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# ASSESSING KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND M&E SYSTEMS IN DEVELOPMENT

microREPORT #175

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## **DISCLAIMER**

The author's views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the United States Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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# I. INTRODUCTION

Good knowledge management and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems are more of an art than a science. There is no formula to follow, but there are some experientially tested best practices that can be used to improve the way a project or organization uses and communicates what they observe, learn and know. However, as an individual working in an organization trying to improve how information and knowledge are captured, communicated and used, it can be difficult to know where to start without a clear understanding of the current situation.

This 12-question quiz creates a snapshot of your organization's or project's knowledge management and M&E systems, and identifies strengths and weaknesses in those systems, enabling a clearer assessment of the current and potential situation. The 5-step framework and guidelines on knowledge management explained in “Understanding and Improving Knowledge Management Systems in Development”<sup>1</sup> will be useful when going through this assessment. It is recommended that both resources be used in combination, as many of the questions posed here will address multiple elements of the framework and best practices, and vice versa.

The purpose of this exercise is two-fold:

- Assess the knowledge management and M&E systems that exist in a team, project or organization operating in a dynamic environment.
- Identify within the existing knowledge management and M&E systems strengths that should be celebrated and weaknesses that should be addressed.

Putting these ideas and improvements into practice after this assessment is not easy. This tool will not solve your implementation challenges ahead, but conducting the assessment will at least provide you with a sense of where you are starting from and where you might need to go.

## WHAT THIS TOOL IS

This tool is intended to help managers and M&E staff of market facilitation projects identify their organization's or project's strengths and weaknesses and understand where to begin focusing their efforts. It aggregates practitioners' experiences and observations from a range of organizations working in market development—from the most traditional to the most innovative. It attempts to highlight some of the best practices that have led organizations to successfully implement effective and sustainable market interventions with their field staff.

This tool is a generalization of the trends and elements of knowledge management and M&E; it is a simplification of the concepts and the issues involved, each of which on its own is a topic that could be further explored. This tool attempts to break down each of these concepts into their manageable pieces, but it is the aggregation which ultimately creates the complete knowledge management system. This whole is greater than the sum of each individual part, but each element is explored separately to enable a focused analysis.

## WHAT THIS TOOL IS NOT

This tool is not intended to be a complete description of knowledge management within an organization or a guide to implementing the necessary improvements. Rather it highlights important issues that have been observed to affect an organization's ability to learn and adapt to situations in real-time, thereby improving their implementation. It will not solve specific problems that exist within your organization or project, but it can give you ideas from people who have faced similar challenges. Furthermore, this tool does not propose that the approach and ideas to knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <http://microlinks.kdid.org/library/understanding-and-improving-knowledge-management-systems-development>

management described below will be appropriate for every context and intervention. However, if a project or organization is interested in taking a market-focused and systems approach, this tool describes what would be required for market facilitation to be successful given ideal circumstances.

Using this tool alone will be insufficient to improve your internal knowledge management systems and project's performance. Rather, you should use this tool as an initial resource to quickly assess your organization's strengths and weaknesses and start a conversation with your colleagues. Leadership, management commitment and ongoing investment in the organization and staff will be needed to realize improved performance, learning and adaptive organizations for market facilitation.

## **GETTING STARTED**

As you use this tool, remember to be honest about your assessment—*no organization is perfect or static*. While this tool provides some known best practices, few organizations apply them all or all at the same time; it is likely that you will need to assess which ones are most useful to you and your team at this time and work towards a goal of adopting more of them over time.

Before we begin, it is worth noting that knowledge management and M&E are different, but they are nearly inseparable and both are important to a project's performance. Elements of both will be addressed in the following pages.

## II. KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND M&E SYSTEMS: 12 QUESTION QUIZ

Circle the answer that best represents your *current* M&E and knowledge management systems. These answers are written as though you were saying them, and are taken from real situations. As a result, they may not fit with your organization or situation perfectly. If that is the case, select the answer that best fits your assessment of your organization, project or team.

Refer to the end of the quiz for a scoring guide and reflection questions to guide next steps.

- 1) Which sentence best describes your M&E and knowledge management systems?
  - a. “We focus on the progress of the industry, actors’ behavior changes and identifying new opportunities, as well as indicator-based monitoring to satisfy project and donor requirements.”
  - b. “We focus on monitoring project activities agreed to in the work plan, but have little time for anything else.”
  - c. “We focus on collecting the required M&E data, but try to also encourage staff to observe and share relevant information they gather throughout their work.”
  - d. “We focus our M&E resources (people, funding and time) on regular reporting and periodic evaluations that track indicators defined by the donor.”
  
- 2) What type of information do you need to know in order to effectively operate a market facilitation project?
  - a. “I need information that enables us to satisfy donor requirements, but I also want to hear about other opportunities, challenges and insights from staff.”
  - b. “I need information that will keep the donors satisfied—confirmable data and success stories are the best.”
  - c. “We need to collect the M&E data to report on the project’s progress regularly, but we also need to know in real time what is happening in the field—What are the opportunities, challenges and insights that we could work with or that could derail our interventions? What are field staff’s ideas to address these?”
  - d. “I just need data and information to report on our pre-determined M&E requirements.”
  
- 3) How often does this information need to be collected?
  - a. “We collect data and produce M&E reports periodically to track our progress against our targets.”
  - b. “M&E data is required periodically to evaluate our progress against the targets. We occasionally sit down to share lessons learned and success stories from the field and use this to adjust our interventions.”
  - c. “We rarely collect data and information from the field, although we are pressured to do so by our partners and donors.”
  - d. “M&E data is required periodically according to the appropriateness of the collection period. Insights, information and ideas from field staff are collected and used on an on-going basis to continually adjust interventions.”
  
- 4) How are M&E officers and other field staff collecting this information (tacit and explicit)?
  - a. “We use tailored survey (in-person or via phone) designed to collect specific information from a small number of directly targeted market actors. This enables us to see the impact of our program or a particular trend.”

- b. “We use open-ended conversation driven by mutual desire to learn, coupled with observation and periodic research to gather information and interesting ideas/opportunities that enable us to work more effectively with market actors.”
  - c. “We use specific surveys aimed at better understanding a particular market actor or industry coupled with analytical observation of staff to guide our project.”
  - d. “We use specific surveys that target the actors we are working with and some that we are not in order to assess our program and compare our results against similar actors. Occasionally, we use Most Significant Change stories to understand and demonstrate results.”
- 5) What happens with the information collected?
- a. “Field staff and M&E officers work together to collect the information required and input it into a database for analysis. They also work to collect, share and discuss some of the additional pieces of information and learning that field staff members gain through their work. The data and reports are shared with project managers and the donor. Information from the field is shared amongst project staff and managers through a variety of means on a periodic basis.”
  - b. “Field staff collect the data and information and give it to the M&E officer who then inputs it into the database, writes a report and sends it to the donor. After some time, we hear back from the donor about our performance and progress.”
  - c. “Field staff and M&E officers work together to collect the information required and input it into a database for analysis. The M&E officer writes a report and shares it with the project manager and the donor. The donor provides feedback after some time on the project’s performance and progress.”
  - d. “Field staff and M&E officers work together to collect the information required, analyze it and share it in real time with the project’s staff, managers and donor. Project staff collect, share and analyze additional information and learning that they gain through their work. This learning and information that is not part of the reporting requirements is shared and used on an ongoing basis by project staff and managers to inform the strategies and interventions. The M&E officer and manager provide the tools and environment that enable this open communication.”
- 6) Who needs to hear this information or knowledge?
- a. “Donors—They provide the funding and therefore need to be updated regularly with our results and progress. Given their positioning and interests, we need to work with them to reaffirm and set the project’s objectives, and help them understand the work that is being done.”
  - b. “Project management—As project managers, we are the best positioned to understand the scope of the project and the vision. We can see the opportunities, constraints, requirements of the organization and the system that we are working to change.”
  - c. “Field staff—They are meeting with actors on a daily basis, so they need the most up-to-date information. They understand the most about what needs to get done and how in their area, but benefit from learning from other staff’s ideas and perspectives.”
  - d. All of the above.
- 7) How is knowledge creation and sharing incentivized?
- a. “We have a monthly meeting where we look at who has been able to produce the best results (based on data) for the month or quarter. We reward the highest performers accordingly.”
  - b. “It’s part of the M&E officer and field staff jobs. They know that they need to get this data, so they will do it.”
  - c. “Staff performance guidelines explicitly state that a field staff member’s job is to achieve results but also to learn about what is or is not working in the field. We encourage and support staff to do this through

opportunities for field exchanges and learning notes competitions that reward the winner with more communication tools (i.e. internet or phone units). Field staff evaluate each other and decide who has done the best at learning, sharing, growing/improving and using these lessons to improve their interventions.”

- d. “Staff are required to get results for the project and are held accountable for this by their managers, but they are also encouraged to learn and share what they are doing (both successes and failures) in regular meetings, reports, staff exchanges and conversations with managers.”

8) How often do you (project managers) hear a new idea from field staff?

- a. “Staff members are regularly coming forward with their ideas. They share their ideas with each other and the management team freely. Sometimes there are so many ideas that we need to rein them in and re-focus on the task at hand!”
- b. “Every now and then, maybe once a month? But not everyone feels comfortable sharing new ideas.”
- c. “In our weekly meetings, staff members are requested to share what they are doing and an idea or insight, so I hear some new ideas then.”
- d. “I can’t remember the last time a field staff member came forward with a new idea. Staff follow the work plan and complete activities according to our tight timeline.”

9) How do you (project managers) provide feedback to staff on their information or ideas?

- a. “I rarely have time to provide feedback directly to staff. They know what to do and what is required. Their progress and understanding will show in their reports and in the data.”
- b. “I read the reports that are submitted and communicate written and verbal positive and constructive feedback. I also make sure to listen and observe what staff are doing and saying (or not saying) and provide them feedback when they are performing well or guide them when they are not. I make sure to provide and ask for feedback in person to build our mutual empathy and trust.”
- c. “I read through the reports and highlight areas for improvement, and I send this information back to the person via email or a phone call.”
- d. “I read the reports that are submitted and highlight areas for improvement as well as the interesting information provided. I share how this information was useful or exciting to the project and help staff take the next actions, in person and sometimes over the phone or email.”

10) What is the purpose of monitoring?

- a. “It provides us with information that is useful in making strategic decisions about future investments and interventions.”
- b. “It helps us fulfill our reporting and accountability requirements to our donors.”
- c. “It provides us with useful information, but adapting our interventions as a result of what we have learned is difficult because of other project pressures and constraints.”
- d. “It gives us some useful information, but the amount of work involved is not worth it.”

11) Whose job is knowledge management?

- a. “We have one M&E officer focused on collecting and analyzing data and writing reports.”
- b. “We have one person solely dedicated to M&E and knowledge management for our project in the head office.”
- c. “We have one person focused on our knowledge management and M&E systems, with staff at all levels contributing to the increased flow of information and learning.”
- d. “The whole team is responsible for tracking, learning and sharing and the project invests in training and resourcing staff to contribute to the knowledge management capacity of the project.”

- 12) How do you evaluate staff performance?
- “When the need arises or there are performance issues, managers will sit down with the person in question and provide a formal performance evaluation.”
  - “We do not have an established formal performance criteria or evaluation method for staff and managers on the project.”
  - “Staff performance is based on their ability to work toward the project objectives over time as well as their ability to create effective sustainable change with partners on the ground and to learn. Staff and managers are aware of these performance criteria and check back against them regularly in closed conversations that allow for discussion and feedback to both parties.”
  - “Staff performance is based on their ability to help the project achieve success based on the metrics and results defined in the work plan. Our donor wants to see results, so staff members need to be working to achieve these targets. Staff are evaluated regularly and consistently based on these pre-determined criteria.”

## HOW DID YOU DO?

Each of the questions presented above highlights and assesses a key part of knowledge management based on the framework presented in “Understanding and Improving Knowledge Management Systems in Development.”<sup>2</sup> This framework highlights five components. As you go through the analysis, think about how each component applies to the question at hand and to your organization.

- Information and Knowledge: What do you need to know? Which information do you value?
- Capture: How are you gathering and collecting this information?
- Analysis: What are you finding and assessing from this information?
- Communication: What information or knowledge are you sharing? How?
- Management: How are you managing the flow of knowledge?

Record your score for each question in the grid below, then compare your total score with the evaluation below.

Question	a	b	c	d	Your Score
1) Which sentence best describes your M&E and knowledge management systems?	4	1	3	2	
2) What type of information do you need to know in order to effectively operate a market facilitation project?	3	2	4	1	
3) How often does this information need to be collected?	2	3	1	4	
4) How are M&E officers and other field staff collecting this information (tacit and explicit)?	1	4	3	2	
5) What happens with the information collected?	3	1	2	4	
6) Who needs to hear this information or knowledge?	1	1	1	4	
7) How is knowledge creation and sharing incentivized?	2	1	4	3	
8) How often do you (project managers) hear a new idea from field staff?	4	2	3	1	
9) How do you (project managers) provide feedback to staff on their information or ideas?	1	4	2	3	
10) What is the purpose of monitoring?	4	1	3	2	
11) Whose job is knowledge management?	1	2	3	4	
12) How do you evaluate staff performance?	2	1	4	3	
	<b>Total:</b>				<b>/48</b>

<sup>2</sup> Available at <http://microlinks.kdid.org/library/understanding-and-improving-knowledge-management-systems-development>

### **If you scored 12-20: Conventional monitoring and evaluation**

Congratulations on taking the first step to improving your knowledge management by completing this quiz! Your responses indicate that you are using a conventional monitoring and evaluation approach. You can easily make some quick improvements by setting a few goals that are appropriate for your organization. First, ensure the leadership and management of your team or project is brought into the idea and value of making these changes. Next, review the above-referenced document “Understanding and Improving Knowledge Management Systems in Development” to gain a deeper understanding of where to take the next step. This includes “Do’s and Don’ts of Knowledge Management,” which will give you practical tips.

### **If you scored 21-29: Heading in the right direction towards knowledge management**

Way to go! You’ve understood the key principles of knowledge management and its importance to market facilitation. Your next step will be to creatively introduce improvements into your team(s) and project(s). Refer to “Understanding and Improving Knowledge Management Systems in Development” to get some ideas on how to do this and consult others trying to create these transformations to learn from what worked for them. You might even want to consider asking for volunteers from your staff to form a knowledge management “core team” to champion these changes in your organization and create buy-in from all levels.

### **If you scored 30-38: On a roll! Building good knowledge management system**

It looks like you and your team have a good understanding of the importance of knowledge management and are successfully adopting good practices. Here are some more ideas to take it from good to great:

- Take a look at where you scored high, and where you scored low.
- Celebrate your strengths.
- Set a six-month goal for improvement with your team.

Your main key to success will be to continue innovating, trying new things and finding ways to help your staff and organization learn. Reach out to other practitioners trying to do the same; learning from others can be a powerful way to improve your effectiveness.

### **If you scored 39-48: Best practice knowledge management**

Congratulations! Your answers suggest that knowledge management is a key component of your day-to-day work. Keep this up and share your knowledge management work with others. Of course, if you’re in this category, you know that there is always room for improvement! Here are some ideas: Let your team know how well they’re doing. This can be encouraging for many field staff. It may also be worthwhile to review how relevant your current knowledge management practices are for your project’s current stage. Knowledge management tools, resources, and practices can be adjusted based on the needs of your team and project. For example, the reporting tools might need to be updated or your team may require more specific training based on the type of information you are getting. Finally, conduct a management review—bring in a neutral third party who understands your work to gather feedback from staff on how to improve.

# III. WHAT NEXT? REFLECTION POINT

Now that you understand your current knowledge management system in more detail, it's time to turn this knowledge into action. Take a moment to reflect on the following questions:

- 1) What is the most significant thing you realized about yourself and your organization? What surprised you?
- 2) Look at your scores. On which questions did you score the highest? How do those relate to the components of knowledge management? These are your strengths.
- 3) What is an area for improvement you discovered? (On which questions did you score the lowest?)
- 4) What does this mean for your team/project?
- 5) What improvement goal will you commit to? By what date?
- 6) What support will you require?
- 7) What are your next steps? List them here.

Share these insights and your next steps with a colleague or manager so that they hold you accountable to your commitment to improving the knowledge management and M&E systems for your project and be part of the process of learning.