LEARNING SPRINTS
A Summary Guide

NAWIRI   **May 2020**

What is a learning sprint?

It is an intensive learning process that can be done over 100 days, 4 months, or 6 months. You choose your duration depending on the complexity of the innovation.
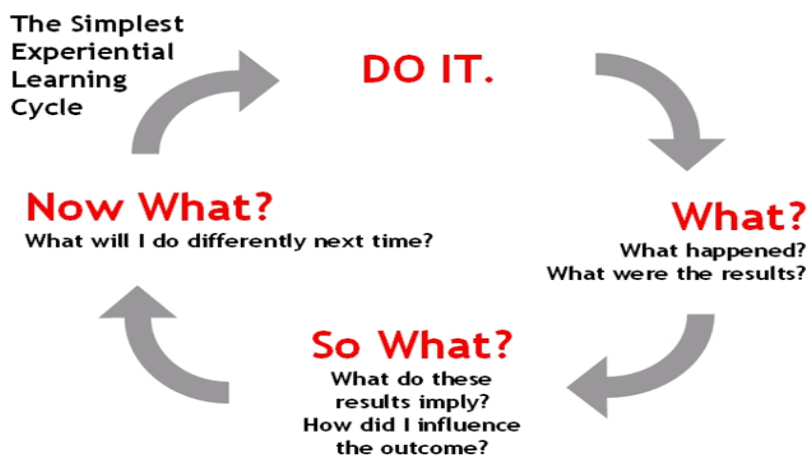
A learning sprint allows you to know in a short amount of time if your innovation is fit for the context, what the design of the activity will touch upon and allow for predictions on the course of the activity for the next 3-6 months. The learning sprint allows you to change as you go along, and allows you adapt to the changes within the specific context.

Contexts like Nairobi, Lodwar and Maralal, we can't predict what will happen in specific sub counties and different communities at all times. It's important to have this iterative learning process to adapt to each specific context.

Learning sprints during COVID-19:

The idea to do a learning sprint through the COVID response is that it's a learning for all of us. This is to see whether we can implement these types of sprints in the wider programs, in the NAWIRI phase 1 and phase 2. This should become a normal way of working, weekly meetings, and monthly meetings with team members to make decisions based on that, to change their activities, to adapt to the changing circumstances and learning to the local contexts. After these learning sprints, we will see how we can apply it to our now NAWIRI phase 1 and phase 2 activities and the other programs we have running. This will allow to know when we see an advantage to keep things running as they are or to stop and reflect, learn and adapt.

Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning:

The Simplest Experiential Learning Cycle

DO IT.

What? What happened? What were the results?

So What? What do these results imply? How did I influence the outcome?

Now What? What will I do differently next time?

compiled by Andrea Corney
www.edbatista.com/2007/10/experiential.html

Through this process we want to apply this model of experiential learning.

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## The Model of Learning

Reflection & Plan
What is it that you want to do? What is your theory of change? What is your assumptions?
In this phase is where you design the plan, then you analyse what were the results and what does that mean to your program?

Assessment and Adjust Plan
You adapt your plan to what you learned during the experience. This is called an iterative change, notice the incremental change using these learning cycles.

Re-Asses and Adjust Plan:
You apply your plan, then you adjust, then you try it and adjust again, sometimes change is incremental. Sometimes you learn it was a bad idea and you have to redesign the whole plan, or you transform your activity so you might have a better impact.

Reflection & Plan
Assessment & adjust plan
Re-assess & adjust plan
Incremental Change
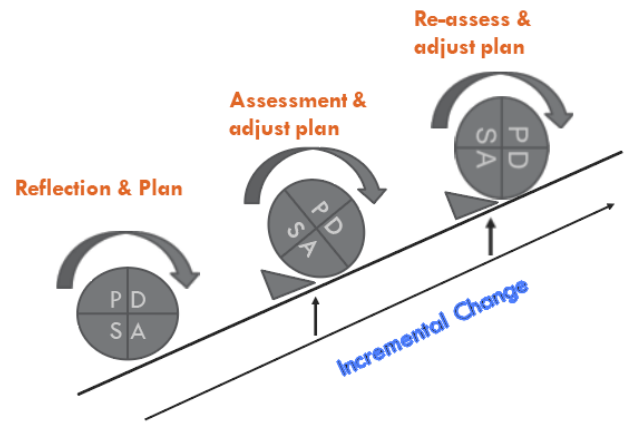
Resilience (Adapt and Absorb Change)

Related to the resilience of NAWIRI. Lets say you adapt the water activity to the COVID-19 response. If you start out thinking the same program plan is the best way to go about this but then you learn there are small things you can adapt to change the bigger issues, you can change those right away through the program. E.g. Maybe we will use a different water trucking company, maybe we will do something different when we commission companies and going to different water points.

Some times you find that your activities are just not fit for purpose. It can't deal with the complexity and the changing environment of a COVID program and the activity fails. You have to be ready for failure, to learn from it, and adapt the program.

Sometimes you find during the process you might need to transform the program design, you learn what is a much better idea for your objectives and your theory of change.

Not Fit for Purpose

Transform

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The Phase Approach to Learning Cycles

The criteria for choosing a project is based on the commitment of the project team. It also depends on the complexity of the project, maybe it is so complex it may take quite some time to consider, you may not want to work on that at that time. These first ones to choose learning sprints for projects might be good to base on their likelihood of success. This is much more motivating for your team, out of this process with this sort of success.

Phase 1: Adaptive Learning Organisational Culture

It is really important for the organisation and members to be open to change, this needs to be built into the plan from the very beginning , as the plan may not survive after the first learning cycle.

There needs to be a readiness among the team to learn, on your own, but also within the organisation and with the donors and the Government. Learning from failure is something that many NGOs and Donors don't see as a positive thing. It is something that needs to be taken into account from the beginning, failing is just as good as achieving.

Phase 1: Team & Design

The organisation and the government, have to allow mistakes to be made, allowing the team to make changes as they go along. There needs to be flexibility within the finance group, within the M&E group and within the leadership group to allow this change to happen. Otherwise once the learning cycle has reached the end, and there were moments where you realized the plan should be adapted, or changed for something new there was no capacity in these other organisational structures to allow for that change.

The team who takes on the learning strategy, will need support from the managers, they will need to be valued in what they are doing.

People who are doing learning sprints, need to learn the skills, how to facilitate, how to transfer learning and how to learn.

Phase 1: Forming the team

Convening the team, there must be a committed core team, committed individuals and a committed organisation. A core team would need to be brought together, Government, M&E and senior support staff related to projects. An example being, if a learning sprint is done for monitoring markets, MDMA , Save the Boma, and the senior NGO staff who are leading on that activity need to be involved. Behind that, a wider team who is involved on what the learning is throughout the activity.

The first phase would be to form the team, this will be around a 6 hour workshop meeting facilitated by CHC. Most of the focus of the workshop will be on the soft aspects of team building, all the commitments made to the team, and when you are going to have meetings, how you will commit to them. Also the design of the project, what are the activities within the project, and how does the M&E provide data for the learning sprints. Then you launch project.

The project acts within these learning cycles of incremental change. The first workshop would take place at the first cycle

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Phase 2: Learning Cycles

Within the first phase you agree when you are going to do your review and reflection. Probably in 1.5 hour meetings. Bi-monthly or longer if you have longer learning cycles planned. Prior to these meetings the team will review data and evidence for wider questions and observations, and within that reflect and review at the meeting. You look at the data and experience noting what will be the interventions or strategies in the coming months. You push the ball further up the slope.

Repeat for as many times as your team has agreed to take part in this process.

At the end there is a final learning event, including the wider team, it would be facilitated by CHC, the core group would be the lead inside of this workshop, reviewing the learning and adaptations. Then the wider group will plan on the possibilities of scaling up and scaling out.

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