

EFFECTIVE PROGRAM PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Time, value, and judgment have become important commodities during this period of COVID-19 pandemic response and management. Countries have hastily closed borders, airspaces, and put citizens into lockdown. Economic, development, humanitarian, and a huge chunk of health services, and programs have been suspended to avert possible catastrophic spread of Covid-19 virus.

No doubt the effect of restricted movement, and inability to support the most vulnerable populations will have a short and long term effect on these groups. If basic services such as health and household food security do not resume progressively, many will die quietly, and the extent of damage will reverberate through months and years to come. This can be averted.

Organizations have taken reactive approach for lack of information and are groping for signs in the dark as to when a near normalcy may be possible. A great sense of helplessness surround these organizations even though some of them support basic and critical services that target the most vulnerable of our society. Just as it is critical to keep hospitals running despite risks to frontline health workers, it is important that development organizations reflect on the essential services, the possible associated risks, and determine which activities could be implemented, and which ones could be deferred to later timelines.

The questions that begs answers is “How can organizations deliver on their program activities while also maintaining the required public health guidelines, legal provisions, and accountability?”

Activity Priority Model

Many organizations have significantly scaled down or even closed services. With no futuristic information, some have diverted funds or allocated funds to support the humanitarian aspects

by providing hand washing hardware in highly populated areas. It is a current conversation that organizations are wondering where to start or how to continue, and what future portends. The Activity Priority Model (APM) developed by KnowSolve Consulting responds to these concerns.

Activity Ranking

While all activities are essential and respond to clear project objectives and goals, some activities may be High Essential while others are Low Essential. The program team should take time to categorize these activities based on how critical they are, and in order of priority. Each activity is then subjected through a risk analysis that look at the legal restrictions, public health guidelines, program accountability and resources available. The risks are then categorized as High Risk or Low Risk. Essential activities that have lower risk will be implemented first. Activities which have high risk will be subjected to a SWOT analysis that gives the organization a micro lens to sub-activities and that helps to interrogate innovative approaches towards implementation. After every activity implementation, high level reflection, learning and adapting is necessary. Below is the illustration of the AP Model.

Sample Ranking Score Card

High Essential or Low Essential

1. Is it a service delivery Activity?
2. Does it save lives?
3. Is it urgent?
4. Does it impact other key activities?
5. Is it affected by the government. financial calendar?

Risk Analysis Domains and Questions

1. Public Health

- Does it require physical meeting?
- Can it be done virtually?
- Are public health provisions of Hand washing, Sanitizing, screening, social distancing at the venue?

2. Legal

- Does it require participants to travel?
- Is it in regions with travel restrictions?
- Are there security/confidentiality implications for the activity?

3. Accountability

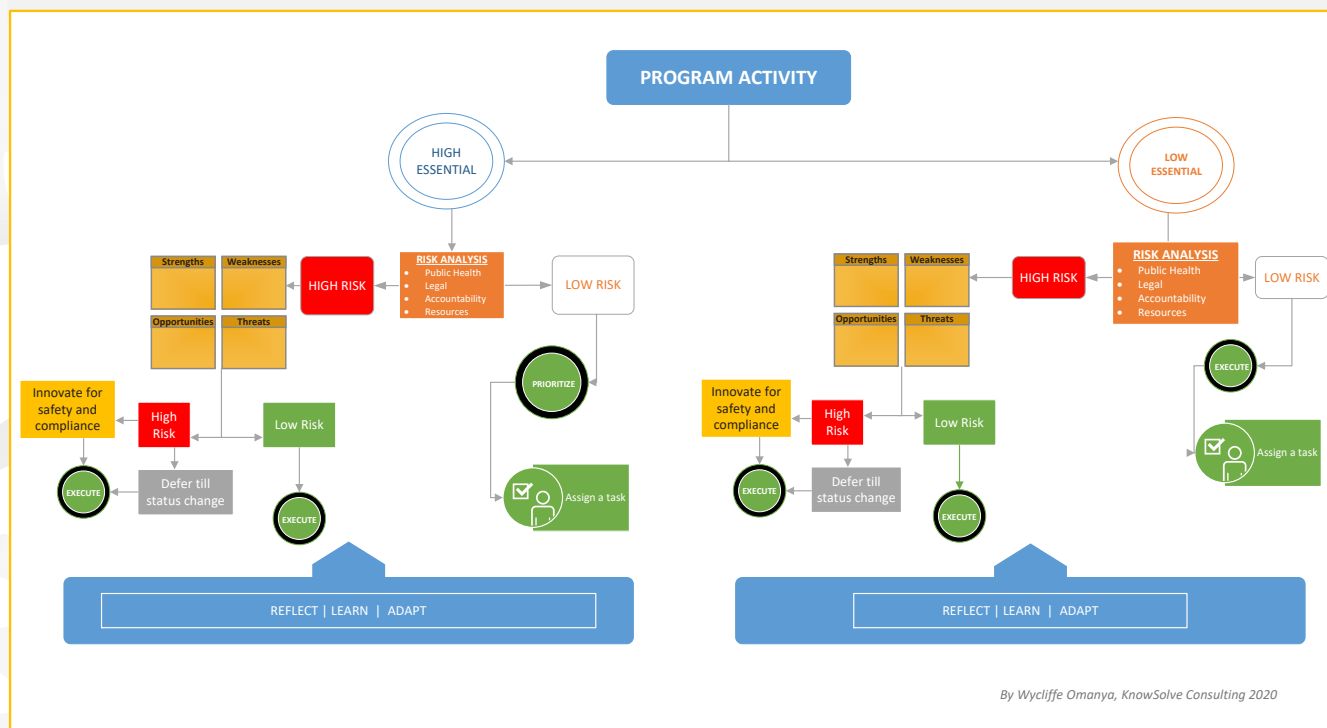
- Is there a strong monitoring mechanism?

- Are there financial controls and accountability in place?
- Can quality of performance be ascertained?

4. Resources

- Are financial resources available for the activity?
- Is technical support available on the ground/off-site?

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Example

Hospitals are high essential and high risk. They have to keep functioning and so establishment of specific testing zones, provision of personal protective equipment (PPE), sanitizers, increased sanitization are some key support system for delivery model. Within the hospital, consulting doctors are low essential yet high risk. They will opt to close clinics and reach their clients through digital consultations.

In business, salons and barber shops may be categorized as low essential and high risk. After SWOT, they either will remain closed or reorganized and completely readjusted to lower the risks. They will provide PPE for both clients and providers, and only admit a few people at a time in line with public health guidelines.

Advantages of APM

- Intentional interrogation of activities against value, time and safety
- Collective ownership in decision-making through brainstorming and reflecting sessions
- Identification of innovative delivery approaches
- Identification of new business opportunity and adaptive programs
- Intentional documentation of lessons learned and supportive decisions
- Prioritization and judicious allocation of resources
- Elimination of unforeseen risks both to care providers and rights holders
- Applicable to any context of work.