

The Intervention Process Flow – A Systemic Approach to M4P Implementation

Background

Formal training in M4P emphasizes the theoretical and analytical framework for market interventions, with much less focus on implementation; it is usually asserted that implementation needs to be ‘flexible’ and practitioners are left with some general guidelines. The “how to” literature on M4P implementation is thin.

At a recent M4P training session, when a question was raised as to exactly what lessons could be extracted from the implementation of one of the most widely-read M4P case studies and applied to a neighbouring project, the room fell silent. This begs the question of if the success story was merely an anecdote – a one-off, serendipitous coincidence of circumstances – or actually the attributable result of a systemic approach to creating change.

This lack of specificity creates a barrier to replication and scale (‘crowding-in’ and ‘scaling-up’); although analysis is carried out methodically, many interventions end up being implemented on an *ad hoc* basis, with process notoriously absent from the picture.

IMPLEMENTATION SERIES # 1

One of the apt criticisms of pro-poor private sector development approaches is that although pilot projects abound, few reach scale and few are portable to other contexts. One of the reasons for lack of replication is the *ad hoc* approach to interventions taken by many implementers, heterogeneous approaches not being particularly conducive to systemic lesson-learning.

Process-driven methodologies offer an alternative to *ad hoc* implementation and are employed by a large proportion of the management consultants who specialize in commercial performance improvement and problem solving. Although each client situation is certainly unique in terms of its specific data and context, there are process steps that, when followed, inexorably lead to practical solutions. Be assured that we are referring to a standardized approach, not to pre-determined ‘cookie cutter’ solutions.

M4P is about creating positive change to benefit the poor; when a process-driven approach to change management is applied within the M4P framework, the combination is extremely powerful. The expected result – as being tested in action by PSP4H – will be a framework to create more scalable, portable interventions in the future. ‘Flexible’ in this sense actually connotes being adaptable to the circumstances at hand; it does not refer to disregarding process and using an *ad hoc* technical approach for each intervention. Applying a uniform process to M4P interventions adds transparency, reproducibility and value to implementation without sacrificing flexibility.

The Intervention Process

PSP4H developed – and follows– a uniform intervention process for its day-to-day technical activities. Potential interventions proceed through a discrete series of steps to assure that they are based on sound logic and not only comply with M4P principles and accepted measurement standards, but also deliver real value-added to partners and beneficiaries.

The process described below is not specific to M4P in Health interventions; it may be adapted and applied to M4P in any industry or sector. Once market analysis is complete and a programme is ready to move into the technical assistance phase, the intervention steps are:

1. Identification of the potential intervention and partner organisation
2. Problem definition and gap analysis
3. Screening for relevance, impact, engagement and do no harm
4. Development of a concept note, including results chain and measurement plan
5. Formalizing the agreement with the partner
6. Action planning
7. Implementation of the action plan by the partner, assisted by the programme
8. Drafting of TORs and contracting services when appropriate
9. Follow up, supervision and monitoring of intervention progress
10. Ongoing data collection, documentation of lessons learnt and sharing of results with other stakeholders

Identification of potential interventions takes place through a variety of means – advertisements, calls for proposals, desk analysis, direct contacts, directories, industry associations, open forums, referrals, road shows, stakeholder mapping, trade fairs, and web searches are some common ways that potential interventions may be discovered. A specific partner (or consortium of partners) must be interested in cooperation.

Once contact has been made with a potential partner and the partner's interests explored, the next step is **problem definition and gap analysis**. Should there be mutual interests,

the partner's strategic issues need to be identified at the root cause level to unearth systemic problems (as opposed to individual business problems). The gap analysis will then identify the changes that need to be made to solve the systemic problems. Following this gap analysis, a decision is made if a potential intervention can be designed which fits within the scope and scale of programme resources.

If so, the third step is a formal **screening of the potential intervention** for relevance, impact, engagement, and do no harm – the R-I-E-D model developed by PSP4H. The programme's intervention manager must enumerate a logical, well-evidenced case for the intervention at each step of the screen. Failure at any step means rejection of the potential intervention. PSP4H uses an Excel-based screening tool to document this step. A companion *PSP4H How-To Practice Note* addresses screening in detail.

Should the potential intervention pass screening, the next step is **development of a concept note** which elaborates the business case for the intervention – how it is proposed to operate – including the roles and responsibilities of each partner, a time line, a budget, expected results, a results chain and a measurement plan. The concept note is an action document and should be brief and to the point. PSP4H uses a Word-based template to assure that all relevant information is included in each concept note, which is reviewed by programme management for compliance.

Once the intervention concept is developed, documented and approved, a formal **agreement with the partner** should be executed. This confirms the nature of the engagement, specifies mutual understanding and objectives, and identifies what each partner is expected to contribute to the partnership. This is generally referred to as a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and can take a multitude of forms and designations. PSP4H uses a simple two-page framework agreement, but the partner may wish to use a more elaborate agreement of their own composition.

Henceforth the intervention gets interesting as we actually start adding some value for the partner. Prior to this stage, everything has

A review of interventions on a predecessor M4P programme in Africa showed that many interventions never progressed beyond the research, analytical and partnering phases, as there was neither a framework for, nor emphasis on, action planning beyond the MOU. Interventions without action plans frequently stalled after the MOU was signed and did not reach the value-added stage where change occurs.

been preparatory; as such, the preliminary steps should be accomplished as rapidly as possible (assuring accuracy, of course) with as little expenditure as possible. **Action planning** with the partner is the next step – what actions will be taken to accomplish the intervention’s objectives? Action planning is often the overlooked step in implementation but it is the single most critical step for achieving desired results.

Once complete, **implementation of the action plan** by the partner takes place, with the programme assisting. The action plan belongs to the partner while the programme uses a light touch to advise and facilitate implementation– it is clearly the partner’s action plan, not the programme’s. The programme might take the lead in some actions and contribute to others. Decisions must be made if outside consultants or other resources will be needed to support implementation, for example a market research firm to conduct surveys. The implementation step is where change starts to happen, and resources committed to activities during the implementation phase can be measured against the intervention’s ultimate impact to determine cost-effectiveness and Value for Money (VfM).

Should third-party services be required for implementation, next comes **drafting Terms**

of Reference (ToRs) and contracting services. To maximize buy-in and impact, the partner must be deeply involved in both creation of the ToRs and in vetting the potential service provider; the partner will be the ultimate user of the services. In the interest of sustainability and VfM, the cost of outside services must be in line with expected impact.

The programme then has an obligation to **follow up and monitor progress** of the action plan to assure implementation. Review sessions with partners should normally take place at least monthly, more frequently at the beginning of the intervention. Adjustments to the action plan may be necessary as feedback is received and results are gauged against expectations.

Finally, after all planned inputs are implemented, **ongoing data collection** will continue over the life of the intervention to measure outcomes and impacts according to the measurement plan. This stage is where evidence of success or failure is gleaned. Lessons learnt can be extracted, and in the spirit of continuous improvement, may now be documented and shared with the wider community of practice. Both positive and negative lessons are valuable; positive ones to be replicated and negative ones eliminated in future programmes.

Process Flow Diagram

The intervention process flow as employed by PSP4H is diagrammed below. The flow diagram is colour coded as follows:

- Orange – document;
- Blue – preparatory process step (non-value-added to partner; minimize expenditure);
- Green – implementation process step (value-added to partner; focus resources here).

PSP4H
Process Flow for Interventions

