2023 CLA CASE COMPETITION

COLLABORATE • LEARN • ADAPT

Case Title:

Using CLA to Launch an Innovative Learning Lab

Name:

MOMENTUM Knowledge Accelerator Team

Organization:

PRB/JSI/Ariadne Labs

Summary:

The Measurement, Adaptive Learning, and Knowledge Management Lab (MAKLab) is a promising new mechanism established by MOMENTUM Knowledge Accelerator (MKA) to address priority challenges and help find and spread promising solutions within a suite of awards. The suite, referred to as MOMENTUM, shares a common goal to improve reproductive health, voluntary family planning, and maternal, newborn, and child health services across the world. MAKLab functions as a learning lab, engaging in short-term activities to address needs identified by MOMENTUM awards. Creating this learning lab involved establishing an innovative process for service delivery that allowed for extra flexibility in response to emerging needs across MOMENTUM and adaptability in complex environments. MAKLab maintains a flexible team that can pull in expertise and resources to engage in short-term activities that meet prioritized needs. MKA recognized the importance of embedding CLA into MAKLab to learn from and improve upon this innovative model during design and implementation. To integrate CLA, MAKLab used collaborative stakeholder engagement and co-design; rapid cycles of user feedback during activity implementation; and annual assessments to collect information about drivers of success and opportunities for improvement and to plan for change. MAKLab used learning to pivot program design and processes during implementation—including establishing services across multiple technical areas, structuring work with rapid response cycles, and developing processes for spreading resources. The result is that MKA has successfully developed and integrated an innovative service delivery model within MOMENTUM that meets award needs, contributing to improvements in outcomes.

1. **WHAT: What is the general context in which the case takes place? What organizational or development challenge(s) or opportunities prompted you to collaborate, learn, and/or adapt?**

MKA is one of six awards in the USAID-funded MOMENTUM suite, which collectively aims to improve reproductive health, voluntary family planning, and maternal, newborn, and child health services across the world. MKA serves as a connector award, building systems and creating tools for sharing data and information to advance learning and better achieve MOMENTUM's objectives. With full work plans, complex partnerships, and short timelines, teams don't always have the capacity, resources, or expertise available to work on challenges that emerge during implementation or to spread promising solutions once they are developed. Without the ability to leverage additional support when challenges or solutions emerge, awards risk suboptimal implementation. MKA recognized an opportunity to meet this need by developing an innovative mechanism called MAKLab. MAKLab is a learning lab within MOMENTUM that can be flexibly deployed to deliver tailored, technical support leveraging MKA's expertise in measurement, adaptive learning, and knowledge management. MAKLab's work is organized into distinct activities—each meeting a specific need prioritized by a MOMENTUM team—leading to a solution co-designed with partners. Each activity has a unique nature and scope and requires specific expertise. MAKLab is designed with the flexibility to meet different needs as they emerge. For example, in one activity, MAKLab created a cross-MOMENTUM assessment tool for understanding facility readiness for small and sick newborn care. In another, MAKLab provided training and technical assistance to a team in Mali adapting a Safe Childbirth Checklist in a fragile setting. The nature of MAKLab's work is iterative and dynamic; MKA is responsible for connections across a new and unique awards structure; and awards are working in complex adaptive environments. Thus, MKA recognized that CLA was a critical element to facilitate the ongoing learning and improvement necessary to ensure the ultimate success of this new endeavor.

2. **What two CLA Sub-Components are most clearly reflected in your case?**

M&E for Learning

Internal Collaboration

3. **HOW: What steps did you take to apply CLA approaches to address the challenge or opportunity described above?**

MAKLab integrated CLA into its structure and approach in three ways: 1) a co-design process to engage stakeholders, 2) ongoing learning cycles embedded in activity implementation, and 3) a yearly learning assessment. At MAKLab's inception, MAKLab designers recognized the critical role that stakeholders should play in designing its structure and service offerings. MAKLab therefore organized a six-month co-design process to collaboratively engage stakeholders in learning lab design. The co-design process involved (1) an environmental scan consisting of a desk review of 21 similar projects and nine key informant interviews from selected projects, (2) interviews with 19 stakeholders from the six MOMENTUM awards to understand needs and priorities, (3) early prototyping of use case examples based on interviews, and (4) focus group discussions with 17 stakeholders to extract feedback on use case prototypes. Many useful insights emerged through the co-design process. For example, stakeholders expected that unforeseen needs would emerge during implementation, but it was difficult to predict those needs. MAKLab therefore designed its process and systems to allow the team to draw upon different types of expertise depending on the nature of each request.

MAKLab was designed to execute short-term activities (lasting three to nine months) with MOMENTUM partners to meet priority challenges rapidly. Once the MAKLab model was launched and service delivery initiated, MAKLab purposefully integrated CLA into the standard process for each activity to ensure that ongoing learning was captured and used to inform future work. Each MAKLab activity was designed with five phases: initiate, triage, engage, execute, and learn. The team recognized the importance of systematically capturing and using learning with each activity cycle, thus institutionalizing a structural process that facilitated CLA. During the learning phase of each activity, MAKLab collected information from stakeholders via after-action reviews, interviews, or surveys to understand what was most successful about the process and products, and where improvements could be made. Learning was captured and immediately used to modify future activities. For example, after completing one activity to help develop a blended learning training in family planning, we learned that it would have been better to engage partners in product design earlier. In subsequent activities, we scheduled a clear process and timeline for engaging stakeholders in review and feedback so that review expectations were clear and the timeline allowed for meaningful stakeholder engagement. While these cycles of learning and adaptation at the completion of each activity were critical for ongoing improvement, MAKLab also recognized the importance of periodic assessments that looked holistically across activities, partnerships, and processes. Thus, after its inaugural year, the MAKLab team conducted an internal learning assessment. This assessment involved interviewing stakeholders and mapping learning from each activity to generate cross-activity findings. Findings were shared with key stakeholders for feedback and to engage in a prioritization process to identify action steps and a timeline for implementing changes. For example, we identified that a common theme across projects was the importance of quick turnaround times in meeting needs and addressing challenges; it was more important to get information quickly than to produce polished products. We therefore created and piloted a new rapid response mechanism that eliminated or reduced some processes, shortening our timeline from three to nine months to one to four weeks for appropriate, eligible activities. Another theme was inconsistency in disseminating resources developed through MAKLab. In response, we developed a MAKLab spread strategy that codified a process for sharing, adapting, and spreading MAKLab products both within and beyond the MOMENTUM suite. This new process has helped promote awareness, use, and institutionalization of the tools and knowledge generated by MAKLab beyond their initial intent.

4. RESULTS: Choose one of the following questions to answer.

We know you may have answers in mind for both questions; However please choose one to highlight as part of this case story

A. DEVELOPM ENT RESULTS

Success of MAKLab is measured by whether we provide services that contribute meaningfully to achieving another award's goals. Since launching in August 2021, MAKLab has received 13 requests for support, initiated 11 activities, and completed eight activities resulting in the development of a portfolio of resources to support MOMENTUM. The following examples demonstrate how MAKLab products were used to advance a project goals:

1. Vignettes developed by MAKLab to assess provider competency in treating hypertensive disorders during pregnancy were integrated into a MOMENTUM Health Facility Assessment (HFA) to be used for ongoing monitoring, evaluation, and learning and for use by external audiences. These vignettes will improve efficiency by providing a streamlined assessment methodology when more time-intensive observation methods are not possible.
2. Training of champions resources to build a culture of CLA were used to introduce adaptive learning in South Sudan and were subsequently adapted and used in other contexts, including in Burkina Faso. This training has built local CLA capacity, contributing to ongoing learning and improvement goals.
3. Adaptive learning training modules developed by MAKLab were incorporated into an implementing partner's training system to be distributed to partner organizations. The modules have been used to introduce and advance adaptive learning work in Côte d'Ivoire, Indonesia, Liberia, Madagascar, and Zambia. The training package has played a critical role in advancing familiarity with adaptive learning concepts across target countries.
4. A desk review of facilitators and barriers to uptake and use of toolkits was used as a framework for evaluating existing immunization toolkits to identify opportunities to improve their design. Findings will help improve uptake of evidence-based resources.

Arguably, the ability to meet awards' needs and deliver useful products and services is directly related to MAKLab's CLA process. Integrating CLA ensures that user and stakeholder needs are reflected in program design and processes.

5. **ENABLING CONDITIONS: How have enabling conditions - resources (time/money/staff), organizational culture, or business/work processes - influenced your results? How would you advise others to navigate any challenges you may have faced?**

Integrating CLA into MAKLab was challenging. We identified multiple obstacles. Often, CLA approaches can add to already stretched timelines, and it is difficult to find the time to thoughtfully collect and use information needed for improvement. This was especially true during the co-design process, when some team members felt urgency to begin implementation raising concern about the time-intensive nature of the co-design effort. Also, change management is challenging. The mid-course corrections needed to adapt in response to learning involved changes to our processes and systems, which required support from leadership and team members. It was sometimes difficult to secure buy-in for this change quickly. To mitigate these challenges, we've identified the following enabling factors as critical to our success: (1) Creating a culture and process for CLA: MAKLab deliberately invested in creating a learning culture. Central to this was approaching our work with humility and regularly reflecting on how we could learn and improve. MAKLab intentionally integrated CLA cycles into their work processes to make CLA systematic. These processes served as a forcing function to ensure that CLA was maintained. (2) Drawing on relevant experience: The team leveraged past experience with co-design and quality improvement approaches that included rapid learning cycles, empathy practice, stakeholder engagement, and human-centered design. Many of these skills and experiences were critical for integrating CLA into this work. (3) Soliciting rapid feedback: In order to improve quickly, rapid feedback was needed. MAKLab prioritized learning about users' experiences on an ongoing basis and making modifications in real time to improve. (4) Building strong, trusting relationships: MAKLab built strong relationships with partners and established trust. Trust facilitates partners' willingness to engage in truthful dialogue about what could be improved, softens the volatility associated with organizational change, and increases comfort with uncertainty in an evolving system—all critical components of CLA.