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

Leadership

What we mean by Leadership:

Personal and technical leadership establish credibility and drive a vision for knowledge management (KM) and learning that make them successful, scalable, and replicable.

Why it matters:

Providing leadership on KM and learning projects ensures better understanding of the subject matter areas and raises awareness of the benefits and value of KM and learning projects that extend their use and impact more broadly.

How it works:

Committed and continuing leadership accelerates the understanding, buy-in, and value of KM and learning projects to others in the field that are trying to accomplish similar goals but may not fully understand the scope and potential of this approach. In fact, KM and learning projects are sometimes misunderstood and faced with skepticism but this can be surmounted by raising awareness of quality work, excellent deliverables, and professional staff. In this way, leadership takes on an advocacy role in demonstrating concrete examples of how exceptional KM and learning activities and products proves beneficial to accomplishing larger goals.

On a project level, leadership is instrumental in creating an environment of creativity and innovation. Effective leadership motivates staff to be inventive and creative, building a sense of collective responsibility and achievement and ultimately contributing to deliverables that capture and share ideas and information in compelling ways, and foster their active use.

What it looks like:

In the final years of the KDMD Project, the team embarked on "roadshows" where KDMD products, activities, and practices were demonstrated at conferences and other learning events. These occasions presented an opportunity to meet with stakeholders and partners to talk about and disseminate resources on the KDMD family of websites, seminar series, or best practice in KM and learning activities. This increased recognition for the KDMD portfolio of activities and provided information for other projects to incorporate KM and learning into their work. Before long, many in the field recognized KDMD products and integrated a similar approach as evidenced through proposal language and requests for guidance and assistance. In this way, KDMD's leadership helped to inform a series of projects and extended the lessons and experience of KDMD far and wide.

Leadership should not be confused with management. Management is the practical side of implementing projects, making sure the project is on track, on budget, and compliant with the contract. Provided the right partners are involved in the process, leadership can be inspirational and can sew the seeds for innovation. Effective leaders illuminate the potential and create opportunities for others to take action and customize practices to meet their needs, thus enabling them to learn and grow from existing models and experience.

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