

The Rapid Results Approach: Briefing Note
Prepared by Nadim Matta, Zahra Hassanali, and Rashmir Balasubramaniam
July 10, 2005

“It is the best tool I have found for changing the culture of implementation in the civil service”

Professor George Krhoda, Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Water,
Kenya

“I would like to thank the World Bank for sponsoring the Rapid-Results work aimed at helping my team translate our National HIV/AIDS strategy into action and results. The impact has been tremendous, both in terms of the results that have been achieved and the implementation capacity that has been created”

H.E. Dr. Saleh Meky, Minister of Health,
Eritrea

“Projects in the past were never completed. The donors would come in during the good times, and then leave. Next time the donors want to start a new project, I will tell them to leave a child behind in the village, so they come back and complete what they started. The RRI project is exciting: we own it and we will finish it.”

Rapid-Results team member in the Western Waterloo area,
Sierra Leone

Overview

The “Rapid-Results Approach” (RRA) is a set of management tools, processes, and skills that help leaders in organizations use a series of short-term projects to translate long term goals into concrete actions, results and impact. The engine of the Approach is the “Rapid-Results Initiative” (RRI) – 100 day project designed to unleash the capacity and creativity of teams in pursuit of a strategically critical goal that delivers a real impact, and that ties directly to the long term plans and objectives of the organization. Each of these RRIs becomes a vehicle for achievement, learning, and the advancement of long term goals.

For more details on the Approach, see the attached briefing note prepared by the Results Secretariat at the World Bank and the attached *Harvard Business Review* article.

These articles and the notes below refer to the specific approach that was introduced in a few sectors in Kenya 18 months ago by Schaffer consultants and the World Bank Institute. The work was sponsored by the Ministry of Planning and National Development, in its effort to infuse a stronger results orientation to implementing Kenya’s Economic Recovery Strategy. No doubt there are other similar and possibly more effective ways to infuse urgency and results-orientation in long term efforts and plans. These may include “quick wins” or other methodologies that are aimed at producing results – possibly very rapidly – and that may be referred to in a short hand manner as “rapid results methodologies or approaches”. We are not qualified to describe or

comment on these. But we can talk authoritatively about the Rapid-Results approach that was introduced in Kenya – and how it might tie into Results-Based Management.

To avoid confusion, we will italicize the terms *Rapid-Results Approach* and *Rapid-Results Initiatives* to refer to the specific methods that we helped introduce in Kenya (as well as a few other countries including Nicaragua, Eritrea and Sierra Leone)

***Rapid-Results Approach* and Results-Based Management**

The analogy between a marathon and a 100-day dash, used by both Permanent Secretaries Ms. Joyce Nyamweya Nyakeya and Mr. David Nalo, provides a useful starting point for outlining the differences and mapping out the linkages.

One way to use *Rapid-Results Initiatives* is simply to get the marathon runners off and running – to jump start action on the 26 mile journey. But that is only one way to leverage *Rapid-Results Initiatives*. To dig deeper into this, it is useful to draw out two distinctions between running marathons and achieving long-term and durable results in the public sector:

1. Unlike a marathon where the roadmap is clear and the challenge is mostly one of endurance, the road map to the long term goals set by Ministries and Government Institutions are much less reliable. No matter how prescient the planners and the experts are, there is always a certain amount of local discovery that is required along the way in order to ensure that the plans will deliver on the required impact. So in addition to endurance, public service managers need a mechanism that ensures continued innovation and discovery along the way.
2. Marathon runners have a clear incentive – whether it is their intrinsic sense of accomplishment or the monetary reward that awaits the winner at the 26 mile line. Whereas leaders in government organizations need a mechanism to motivate their staff to endure the 26 mile journey without the benefit of the marathon’s built-in incentives.

The *Rapid-Results Approach* enables public sector leaders to address these two real-life “complications”. It does this by encouraging leaders to acknowledge that the road map to the long term results is inherently not reliable, and therefore to focus their resources on running the marathon in 100 or 200 meter dashes!

This of course does not work in real life races. We all know that 100-meter champions are built differently and need to be conditioned differently than marathon runners. Public sector managers and staff, however, need to become good at 100-day dashes as well as marathons... In fact, they may not have the luxury to even finish the “26 mile results marathon”, unless they are delivering to the public a real “win” every 100 meters or so... That’s just political reality. Luckily, 100-day *Rapid-Results Initiatives* can be used not only to deliver these much needed “early wins”, but they can be leveraged by leaders in public sector organizations to compensate for the “unreliable road map” and “lack of motivation” factors that distinguish marathons from the real-life pursuit of long-term results.

By carefully choosing the destinations of the 100-meter dashes, government leaders can ensure that the road map to long term results becomes increasingly clearer with each dash. The more

terrain that gets covered in this “accomplish and learn” mode, the more the landscape of miles 15, 20, and 26 become predictable. And thus the short-dash destinations can be gradually increased from the initial 100 meters to 200, to 500, and so on.

Moreover, staff do not need to wait till the end of the marathon to benefit from the motivational effect of achievement and recognition. This can happen after every 100-meter dash – or every 100-day *Rapid-Results Initiative*. So the discipline and stamina required for long term results can get built gradually, with each 100-day result. Just as with 100-day dashes, where confidence and conditioning increases with each dash, and thus the readiness to take on the next, more challenging, race.

How does this tie in with Results Based Management? As we understand it, RBM aims is to gear up staff and managers in the public sector for the “results marathons” ahead of them, by doing the following types of activities:

- Establishing public sector visions, values and core competencies
- Benchmarking other country experiences
- Defining structures and policy frameworks
- Implementing performance management systems and results agreements

These are all important preparations. In the marathon analogy, these are equivalent to smoothing the terrain for the runners, advertising the prize money; setting up the rules of behavior during the race; mandating stretching exercises; conducting pre-race fitness programs, optimizing running shoe designs, and so on.

In the context of the “marathon by a 1000 dashes” approach, each *dash* becomes a vehicle for putting into practice the disciplines and tools of RBM. To carry the analogy further, there is stocktaking after the first 100 meter dash, and perhaps the shoe design gets adjusted based on the experience of the runners. Or the shirts are substituted for no-sweat shirts. Or the order of the runners is changed to ensure that everyone has a better chance of success.

Similarly, after the first round of *Rapid-Results Initiatives* in a Sector, the leadership group and the teams can step back and see what adjustments need to be made to the RBM’s results agreements, they can conduct a quick performance appraisal (using the RBM framework), they can exchange feedback about the different roles they played and how well they exemplified the values that were espoused as part of the RBM effort (they can also add new value commitments that may have emerged as critical for results in the first wave of *RRI’s*). So *Rapid-Results Initiatives* and the activities outlined in a typical RBM program can be mutually reinforcing, provided (a) that the *RRI’s* are carefully designed to align and take advantage of the RBM tools and processes, and (b) RBM tools and processes remain flexible and amenable to quick adjustments and tinkering along the way.

Tools, Processes, and Skills Embedded in the Rapid-Results Approach

These can be clustered under two broad headings: (a) strengthening the demands for results, and (b) strengthening the response capacity to these demands, or the results delivery mechanisms.

(a) Strengthening leadership demands for better and faster results

This needs to be strengthened and reinforced at the levels of Permanent Secretaries and Directors, both at national and regional level. Ultimately, this demand can – and should – come from the bottom up as well: from more informed and more demanding citizens (the customers of Government services). Here are some of the relevant tools and processes that are introduced as part of the *Rapid-Results Approach*:

- Strategic dialogue with leaders to scope out the areas of focus for pursuing initial results, based on strategic priorities of the Ministry as well as the most critical “learning and discovery” imperatives of the moment
- :”Challenge note” which the leadership sponsor transmits to the *Rapid-Results team* as a way of clarifying expectations of the team and establishing the strategic context for their work. This is typically a culmination of consultations with key stakeholders about the scope of the RRI’s and the appropriate delivery mechanisms (membership of the *teams*)
- Structured reviews between the team and the leadership sponsor (particularly the reviews at the end of the team launch, 3 weeks after launch, and half way – or 50 days – into the implementation cycle), and which are designed to give the leadership sponsor the opportunity to practice the art and science of inspiring the *team* to perform while holding their feet to the fire in terms the results they committed to
- Scale-up workshops – where leadership sponsors shape strategies and plans for sustaining the initial results and replicating the process across multiple organizational units or regions.
- Leadership sponsor clinics, where participants exchange perspectives on their experiences with “inspirational demand making,” and get introduced to tools and insights related to their role (e.g. demand making self assessment questionnaire; deadly sins of demand making; leading portfolio of *RRI’s*; etc.)
- Town meetings with all stakeholders (including citizen representatives and members of the press) to participate in the prioritization as well as expectation setting process, and to set the stage for bottom-up results monitoring mechanisms.

(b) Strengthening results delivery mechanisms

Implementation disciplines such as clear goal setting, thorough work planning, results tracking, and effective team reviews do not come naturally to individuals and teams. Here are the tools that the *Rapid-Results Approach* provides to help teams respond with discipline and confidence to the higher results expectations:

- Launch workshop, where the team sets its goal and develops its plan, in response to the challenge note from the leadership sponsor. This is where tools and templates for rapid-results goal setting and work planning are introduced.
- Structured team reviews, where team leaders practice management skills at the team level, such as ways to clarify and strengthen accountability for individual commitments from team members.
- Team leader clinics, where team leaders exchange perspectives on their roles and get introduced, on a just in time basis, to tools and concepts that are critical for success in their role (e.g. cycles of team development; managing team meetings; reinforcing accountability for individual commitments; communicating with key stakeholders; interacting with leadership sponsors; etc.)

Why Rapid-Results Coaches?

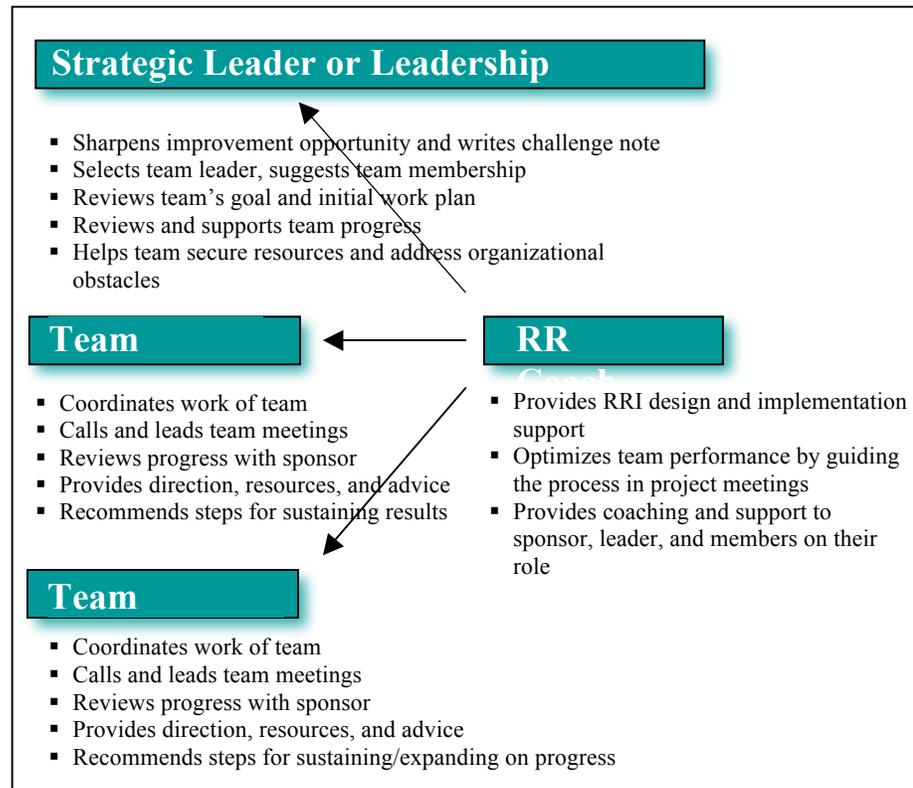
The end game is to institutionalize the *Rapid-Results Approach*, so it is fully integrated in the way Ministries operate. This means that processes in the demand/response results cycle we described above are blended in the management processes in each Ministry, and that skills required for successfully leading these processes are embedded in Government staff. At that stage, there will be no need for private sector *Rapid-Results coaches* – local or international. At that point, rapid-results becomes a way of doing business that is applied across all programs and goals, versus a special effort focused on a few priorities.

This ideal state of affairs requires that the Ministries and their staff develop “muscle memory” in the *Rapid-Results* demand/response cycle. The skills for doing this are acquired over time, through repeated experimentation. Just like any new skill development, this can be accelerated by competent coaching.

In the first round of *RRIs* in Kenya, this coaching and support was done by

International Schaffer consultants. The institutionalization strategy, spurred by the World Bank and the Ministry of Planning and National Development, involved three phases:

1. Skills transfer from Schaffer consultants to local private sector rapid-results coaches, possibly in affiliation with KIA or other similar institutions.
2. Skills transfer from local rapid-results coaches to internal coaches in each Ministry.
3. Over time (2-3 years), and as “muscle memory” for doing rapid-results builds up in each Ministry, the need for these internal coaches would go away. There is also less and less need for technical assistance as the teams absorb and adapt the technical inputs to their own circumstances. Effectively, this would be the beginning of institutionalization. There may still be a role for private sector rapid-results coaches – but this would be occasional reinforcement versus intense support.



The private sector coaches could be independent or could be part of an existing institution. The key though is to have the flexibility to select individuals who have the aptitude, native skills, and incentives to play an effective coaching role.

Why not use managers in the public sector as local *Rapid-Results* coaches? Our experience in the private sector suggests that building *Rapid-Results* “muscle memory” requires intensive support by competent coaches, even with a strong cadre of managers. Initially, *Rapid-Results Initiatives* feel like “unnatural acts in unnatural places”, requiring careful preparation, orchestration, and hands-on support. Overtime, these begin to happen “anywhere, anytime”, a natural reflex of the organization that occurs spontaneously and with little outside support.

Individuals with prime accountability for delivering results (line managers) cannot be expected, initially, to play this intense coaching role: There are three reasons for this:

- Time constraints and limits to what line managers can focus on at any one time.
- Personal pre-dispositions – *Rapid-Results* coaches need to tune into people’s readiness and to go with the flow, while effective line managers are more the “take charge and pull people along” types.
- Skill set – coaching skills can be very helpful for managers but they tend to acquire these slowly over their careers, whereas these skills are critical for *Rapid-Results* coaches right from the start.

So we have found that the expertise necessary for embedding the *rapid-results disciplines* in organizations is best housed, at least initially, outside of line management, and it needs to be built and managed just like any other functional skill area. Thus part of the institutionalization strategy involves supporting relevant units in the Ministry of Planning and Ministry of Public Service so these (a) ensure that the targeted results are aligned with the ERS, (b) provide results tracking, (c) provide on-going development of the coaches, and (d) ensure quality assurance of their work. The unit can also decide on the timing for transitioning from phases 1 to 2 to 3 of the institutionalization strategy.

Specific Modalities for Integrating the RRA into Kenya’s RBM

Here are a few initial thoughts:

1. Integrate a high-level orientation on the *Rapid-Results Approach* into the leadership development program that is envisioned under the RBM program.
2. Adapt the process for designing and launching *RRI’s* so there is a more explicit connection to the tools of RBM. For example, as part of the launch discussion, the *Rapid-Results* team (in addition to committing to an impact-oriented 100-day goal, commits to adhering to the values that were established as part of the RBM program – and to a few related behaviors).
3. Once strategic plans and results agreements have been completed under the RBM program, avail interested Permanent Secretaries of the services of local private sector coaches, so they help them shape, launch, and support the implementation of *Rapid-Results Initiatives* that can translate these results agreements into 100-day “achieve and learn” results.

4. Organize periodic discussions between various players involved in the *RRI's* across Ministries (strategic leaders; team leaders; etc.) as well as Permanent Secretaries to discuss the insights emerging from the *RRI's* and how the RBM tools can be refined to facilitate the running of the marathon.
5. Identify 2-3 individuals from each Ministry that can be developed as internal *Rapid-Results coaches*, and create a development and apprenticeship program to help them replace the local private sector coaches. Ideally, these would be the same individuals playing a focal role in advancing the RBM program in each Ministry.