



Accelerated Peer-support Partnership

Training for providers of support to SAIs in challenging contexts

Oslo Monday 12. – Friday 16. September 2022

- How can we provide customized and effective support in a challenging context?
- How can we enable SAIs to successfully implement their strategic plan and deliver audits which positively impact society?
- How can we enable the SAI to deal with its most complex problems?
- How can we work effectively across organizations supporting the same SAI?

1. Background

Introduction

The Accelerated Peer-support Partnership (PAP-APP) programme seeks to ensure synergies and share good practices among partners providing support to SAIs in challenging contexts. The programme especially seeks to enable this for providers of support to the SAIs of DRC, Eritrea, The Gambia, Guinea, Madagascar, Niger, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Togo and Zimbabwe.¹ Currently various support projects are ongoing for these SAIs, including support by AFROSAI-E, IDI, CREFIAF, a range of peer-SAIs and consultants.

Capacity development in challenging contexts is difficult. Challenging contexts are characterized by instability, weak institutions, and a hyper-sensitive political environment. They are also referred to as complex systems where any (well-intentioned) intervention can have side effects which can cause more harm than good, potentially reinforcing instability. For SAIs, such context creates tremendous constraints on their operations, among others independence, staffing and funding. As a result, audit delivery, quality and engagements are hampered limiting the SAI's impact on public financial management and the well-being of citizens.

Therefore, promoting and supporting change in a challenging context requires specific sets of skills and tools that enable external actors to be able to constantly grasp opportunities while at the same time anticipating potential consequences. Providers of support in challenging contexts need to be knowledgeable about different capacity development support approaches and techniques in general, but also be able to apply these in a way that works well in challenging contexts. As peers and managers are the cornerstone of PAP-APP support, dedicating a specific workshop to develop competencies and building a community of practice to support SAIs in challenging context is a crucial investment for delivering on PAP-APP promises.

Dealing with complex problems through PDIA

The SAIs we are working with face a lot of complex problems, i.e., the big issues that keep Auditors General (and dedicated providers of support) up at night. Some examples:

- SAIs are unable to submit core audit reports on time
- SAI staff are submitting unclear and/or incomplete working papers
- SAIs are not following their QA procedures to ensure audit files and reports can withstand scrutiny
- SAIs are failing to deliver their own strategic plans while at the same time critiquing the performance of others
- SAI leaders are not sufficiently involved in or tracking strategy implementation
- Parliaments are not holding hearings or following up on audit reports
- Auditees are not acting on audit recommendations
- External stakeholders do not understand audit reports, which often leads to inaction or misrepresentation

¹ These SAIs were selected for the Global Call for Proposals Tier 2 – a global effort by the INTOSAI-Donor Cooperation to enable scaled-up and effective support to SAIs at risk of being left behind.

- SAI leader hesitates to publish audit findings that threaten powerful public players which can lead to retaliation on SAI or staff

When faced with such complex problems, advising the management of a SAI can be a daunting endeavor, rife with potential failure and even harm if the wrong support or advice is provided.

Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)² is a capacity development approach designed to address that challenge. Developed by Harvard faculty with extensive expertise in development and public financial management, PDIA is an approach for solving complex problems in a locally-driven, results-oriented, and iterative way. This is done by breaking problems into root causes, identifying entry points, searching for possible solutions, taking action, reflecting upon what you have learned, adapting and then acting again. It is a dynamic process with tight feedback loops that allows change managers to build solutions to problems that fit the local context.

PDIA is also designed to avoid some of the most common traps in capacity development—traps which even PAP-APP can sometimes be guilty of—including encouraging *isomorphic mimicry* and *premature load bearing* (see box). Further, PDIA encourages support providers to take more of a coaching role rather than one of “expert”.

PDIA is a natural fit for a programme like PAP-APP.

All the above characteristics of PDIA are either already built into PAP-APP’s core principles (e.g., the emphasis on local ownership and results) or ideas we’ve been exploring more and more (e.g., avoiding mimicry and coaching rather than advising).

Further, understanding how change happens (and does not happen) in challenging / fragile contexts is critical for our work. As collaboration between SAIs and PAP-APP deepens, **serious problems of implementation are emerging, forcing us to open up discussions about the root causes of inertia.**

These problems require robust and agile approaches to help us navigate and facilitate institutional and organizational change. However, often, when faced with complex problems, we can be tempted to come with one-size-fits-all responses, often inadequate for our beneficiary. We therefore need to provide peers and managers with approaches that maximize their capacity to adapt their knowledge and experience to other (and often substantially) different contexts.

Our intention is not to adopt PDIA as the approach for all PAP-APP support, but rather for project managers and peers to understand and feel confident applying its mindset and tools where appropriate. With this training, we hope to familiarize managers and peers to a number of powerful concepts they can relate to when advising SAIs. We will also develop a common language in PAP-APP on which we can build and advance knowledge and experience. The training is a first step, and we look forward for managers and peers being able to use these tools in their SAI. PAP-APP can provide additional guidance with on-the- job support with the training provider.

Example of *isomorphic mimicry*: SAI X invests a lot of its management and staff time to meeting all the criteria of SAI-PMF indicator 3 (strategic planning cycle), meanwhile ignoring the fact that key staff needed to implement strategic priorities are overloaded and burning out.

Example of *premature load bearing*: SAI Y is focused on developing an elaborate, cloud-based M&E system and customizing audit manuals in an AMIS, meanwhile most staff still do not have functioning laptops.

² You can download Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock’s book for free here : [Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action | Building State Capability \(harvard.edu\)](https://hks.harvard.edu/publications/building-state-capability-evidence-analysis-action)