ReDSS ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT
Focus and characteristics
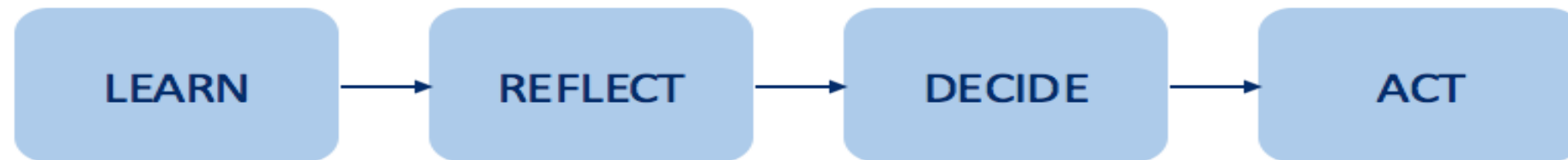## *November 2019*

Adaptive management involves **testing, monitoring, getting feedback** and – **crucially - making adaptations/course corrections if necessary**
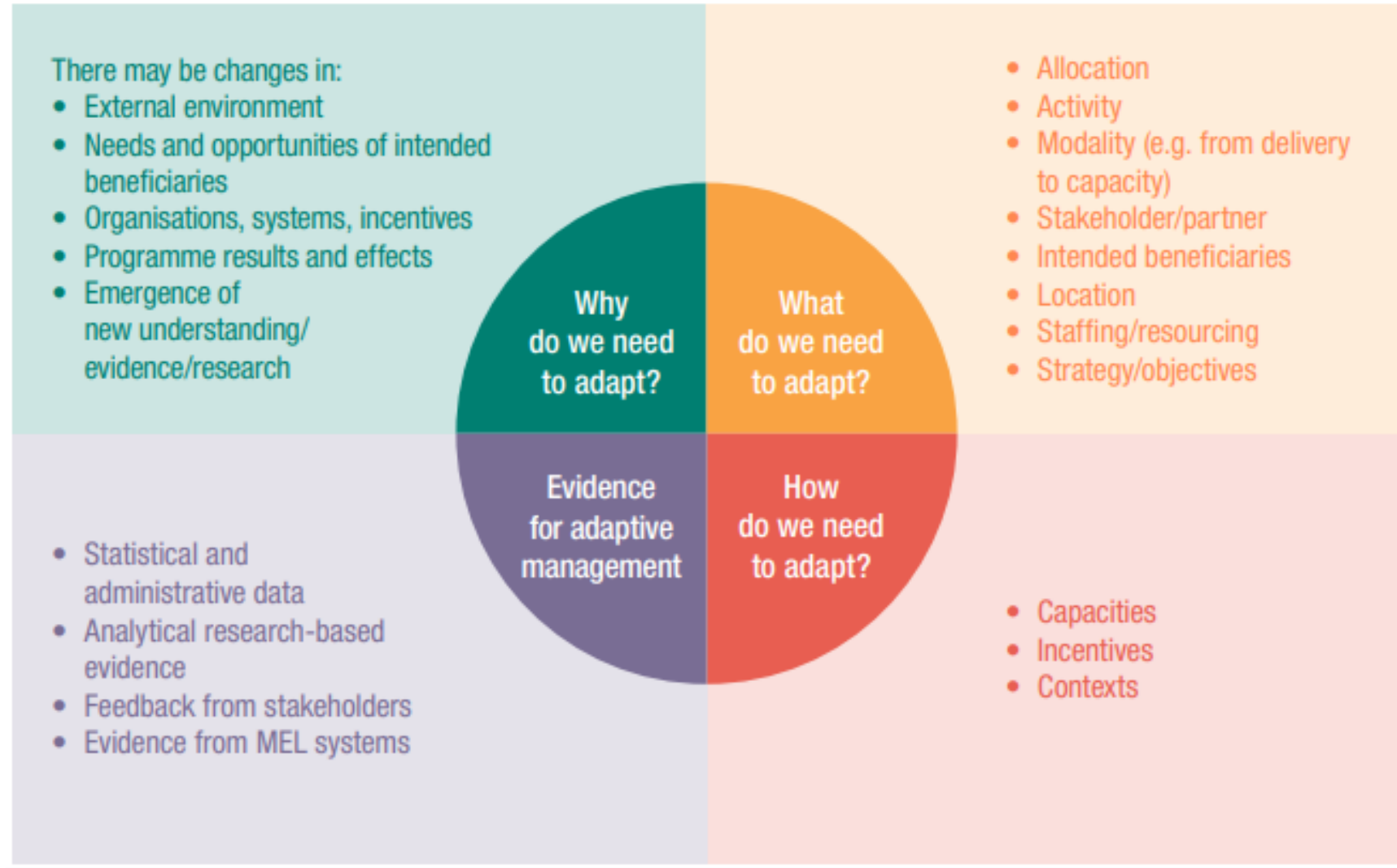
An adaptive programme learns, has opportunities to use that learning and actually adjusts (Bond)

LEARN → REFLECT → DECIDE → ACT

Figure 1 The role of evidence in adaptive management

☐ Evidence is central to effective and rigorous adaptive management. However, despite this central importance, **exactly how evidence has been used to inform decisions for adapting development and humanitarian programmes in the past remains unobservable to many**.

☐ There is a need to **strengthen and document evidence-informed adaptive management.**

☐ Those seeking to use evidence for adaptive management will need to **manage trade-offs between ensuring a rigorous, documented** (and auditable) trail of evidence-informed actions, **being pragmatic about the time and resources allocated** to documentation and **recognising that it may be necessary to proceed without rigorous evidence when it is unavailable**.

Step	Key questions or prompts
1. **Establish the need for evidence in adaptive management** Identifying different evidence needs according to why there is a need to adapt, what might need to be adapted and how	• **What** triggers or changes support or challenge hypotheses and assumptions and might require a programme to change course? • **What** specific elements of a programme might need to change? • **How** should decisions be made so they are sensitive to capabilities and the enabling environment?
2. **Consider the types and levels of evidence for adaptive management** Identifying the role of data and information, as well as its interpretation, often involving forms of judgement and wisdom, in order to create appropriate evidence	• **How** will we gather data, organise it into information, interpret it to create knowledge and use it to inform wise decision-making? • **How** will trade-offs be identified and managed – for instance between a rigorous, documented trail of evidence-informed actions and the time and resources allocated to documentation? • **When** might we need to proceed without rigorous evidence when it is unavailable, and what steps can be taken to build that evidence over time?
3. **Assess the robustness of evidence for different decisions** Criteria for ensuring that, wherever possible, evidence used for adaptation is robust and rigorous, including how it is used	• **Quality and credibility**: Are appropriate data collection and analytical methods used? Does it say something meaningful about whether change is (or isn't) happening? • **Relevance**: How widely applicable are findings? Are they limited to particular timeframes or contexts? • **Reliability**: Are consistent measurement and analytical methods used? If not, why not and how has this been documented? • **Strength and consistency**: How is strong and weak evidence identified and assessed? How is evidence triangulated? • **Objectivity**: How have potential biases been identified and have appropriate techniques been used to minimise that bias? • **Rootedness**: Whose values and viewpoints have been considered in framing and gathering evidence? Does the evidence meet the demands for decision-making, and what are the gaps?
4. **Ensure the basis of adaptive management decisions is sound, transparent and documented** Criteria for assessing the burden of proof needed to make decisions to adapt or change course based on the evidence available	• **How** costly or significant is the decision? • **What** is the urgency of the decision and degrees of uncertainty? • **What** are the consequences of errors of action and inaction? How reversible is the decision?

USAID's Collaborating, Learning and Adapting (CLA) framework defines three components of the enabling environment that support continuous learning and adaptive management: culture, processes and resources.

Characteristics of adaptive management

1. **Accept and treat** the problems as "**complex**" in nature
2. **Focus on "course-correction" of activities within the lifetime of the program** as well as from one program to the next
3. A strong emphasis on **rapid learning and feedback to inform changes**
4. **Flexibility in implementation to enable the above** (including within budgets and results frameworks)
5. **Responsibility for decision-making is delegated to staff as close to implementation of work as possible**, recognising that those close to the intervention (both affected populations and frontline staff) are thought to have the best knowledge of circumstances
6. **The focus** should be on problems that are identified and agreed **at local level – context specific**
7. **A politically-smart or power-sensitive approach is taken**: this recognises that problems look different depending on whose perspective they are viewed from, allows space to explore the politics underpinning a problem and emerging contextual opportunities for action
8. **Accountability focuses on progress towards agreed high level results and on learning**, rather than on pre-defined implementation plans and milestones (**asking "did we do the right thing?" rather than "did we do what we said we would do?"**)

- ❑ Seeking and nurturing staff with competencies in **reflection, learning, curiosity and open communications**
- ❑ Ensuring that **finance, planning and performance management systems enable and do not unduly hinder changes** in interventions and budgets based on learning
- ❑ Promoting ongoing, open communications with members and partners to **build trust and mutual understanding**, as this can enhance speed of decision-making around proposed changes in interventions
- ❑ Enabling **greater decision-making by staff closer to programme implementation**
- ❑ Focusing more on **past evidence of learning and adaptation**
- ❑ Adequately **funding reflection and learning** over time and retain the knowledge

ReDSS learning principles

Collaborative — Ensure our work is generated and grounded in a collaborative and collective process involving all relevant members and external actors

Adaptive — Embed adaptive working approaches where durable solutions strategies and activities are designed assuming change is inevitable

Iterative — Promote the use of continuous learning and adaptation in improving programmes processes and decision making – repeated cycles of reflection and action

Locally-led — Enable a context-specific and problem-oriented approach to strategies and activities for improved programming and policies for durable solutions

ReDSS examples of adaptive management

Research, analysis & Knowledge Management	Programme Support & Capacity Development	Policy Dialogue	Internal & External Coordination
Consultative workshops with national authorities and partners at field level to develop joint recommendations **Learning events on studies:** convening authorities and practitioners to adapt programming based on findings & recommendations Documenting **progress of application of core programing principles**	**Real time learning:** 3 thematic areas identified to monitor and document: DAC engagement, government engagement, area-based approach **Adjusting of programe Results Matrix Framework** **Political economy analyses shared** in DS TWG and PSC meetings	**Joint planning with authorities:** to better understand their priorities **Use of evidence generated to inform policy dialogue** **Technical support to key donors in developing and adapting their solutions strategies**	**Peer learning:** convening various DS consortia for periodic reflections and learning Focus on **field level DS consortia TWG thematic discussions**