowed meeting time to focus on substantive discussions and new ideas, as opposed to basic updates.

It's important to recognize that accountability should be mutual and all stakeholders should be realistic about requirements and expectations. Each party needs to build empathy for the other, realizing that large projects require a great deal of effort and participation, and that when things slip through the cracks there is an effort to move quickly to resolution and not dwell there. Ultimately, everyone makes mistakes, but accountability is demonstrated by how those mistakes are handled and communicated.