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Putting adaptive management into practice



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All blogs

Practitioners trying to create systems change in dynamic environments recognise the need to continually learn, experiment, and change their strategies to maximise impact.

As such, adaptive management has increasingly become an area of focus for market systems development practitioners in recent years. Managing in this way involves experimentation amidst ambiguity, changing plans, and extensive knowledge management. Due to personnel and institutional constraints on both donors and implementers, operationalising adaptive management remains a challenge.

In 2016, The BEAM Exchange sponsored a **study** that examined the incentives and constraints to adaptive management across the donor-implementer relationship. The study highlighted four aspects needed to enable adaptive management: knowledge, leadership, operations (tools, procurement, budgeting), and culture (local and organisational).

Following the study, BEAM Exchange invited practitioners to write blogs on emerging good practice and current challenges in adaptive management. Eleven posts were published in a blog series on adaptive management.

Based on recurring themes between the study and the blog posts, BEAM Exchange identified three areas to develop 'advanced knowledge products' around. The goal is to inspire conversation on the details of operationalizing adaptive management by focussing on specific sub-topics. The three areas chosen were:

1. Structured hypothesis-testing and experimentation at the programme level

2. Recruitment processes and hiring criteria for senior managers
3. Tactics to improve donor-implementer relations

The result was:

1. A guidance note with case studies
2. A webinar
3. A **HowTo!** note on donor-implementer secondments.

As the development community develops an understanding of what adaptive management is and where it is appropriate, we must turn our attention to the nitty-gritty of enabling it in practice. These products are a starting point for discussion on several elements of doing so. We are keen to hear more examples, opinions, and reactions, please leave a comment below!