GLOBAL INTEGRITY
Data, Learning & Action for Open Governance

Learning by doing: Our action plan for open governance

Introduction: What is the aim of our learning plan?

1. Global Integrity's mission is to support progress toward more open and accountable governance in countries and communities around the world. As our strategy sets out, we do this because we believe that people have the right to shape the rules that govern their lives. And, because we believe that more open governance can enable communities to craft approaches to addressing development challenges such as corruption, poor service delivery, environmental degradation and persistent poverty, in ways that work in their contexts.

2. At the heart of our work is a theory of change. This theory of change holds that people and organizations can sharpen their impact and effectiveness by putting adaptive learning — a structured approach to learning by doing — into practice. This theory is likely as old as learning itself but has been revived and revamped over recent years in discussions about adaptive development and "doing development differently"; starting with specific problems in particular contexts and supporting the search for locally appropriate solutions.

3. The theory of change has wide applicability. As regards our work on open governance, it is relevant to: governments and civil society organizations working to open governance and drive development outcomes in countries and communities around the world; external actors including implementers and funders who seek to support such outcomes; and, to Global Integrity itself and the work we undertake in support of open governance. The impact and effectiveness of all these players, can, we believe, be sharpened by the application of adaptive learning.

4. Our learning plan sets out how we are implementing and exploring this theory of change. First, it explains what we mean by adaptive learning and why it is central to what we do. Second, it describes how we are supporting adaptive learning through our programs and projects. And third, it outlines how we are practicing what we preach, putting adaptive learning into practice, not only through our programs and projects but also at the organizational and individual levels.

5. By developing and implementing a learning plan[1] — and making explicit the theory of change at its heart — we aim to sharpen our impact and effectiveness in supporting

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[1] This plan has emerged as a result of many conversations about adaptive learning, governance and development. Particular thanks for inspiration and input are due to Matt Andrews, Dave Algoso, Florencia Guerzovich, Brendan Halloran, Samantha Hammer, Charlotte Oernemark, Craig Valters, Leni Wild, and members of the Doing Development Differently and T/A LEARN communities of practice.

progress toward more open governance and better development outcomes, and that of other actors too. This plan provides a framework for reflection and learning. It is intended to be a working document and a work in progress. We will revise it and refine what we do in the light of that reflection.

What is adaptive learning and why is it central to what we do?

6. Adaptive learning is a structured process of learning by doing: taking action in pursuit of an objective; monitoring to collect data on the effectiveness of that action; using that data to reflect on the approach taken; and, adapting the approach for future iterations. The process of adaptive learning is shaped by, and in turn interrogates, a theory of change, exploring — through iterative cycles of planning and implementation, monitoring, reflection, and adaptation — how the theory that informs the action taken, and the principles it articulates, are playing out in practice (see Figure 1). More concisely, adaptive learning is a continuous process of theoretically-informed, data-driven, reflection and adaptation, to improve impact and effectiveness.

Figure 1: The cycle of adaptive learning
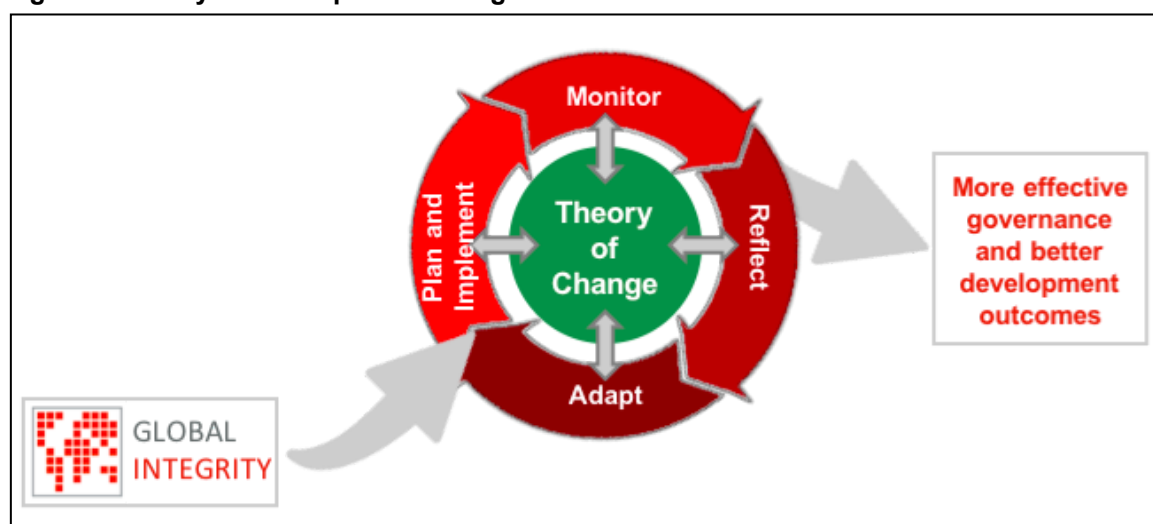
7. Adaptive learning is central to what we do. First, because our aim is to support processes of change in complex social and political systems. Second, because sustainable change in such systems comes about through locally-led efforts to craft and implement best-fit approaches, rather than through the implementation of best-practice blueprints. And third, because finding the best way forward in a complex political landscape is always a process of trial and error. Adaptive learning — when it engages the political dynamics of development, strengthens reform coalitions, and informs political action[2] — provides a means of navigating complexity, closing the gap between policy commitments and implementation, addressing delivery challenges and delivering results.

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[2] Brendan Halloran's useful 2015 piece on "political analysis for citizen-led accountability" and the notion of strengthening the capacity of organizations to navigate and shape the political dynamics, including in the accountability systems that they are part of, provides a good starting point for thinking through how adaptive learning can support political action.

8. Adaptive learning seems to hold particular promise as regards governance. This is because while adaptive learning can foster the emergence of more open governance, open processes of governance (transparency, participation and accountability) can also support adaptive learning. Transparency helps to enrich the informational environment in which learning takes place. Participation helps to ensure that learning incorporates citizens' feedback. And smart accountability mechanisms can help to ensure that learning leads to effective action.

9. As such, harnessing the relationship between adaptive learning and open governance — open governance facilitates adaptive learning, and adaptive learning can foster the emergence of effective approaches to open governance — has the potential to set in motion a virtuous circle that can drive progress toward better development outcomes.[3] More concretely, structured learning and reflection about how policies intended to promote more open governance are working out in practice — for instance, as part of the process of designing and implementing Open Government Partnership Action Plans — can accelerate the process of opening governance, and in turn increase the scope for future cycles of learning.

How are we putting adaptive learning into practice in our programs and projects?

10. We put adaptive learning into practice across two key dimensions of our work, as we seek to support, directly and indirectly, the efforts of country-level actors to understand, navigate and shape more effectively the complex political environments in which they work, through cycles of trying, learning and adapting. The first dimension consists of the various actors with whom we work, supporting their adaptive learning: country-level actors including government, civil society and private sector players; external actors, including donors, international NGOs, and multi-stakeholder governance initiatives seeking to promote open governance; and, last but not least, to ourselves. The second dimensions consists of four thematic areas that we believe are key to open governance and that are our substantive focus: governance, data and citizen engagement; multi-stakeholder governance initiatives; open fiscal governance; and, money in politics.

11. For each of these dimensions, we are supporting, and exploring the value of, adaptive learning. This, in effect, produces a two-dimensional matrix, with adaptive learning taking place in cell, and each cell being a unique combination of who is learning, about what.[4] (See figure 2). By setting things out in this way we hope to provide some clarity about what the focus of our interest is, a clarity which we find lacking in some discussions of

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[3] This argument is echoed in a recent paper by Shantayanan Devarajan and Stuti Khemani that argues that targeted transparency can support cycles of progressively richer political engagement, leading to more effective governance and better development outcomes.

[4] There are other dimensions, with, for instance a third referring to our workstreams; whether an activity is about generating and collecting data, country-level engagement, or advocacy. To keep things simple, we have opted in this note to focus on the two primary dimensions; who is learning, about what. But we will be learning lessons across other dimensions too.

adaptive learning. The remainder of this document provides additional information about how the learning happens, and to what end.

Figure 2: Whose learning, about what?

Whose learning?	Learning about what?			
	Governance, data & citizen engagement	Multi-stakeholder governance initiatives	Open fiscal governance	Money in politics
Country-level actors	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻
External actors	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻
Global Integrity	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻	Adaptive Learning ↻

12. For each thematic area, we have an aim, a core hypothesis that guides our work and which we are exploring, and a number of programmes and projects that involve collaboration with both country-level and external actors to support their adaptive learning. The paragraphs below outline how we are practicing adaptive learning across our four thematic areas; our Annual Report provides additional information.

Governance, data & citizen engagement

13. Our work on this theme aims to shape policy and practice as regards the role that data, learning and citizen engagement can play in supporting progress toward open and effective governance. The core hypothesis which guides our work in this area, and which we are exploring, is that the provision of relevant and actionable data can facilitate politically-engaged adaptive learning; data-driven reflection on how policies are playing out in practice, and on how different actors might work together, navigating and shaping the political landscape, to drive progress toward more open and effective governance.

14. This thematic area, the core of what we do, includes projects and activities on: learning in the transparency and accountability space; the potential of citizen-generated data; the use of indicator-based assessments such as the Africa Integrity Indicators and our US-focused work on State Integrity to support policy dialogue; and designing governance assessments and corruption diagnostics to maximize their contribution to country-level learning.

15. These projects combine work to generate high-quality cross-country data on governance, support for the use of data at country (or state) level, and engagement with external actors about improving the quality of data and supporting its use. This includes

participation in the Governance Data Alliance and the Open Government Impact Research Consortium, engagement with the Millennium Challenge Corporation, and work on the Sustainable Development Goals, including the potential of citizen-generated data.

Multi-stakeholder governance initiatives

25. Our work on this theme aims to support efforts to sharpen the impact and effectiveness of multi-stakeholder governance initiatives (MSGIs), primarily by [strengthening their learning](#) functions and by making the most of their interconnections. The core hypothesis which guides our work in this area, and which we are exploring, is that MSGIs can sharpen their impact and effectiveness by putting adaptive learning into practice, ensuring that what they do is informed by a clear theory of change, collecting data on their performance, reflecting systematically on the evidence collected, and adapting the approach they take.

26. This thematic area includes a number of projects and activities including our [five-country assessment](#) of how the Open Government Partnership (OGP) is playing out in practice, support for peer learning at OGP global and regional meetings, and ongoing work with Making All Voices Count to provide real-time learning support for civil society organizations engaging with governments through OGP. It also includes work that we have done with the Global Initiative on Fiscal Transparency (GIFT) on public participation in budget processes.

27. In the coming months, subject to resources, we plan to deepen our engagement with OGP, encouraging and supporting their efforts — and those of other MSGIs such as GIFT — to put adaptive learning at the center of their work. We also plan to work closely with a number of OGP Working Groups, including the recently established Anti-Corruption Working Group.

Open fiscal governance

25. Our work on open fiscal governance aims to improve the ability of citizens to track and shape the use of public resources. The core hypothesis that informs our work in this area, and which our work in turn explores, is that a stronger focus on *the use* of data to address specific problems, and on on the link between financial flows and service delivery results, can drive progress toward more open fiscal governance. This focus reflects our assessment that despite good progress by a number of countries in opening government fiscal data, and developing online tools to make the information accessible, there has not been a proportionate increase in the use of that data.

26. This thematic area includes a number of programs and projects, supporting country-level work and informing external actors' support for open fiscal governance. Our primary project has been in Mexico, where we have worked closely with the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO) and the National Access to Information Initiative (INAI), using our citizen-centric, problem-focused, "[treasure hunts](#)" methodology, to explore the fiscal

governance landscape, including the policy and data landscape, in order to inspire action and inform efforts to open fiscal governance, at national and subnational levels.

27. In recent months — as well as sharing our findings through GIFT and OGP — we have been scoping out the demand for extending our work in Mexico and supporting similar initiatives elsewhere in Latin America and beyond. We have also been discussing with the World Bank and others how their "[follow the money data visualizations](#)" might provide a useful work-bench for efforts to understand and improve the fiscal governance landscape.

28. Finally, in addition to being a GIFT Steward, we also continue to play a leadership role in the Follow the Money Network. Properly resourced, the Follow the Money Network can help organizations to join the dots amongst issues including aid, taxes, extractives, illicit financial flows, budgets, contracts and results, through a combination of data and policy interoperability. Joined up data and policies are the foundations for a systemic approach to fiscal governance, an approach which we believe can drive progress toward more open fiscal governance, in part by facilitating system-wide adaptive learning.

Money in politics

25. Our work on money in politics aims to inform efforts to improve the regulation of campaign finance. The core hypothesis which guides our work in this area, is exploring the ways in which campaign finance is regulated, in law and in practice, can help pro-reform actors understand the strengths and weaknesses of their political finance systems. This can then support their efforts to adapt their systems, and make progress towards more open, transparent, and accountable political finance regimes. At the same time, external actors, in exploring, using, and reflecting on political finance data, can learn how to more effectively support locally driven progress in particular contexts.

26. Building on our [Campaign Finance Indicators](#) project, this area of work increasingly extends beyond data collection to supporting country-level policy dialogues about campaign finance regulation. In addition to the international data set published in mid-2015 on what laws are in place and the extent to which they are implemented, we have released [political finance data](#) on the subnational level as part of the State Integrity Investigation in the US, with a number of reform champions at both national and subnational level using our data to advocate for reform.

27. Beyond these specific projects, we continue to engage with external actors who are promoting and supporting campaign finance reform, including through an emerging Community of Practice on political financing which includes International-IDEA and other leading players in the democracy assistance community. In this forum, we are making the case that one-size fits-all approaches to regulating campaign finance are not appropriate, and that the focus instead needs to be on supporting the varied and tailored application of general principles in specific contexts.

How are we practicing what we preach on adaptive learning, as an organization?

28. We are serious about adaptive learning and exploring its value. So, as well as supporting adaptive learning by country-level actors and external actors promoting more open governance, we're also putting it into practice, and exploring its utility, for ourselves. As an organization, we've come a long way over the past two years, with a revised strategy, strengthened systems for managing our resources and knowledge, a more integrated team, and new and reshaped projects that put our strategy and its focus on adaptive learning into practice. This has sharpened our impact and effectiveness. But there is much more to do.

29. The paragraphs below apply the model of adaptive learning that we have set out, to Global Integrity itself. Our starting point is our programs and projects, the activities in which we directly support adaptive learning by country-level and external actors. Then, we move on to consider how we function as an organization. And finally, we focus on the individual level. By applying an adaptive learning perspective to ourselves we aim to strengthen and support our own learning and adaptation, so that we can better deliver on our mission.

Programs and projects as the core

Adaptive Learning stage	What we do (2016)	What we will do (2017)
Planning and implementation	We recognize the value of being clear about our aims and why we think that what we are doing will help to meet those aims. But we aren't as clear as we would like.	We will articulate clearer, more explicit theories of change, that set out our assumptions and outline our learning objectives, which really drive what we do, and which structure our plans for monitoring.
Monitoring	We collect data about the things we are doing and the impact they seem to have, but this is a much lower priority than actually implementing the activities.	We will track activities, outputs and outcomes, including learning outcomes, on a regular (monthly?) basis, with this an important priority.
Reflection	We review how things are going through regular internal meetings, but without much data. We aspire to having post-project reviews, but the reality is that we move quickly on to the next thing.	We will conduct reviews of progress, supported by relevant data, including assessment by external partners, with serious investment in post-project reviews of impact, effectiveness and learning.
Adaptation	We make adjustments to projects as challenges and opportunities come up, but we do not always have the time to make the adjustments we would like to make or to fully think them through.	We will regularly consider options for course correction, on the basis of data-driven reflection. When we do adapt our approach, we will keep an explanatory record to enable future learning.

Organizational level

Adaptive Learning stage	What we do (2016)	What we will do (2017)
Planning and implementation	We have a mission and a strategy (3 years?), and we set annual organizational goals.	We will take more strategic decisions about what we do, with whom and where, and will begin to explore the possibility of developing long term strategic partnerships with organizations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. To complement our strategy we will implement our learning plan and develop an advocacy and communications plan.
Monitoring	We track the impact of what we do using a simple model of reach (people see our findings), engagement (people ask us about our findings) and influence (something seems to change as a result of our findings). We report this information to one of our funders, but make little use of it ourselves.	We will track the impact of what we do using a clearer theory of change and our learning plan as the frame, with an easy to use system, better indicators, and a more user-friendly front-end that delivers data that can inform our reflection, as well as that of our partners and board.
Reflection	We occasionally conduct brief and somewhat hurried reviews of progress toward our organizational goals, on the basis of patchy data.	We will include discussion of failures and learning at all staff meetings, hold quarterly cross-programme internal review meetings, six-monthly external impact calls[5], and put impact and learning high on the agenda for board meetings. We also draw on data collected to reflect on the value and effectiveness of our investment in learning.
Adaptation	We occasionally tweak our strategy, when one of us gets particularly exercised/excited by something s/he has read/heard.	We will revisit our strategy and plans regularly, including our approach to data collection, country-level engagement and advocacy, informed by reflective engagement with internal and external players. We will report on adaptations we make and, over time, move to working in the open.
Supported by	We use tools for managing resources, knowledge, tasks and responsibilities (Harvest, Small Improvements, Evernote, Google Docs, Asana). Staff meetings and management meetings are held every alternate two weeks.	We will have a culture of learning, with constant constructive feedback the norm. Creativity, adaptability and aptitude for learning will be important criteria for hiring. We will support the evolution of the OpenGov Hub into a space for collaboration and learning, and capitalize on its potential.

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[5] This is inspired by the quarterly impact calls held by the Accountability Lab, an organization that is at the leading edge of putting radical transparency and openness - and adaptive learning - into practice.

At the individual level

Adaptive Learning stage	What we do (2016)	What we will do (2017)
Planning and implementation	We set individual objectives on an annual basis, with those objectives intended to flow from organizational goals. But the alignment is not always great.	We will set smarter individual objectives with more thought given to how individuals' goals fit together, and to how we might collect useful data about individuals' performance.
Monitoring	We put our objectives into Small Improvements, a tool for performance management.	We will put additional emphasis, not only on individuals' progress against objectives, but also on the extent to which people's actions demonstrate a real commitment to learning, adaptation and teamwork.
Reflection	We have regular 1:1s with our line managers and six-monthly performance reviews.	We will supplement what we currently do with efforts to further strengthen our culture of feedback and learning. The Board will be brought more fully into the process, with their feedback helping the Executive Director to further improve his/her performance.
Adaptation	We sometimes tweak our individual objectives following our six-month performance reviews. We constantly adjust how we spend our time, often through bilateral conversations with project-leads.	We will do a better job, at management level, of looking across the team and our various projects to ensure that people are playing to their strengths, with balanced workloads.
Supported by	Professional development and training that Global Integrity pays for and which some (<25%) staff make use of.	Individual learning plans, supported by professional development and training which all staff take advantage of.

Next steps

30. We are pleased with the progress we have made with thinking through our approach to adaptive learning and excited to put it into practice. The immediate next steps are: first, an internal retreat at which we will review where we are on putting adaptive learning into practice, where we want to be, and how we are going to get there; and second, engaging with external partners to get their feedback as part of a wider process of encouraging organizations to share their experiences. We know we have much to learn. These conversations will help us to decide how ambitious we want to be in terms of investing in learning, and to craft an implementation plan to put things into action.

31. Alongside these conversations, we will be engaging with funders to secure the resources we need to fully implement our strategy and to invest in our learning plan. An investment in Global Integrity, we will argue, is an investment in learning, an opportunity to shape thinking, policy and practice on governance and development, and a means of driving progress — through adaptive learning, and sharper impact and effectiveness — toward more open governance and better development outcomes. We look forward to taking the next steps in our learning journey, and hope that you will come along!

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6th September 2016