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**EVIDENCE BASE
FOR CLA**

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Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting to Improve Organizational Effectiveness



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INTRODUCTION

What does it take to increase income, improve food security and nutrition, raise literacy rates, or decrease malaria? To achieve these goals, we design programs that logically lay out the 'how' and then we implement, monitor, assess, learn, and course correct. Staff, the engine of our organizations and programs, strongly influence whether or not we achieve our development goals. So how can we ensure that staff consistently show up to work motivated and engaged, ready to produce at the highest level, and support the achievement of development outcomes? Recent evidence reveals that collaborating, learning, and adapting (CLA) is part of the 'how.'

Efforts to examine evidence about CLA's contribution to organizational effectiveness and development results suggest that USAID's investments in CLA are well placed. This briefer synthesizes the evidence on CLA's contribution to organizational effectiveness, offers examples of what this looks like in practice, and highlights additional resources so we can start making changes in ourselves and our organizations now.

WHAT DOES THE EVIDENCE SAY ABOUT CLA AND ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS?

Our review of business and public sector literature indicates that:

- **Collaborating improves employee innovation, loyalty, and performance.** When we intentionally collaborate, we can also create strategic alliances that generate savings in operating costs and increase productivity (Roghe, et al., 2012; CISCO, 2010; Dewar, et al., 2009; Morgan & Berthon, 2008; Todeva & Knoke, 2005; Cassiman, et al., 2002). In the public sector, the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) identifies collaborative management as one of the five key drivers of employee engagement and successful management practices.
- **Learning efforts, such as learning agendas and communities of practice, support evidence-based decision-making and data-driven adaptations in organizations for improved development outcomes** (Raimondo, 2016; Moreno, 2001; Wesley & Buysse, 2001; Wenger, 1998). Business sector research demonstrates that when learning is embedded into our organizational culture and processes, our organizations are more innovative and our team and organizational performance improves (Arthur & Huntley, 2005; Collins & Smith, 2006; Cummings, 2004; Hansen, 2002; Lin, 2007d; Mesmer-Magnus & DeChurch, 2009).



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Adapting in complex environments provides performance advantages to both public and private sector organizations (Akhtar, et al., 2016; Valters, et al., 2016; Jones, 2011; Allan & Curtis, 2005). Studies also found that when we manage adaptively, we are more likely to improve our organizational effectiveness and development outcomes. This is especially true when decision-making autonomy is placed as close to field staff and local partners as possible (Honig & Gulrajani, 2017; Moynihan & Pandey, 2004).

TRY THIS!

Think about a recent time at work when you felt most engaged, alive, and satisfied. What were you doing, who were you with, what happened, and how did you feel?

Do you have the story playing in your head? Now consider: does your story have something to do with collaborating, learning, and adapting? If yes, your personal experience aligns with recent findings from an analysis of more than 3,000 USAID employee responses to the 2016 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS). The data showed strong, positive relationships between CLA and indicators of organizational effectiveness including employee engagement, empowerment, satisfaction, and perceived organizational effectiveness. These findings fit within a growing body of evidence from both private- and public-sector research that recognizes employee engagement and empowerment as critical to successful organizational performance.

HOW CLA ENHANCES ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS IN HUMANITARIAN CRISES

Scenario Planning Improves Programming in Yemen's Humanitarian Crisis

In the face of economic collapse in 2017, Yemen faced a dire humanitarian situation. The U.S. Embassy suspended operations in early 2015 and relocated staff and operations, so the core team was split across various countries. Although no formal strategy to guide programming in Yemen existed, the team developed a scenario plan and monitoring framework to direct program assistance implementation. Together with USAID and IPs, the team developed this approach to guide USAID decision-making and provide a platform for USAID to serve as a thought leader for the U.S. Government in providing assistance to Yemen. The scenario planning approach received cross-agency support, making the program less vulnerable to ad-hoc requests as circumstances in Yemen changed.



Scenario Planning for Assistance to Yemen
By: Laura McAdams, USAID Bureau for the Middle East

ORGANIZATIONAL CHALLENGE
USAID/Yemen developed a plan for how it will invest in non-humanitarian activities under five "scenarios" that, in USAID's judgment, are likely to unfold over the next 18 months.

CLA Approach:

- Brainstormed risks, opportunities, challenges and course-changing events to identify potential trajectories.
- Developed a monitoring framework with indicators to quickly identify shifts across scenarios.
- Used the scenario plan as an analytical framework through which to understand the rapidly changing events on the ground.

OUTCOMES
Scenario planning allowed the team to build a coherent program that is less vulnerable to ad hoc programming requests, improving long-term development outcomes.

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Collaboration Increases Partner Effectiveness in the Midst of Jordan's Humanitarian Crisis

In 2017, as a result of the increasing humanitarian crisis in Syria, Jordan hosted the world's fifth-largest refugee population. This put extraordinary pressure on Jordan's healthcare system. In order to address this issue, USAID/Jordan's Population and Family Health Office expanded and realigned its program to focus on the resilience of Jordan's health system. As USAID/Jordan grew its health portfolio, however, it realized that the worsening humanitarian situation affected staff morale and, consequently, the work across three different implementing partners (IPs). To address this challenge, USAID/Jordan implemented a joint work plan, accompanied by regular meetings and a framework to demonstrate how all the IPs were working toward the same overarching goal. The steps implemented by USAID/Jordan not only helped IPs identify synergies but also created a strong sense of community across IPs. For example, during a joint work planning process, implementing partners identified 13 different collaboration points that helped them reduce overlaps and redundancies in their work. These shifts meant that IPs were more efficient and effective, accelerating all projects toward their results.

A VIEW FROM USAID MISSIONS: DRIVING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE THROUGH CLA

USAID/Senegal Uses Data to Drive Organizational Change

When USAID/Senegal leadership reviewed their Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results in 2017, the stark discrepancies between the experience of U.S. Direct Hires (DHs) and Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs) became apparent. In general, Mission DHs had less positive views of their working environment in comparison with FSNs. Some of the areas for improvement included performance management, communication from Mission leadership, and workload management. In order to address these challenges, the Mission hired an external facilitator to lead a series of pause and reflect retreats. The facilitator designed the retreats to maximize openness and break down the traditional hierarchical nature of the Mission. The retreat format helped increase trust and openness among participants and helped Mission leadership glean a more complete picture of low morale. As a result, the Mission updated several policies, including its performance management system.

Leveraging the Annual Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey for Reflection and Change
By: Elizabeth Callender, USAID/Senegal FEVS Committee

DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGE
USAID/Senegal's Program Office conducted an in-depth analysis of past Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (FEVS) results and found a need for improvement in six areas related to mission culture and performance management.

USAID/Senegal's CLA Approach:

Pause & Reflect:
Organized mini-retreats to:
- Explore areas of dissatisfaction
- Address issues that hinder the mission's ability to achieve its development objectives
- Give staff an opportunity to raise issues and propose ideas.

Openness:
Encouraged staff to interact in a non-hierarchical manner and share knowledge in a way that would not have happened otherwise.

Outcomes: USAID/Senegal made several operational adaptations in response to the issues raised during the mini-retreats. The process also set the stage for ongoing reflection and long-term action within the mission.

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Creating a Mission of Leaders to Enhance Staff Engagement

In many USAID Missions, conditions such as the high rate of Foreign Service Officer and leadership turnover and the hierarchical leadership structure can slow change and impede the type of programmatic innovation and risk-taking needed to make progress toward development objectives. In 2015, to tackle these issues and more effectively address the development obstacles faced by Uganda, USAID/Uganda institutionalized a "Mission of Leaders" approach, which aimed to equip all staff with the knowledge, skills, and attitudes for CLA. A few of the components of the Mission of Leaders approach included professional development opportunities such as executive coaching and leadership training. Additionally, the Mission hired external CLA support to assist with various phases of Mission of Leaders. Mission leadership consistently made CLA a priority by ensuring the availability of funds. As a result of the Mission of Leaders approach, staff reported increased engagement and confidence in leadership



PHOTO CREDIT: USAID/Uganda

DID YOU KNOW ...

Following USAID/Uganda's Mission of Leaders example, other USAID Missions, such as USAID/Rwanda and USAID/Mexico, have integrated a similar approach. If you're interested in learning more, check out these resources in the CLA Toolkit.

HOW CAN I USE CLA TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS?

Invest time and funding in CLA: Implementing CLA approaches to increase organizational effectiveness and ultimately improve development outcomes requires a **willingness to make an upfront investment in CLA**. Our review of the evidence demonstrates that investing in CLA pays off. In order of lowest to highest time commitment, check out these tips for bringing CLA to your workplace:

- **15-minute pause and reflect:** Strengthen your learning practice by investing 15 minutes of your time at the end of each day to pause and reflect. Even this seemingly insignificant practice leads to **improvements in productivity**. If you're a leader, ask your staff to try this practice with you for one week and debrief on the effects. As an individual, test this out and then share the impact it's had on you personally with your boss and colleagues.
- **Facilitate data-driven discussions:** Improve your team's learning culture by hosting a one-hour meeting at the end of each month to look at your program data and ask: where do we stand? What can we change? What should we keep doing? To make these meetings even more useful, make sure they align with pre-existing decision-making deadlines. Also, take your facilitation to the next level with **these approaches**.
- **Do the CLA Self-Assessment and Action Planning Process:** If you want to help your team assess their current CLA practices and what they would like to change, facilitate the CLA Self-Assessment and Action Planning Process. For **CLA Self-Assessment** facilitation tips, review **these resources**.

- **Map your collaborators:** The evidence shows that strategic collaboration can reduce costs and improve productivity. But oftentimes, identifying the right actors can be challenging. Learn which relationships your organization should strategically cultivate through [this collaboration mapping tool](#).

Strengthen your skills in collaborating, learning, and adapting: Five years of building the evidence base for CLA have shown that systematic, intentional, and resourced CLA leads to improved organizational effectiveness and better development outcomes. But are you convinced? Do you wonder if you have the right skill set to bring CLA practices to life in your team? Improve your knowledge of the evidence base and CLA skills with these tips:

- **Take a deep dive into the evidence:** If you're not currently incorporating CLA into your work because you don't think it will be beneficial, dig deeper into the evidence presented here by taking a deep dive into our [CLA Evidence Dashboard](#).
- **Upgrade your CLA skills:** If you feel convinced, but do not feel completely confident in your abilities, [visit the CLA toolkit](#) for guidance and tools. Or, take the [Introduction to CLA in the Program Cycle Course](#), which will help deepen your understanding of CLA and give you the confidence you need to start applying CLA in your day-to-day work.
- **Facilitate:** Maybe the people you work with need some encouragement and convincing. Our evidence shows that people understand the value of CLA when they experience it firsthand. Start small and [facilitate a learning-focused discussion](#).

What else can you do to help improve the effectiveness of your team and organization through CLA?

- **Share this briefer** with your colleagues or have a conversation about it. Share what you found most intriguing and what approaches you will integrate into your work.
- **Integrate some of the tips above** into your work and let us know about it. Ask us your questions. Tell us where you are still struggling. Leave your comments below. We are here to help.



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