Basic Guide to the Positive Deviance (PD) Approach

Developed by the PDI, May 2009

The PD approach enables practitioners to improve and save lives

The positive deviance approach differs from traditional "needs based" or problem-solving approaches in that it does not focus primarily on identification of needs and the external inputs necessary to meet those needs or solve problems. Instead it seeks to identify and optimize existing successful solutions or strategies within the community or organization to solve problems that require behavior and social change. The PD approach has been used to address issues as diverse as childhood malnutrition, neo-natal mortality, girl trafficking, school drop-out, female genital cutting (FGC) , hospital acquired infections (HAI) and HIV/AIDS.

Impact

The successful application of the PD approach has been documented in more than 41 countries in nutrition and a wide variety of other sectors from public health and education to business.

The following is an illustrative sample of PD-informed program impact over the last decade and a half:

- Sustained 65 to 80% reduction in childhood malnutrition in Vietnamese communities reaching a population of 2.2 million people

- Significant reduction in childhood malnutrition in communities in 41 countries around the world

- Documented 29 to 62% % reduction in MRSA transmission in 3 US hospitals over a one year period.

- Reduction in neo-natal mortality & morbidity in Pashtun communities in Pakistan and minority communities in Vietnam with near universal adoption of protective behaviors and social change.

- Estimated 50% increase in primary school students retention in 10 participating schools in Missiones, Argentina

- Documented reduction in girl trafficking in impoverished communities in East Java, Indonesia

- Thousands of documented female circumcisions averted in Egypt and the formation of 12 "FGM free" communities.

Purpose of the basic guide:

This short basic guide is intended to orient newcomers to the PD approach by providing a brief description of the guiding principles, methodology and process that has made PD informed projects successful.

Its brevity and simplicity is meant to invite curious and intrepid implementers who face complex problems requiring behavior and social change, to venture out to help the community seek solutions that exist right now in the community and leverage them to the benefit of all members of the community.

PLEASE BE ADVISED: PD is best understood and only works by <u>doing</u> it. This basic guide is recommended as a resource for quickly initiating a PD approach and should be referred to frequently to enable facilitators and apprentices to reflect on and make sense of experience. The depth of understanding and skill level of PD facilitators and practitioners can be enhanced by experience and reflection with frequent reference to this guide.

When to Use Positive Deviance

Positive Deviance should be considered as an intervention when a concrete problem meets the following criteria:

- ☑ The problem is not exclusively technical and requires behavioral or/and social change

- ☑ The problem is "intractable" – other solutions haven't worked

- ☑ Positive Deviants exist - solutions are possible

- ☑ There is leadership commitment to address the issue - "PD champions" exist

Guiding Principles of Positive Deviance Approach

❖ Community discovers existing, uncommon, successful behaviors and strategies (PD Inquiry) and unleashes great ideas

❖ Community creates plans to amplify successful practices and act on ideas

❖ Community recognizes that "someone just like me" can do and get better results especially in the worst case scenarios (social proof).

❖ Emphasis is on transferring <u>behavior</u> instead of knowledge.

"<u>Act</u> your way into a new way of thinking instead of thinking your way into a new way of acting"

❖ Community owns the entire process

❖ "Everyone" is involved – Go to uncommon places and to "unlikely suspects to find solutions. '
"Don't do anything about me without me"

❖ Community –creates its own (actionable) performance indicators and monitors progress.

Characteristics of the PD Process

The PD process promotes behavior and social change because it is:

- ❖ Embedded in the culture (language & medium appropriate)

- ❖ Generative- builds on itself

- ❖ Based on strengths and assets

- ❖ Not "expert" driven- The people are the experts

The PD process:

- ❖ Emphasizes the relational versus the technical

- ❖ Leverages existing formal and informal networks

- ❖ Generates new networks within and among "silos.

- ❖ Is bathed in actionable information used to drive improvement.

- ❖ Makes the invisible visible

- ❖ Enables the community to act TODAY

Tips for PD facilitation

"The people are the experts'

❖ Be sure participants talk more than you do and exchange among themselves

❖ Refrain from making suggestions, giving advice unless specifically asked

❖ Ask open-ended questions with "What, how, what if?" (Avoid questions that elicit "yes" or "no" answers)

❖ Invite participants to tell their story or share their experience with the issue at hand. Tap into emotions. Make it personal and fun.

❖ Share relevant personal experience with participants to make them feel comfortable and develop trust by evoking feelings, beliefs, needs and own vulnerability

"Let go of control-You go fast by going slow"

❖ Let the conversation guide the group.

❖ Let silence speak (take a 20 second pause after asking a question).

❖ Stay with the questions, rather than search for quick fixes. Insights often come when one does not strain for them.

❖ Commit to learn, to be influenced, to be personally changed, by the experience. Remember, to listen is to lean in softly with a willingness to be changed by what we hear.

❖ Support a group climate where speaking one's truth is OK, even on those occasions when doing so may make one look foolish, confused, or unprepared.

❖ Believe that there will be enough time; don't have to rush; don't have to do it all ourselves; when we do our best with goodwill, help will come; each person is valuable to the process.

❖ The group will invent forms of organization & work processes that suit it.

❖ Invite others who are willing, and at times eager to risk doing all of the above.

PD Facilitation: the Art of Asking Questions

1. Types of questioning:

Use of open-ended questions with: what, **how**, why, why now

2. Specific situations:

A.) To send back the reflection and thinking among the group

- *To answer your question, let me ask a question?*

- *Or can I ask you a question? Or I have a question for you…*

B.) To generate more interactive discussion among the group

- *Who can answer this question?*

- *Who wants to answer this question?*

- *Who has any idea about this?*

C.) To involve more stakeholders:

- *Whose problem is it?*

- *Who else should be involved?*

- *How to involve them?*

To uncover or identify PD individuals or groups:

- *So if I understand correctly, nobody here is…or has…achieved xxxx?*

- *So according to you there are no people in your community who have overcome this problem?*

- *How can we learn from them?*

- *What will it take?*

To discover PD behaviors and strategies (probing questions):

- *You said that you did xxxx, how were able to do that?*
- *Most other people have had xxxx problems or challenges with xxx & zzzz, how have you been able to overcome them?*
- *Many people have explained to us how difficult it is to do X because of busy schedules, the high cost involved, as well as some community customs or traditions. I was wondering what you do about X?*
- *Can you show us how?*
- *What do you do when this xxxx problem happens or you are faced by this yyyy challenge?*
- *So, if I understand correctly, you **only do xxxx** at 8:00, 12:00 and 6:00 O'clock, and aside from this, you do not do **zzzz** and xxxx at all during the day or night?"*
- *Do you know other individuals like you?*

Action oriented questions:

- *What are our next steps?*

- *Who is going to do what?*

- *What will it take?*

To make a suggestion:

- *Can I make a suggestion?*

- *Would it be possible if?*

- *You are the experts but would it make sense if?*

3. Feedback process questions for PD facilitators after a conversation or activity

<u>Atmosphere</u>

- What was different about this from other gatherings you have led?
- Before and after or beginning and end of dialogue atmosphere: think of non-verbal clues, laughs, presence of humor

<u>Facilitation</u>

- How did you include all participants?, how did you deal with dominant individual(s)
- What challenges did you face and how did you manage them?
- What were your best "tongue biting" tricks
- How did you probe?
- What will you do differently next time you facilitate a PD activity?
- What tips would you give to other facilitators?
- What are you thinking about as the next step – what are you definitely not going to do – what do you want to do differently?

Useful Definitions for the Positive Deviance course for practitioners

PD Concept:

Positive Deviance is based on the observation that in every community or organization, there are a few individuals or groups who have overcome or prevented a pervading problem.

PD Approach:

A strength-based development method that enables a community or organization to bring about sustainable behavior and social change through identification and amplification of existing solutions from within.

PD Individual or Group:

A person or group whose special or uncommon behaviors and strategies enable him/her/them to overcome a problem without special resources and facing similar barriers and challenges as their peers. A person is called "PD" only in the context of a specific problem.

PD Design or Methodology:

The PD design is made up of four steps: Define the problem and desired outcome, Determine the presence of PD individuals or groups, Discover uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies through a PD inquiry, Design activities that allow other community members to practice these identified behaviors or strategies. These steps serve as an iterative roadmap to apply the PD approach.

PD Inquiry: (Step 3 Discover)

A tool to enable community members to discover demonstrably successful behaviors and strategies among their midst.

PD Process:
The process refers to the skillful facilitation and use of experiential learning methods used to apply the 4 steps of the PD design. This process results in astounding and lasting success in solving the problem via community mobilization and ownership of solutions and subsequent initiatives.

Basic Steps carried out by the community

Define the problem and desired outcome

Determine the presence of PD individuals

Discover uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies through an inquiry

Develop or Design initiative based on the inquiry findings

Discern the effectiveness of the initiative

Disseminate the successful initiative

Basic Steps of PD

Pre-conditions for success

Facilitators or organization/community members

Preliminary Step: Develop a team of people interested in solving the problem from within by invitation (<u>not </u>by appointment or assignment)

- Build a "resource" team of volunteers that is diverse and includes "the people" as well as leaders.

- Introduce the PD concept and approach to leadership

- Elicit leadership commitment. Extend invitations for involvement
  "beyond the usual suspects"

PD Facilitation Questions:

- What does the group want to accomplish?

- How does the PD concept make sense to you to solve this problem?

- Who else needs to be involved at this point?

- How are we going to involve them?

Step 1 – Community Defines or reframes the problem by:

- Involving everyone to review or generate data that measure the magnitude of the problem
- Articulating a preferred future that is different from the past
- Exploring the issues impacting the problem and current behavioral norms
- Listing common barriers and challenges related to the problem
- Identifying all those who should be involved.

Tools or activities:

- Creating or using baseline data (mapping, creating visual score boards)
- Development of simple time framed goal, known by all
- Focus Group Discussions with various groups in the community
- Participatory Learning & Action (PLA) activities such as: improvisation, Venn diagrams, transects, prioritizing, etc. conversations: discovery and action dialogues DAD.
- Creation of new connections and networks via these activities
- Community wide meeting to share the problem, the shared goal and expose the community to the PD concept via stories from the community and via baseline culturally acceptable visuals.

PD Facilitation Questions:

- Whose problem is it?
- What do the community members think about this issue?
- What kind of data do we have about the problem?
- If we solved this problem, what would it look like? What is our preferred outcome? What do we want? How long will it take?
- What contributions will I make to achieve this outcome?

- What do most of us usually do?
- What are the common barriers and challenges that we face that are related to the problem?
- Who impacts on the problem? on the solution?
- What do you think should be done? How?
- Who else needs to be involved? What group or organization?

Step 2 – Community <u>D</u>etermines the presence of Positive Deviants by:

- Identifying individuals, families, or entities in the community who already exhibit successful behaviors or preferred outcomes from quantitative or qualitative data –baseline

- Defining current practice and distinguishing it from PD practices and behaviors

- Establishing exclusion criteria – select only those individuals or entities that face the same or worse challenges and barriers as others
- Selecting PDs for in-depth interviews, observations by the community and PD facilitator(s).

Tools or activities: Identification of PD from baseline
information, existing data, from FGD (Step 2)

PD Facilitation Questions:

- Who in our community already exhibits the desired outcome?

- How do we find them out?

- How are we going to select them? On what basis?

- What do we want to find out?

- How are we going to find out?

- What tools do we need to create?

- Who is going to create them?

- Who is going to be part of the inquiry/be involved?

Step 3 – Community <u>Discovers</u> the specific uncommon practices that enable PDs to prevent or solve the problem in their community by:

- Enabling peers and community members to design tools for the PD inquiry
- Conducting a Positive Deviance inquiry
- Applying exclusion criteria- Separate out the "true, but useless" (TBU)
- Identifying the PD practices, strategies, and behaviors
- Vetting the results with the whole community

Note: This step can be repeated many times during the life of the project, can become a feature of inquiry in the community for other problems

Tools or activities:

In-depth interviews, observations, on site visits, discovery & action dialogues, Community feedback session (See examples of PD inquiry tools pages 12 to 15).

PD Facilitation Questions:

- What are the questions or issue we want answered by the PDs?
- What other tools can we use to discover what they do that is different?

Specific questions:

- **How** do you overcome this…? (common challenge, barrier or obstacle)?
- Who else is involved? Who should we talk to?

- What are the strategies we found that are accessible to all?
- Could <u>you</u> adopt this practice?
- Does the practice impact on the problem?
- Who else needs to be involved?

Step 4 – **Community** <u>D</u>esigns and develops activities to expand the PD solutions by:

- Leveraging innovations coming from the community
- Expanding the solution space by engaging multiple stakeholders in developing activities to apply PD behaviors & strategies
- Starting small to demonstrate success
- Connecting people who haven't connected before
- Targeting the widest range of appropriate community members
- Creating opportunities to practice and "learn through doing" in a safe environment with peer support
- Using multi-channel, multi target communication strategies
- Using existing resources and assets

Tools or activities:

- Community meeting to share PD inquiry findings
- Creation of an action team involving the resource team and self-selected volunteers who have participated in the process
- Development of an action plan , development of roles & responsibilities

PD Facilitation Questions:

- How can these practices be used by everyone concerned?
- What can be done today?
- What are our next steps?
- Who is going to do what?
- When & how often do we meet again?
- What kind of structure do we need? What kind of existing structure (committee, clubs, groupings, assoc, etc) can we use?
- Who should be involved?
- What resources do we have to carry out these initiatives?
- Where can we get extra resources? For what?

Step 5 – Community <u>D</u>iscerns the effectiveness of their initiatives by:

- Developing a way to Assess, Analyze and Act (Triple A) information they obtain from the people. Making the data real by engaging the community in developing their own indicators to monitor progress (quantitative and qualitative indicators of behavior and social change)
- Creating culturally appropriate ways to communicate the data to the community as a whole
- Evaluating its initiatives at regular, frequent intervals
- Sharing its impact with others.

Tools or activities:

Development of simple indicators of progress, of results both quantitative and qualitative, using culturally acceptable media. Creation of an evaluation format.

PD Facilitation Questions:

- Who needs to know if the initiative is working?
- What kind of info do we need?
- How can we generate the information?
- What will be our indicators of progress?
- Who will generate it?
- How are we going to share that information with the community at large?
- How often?
- Who else needs to be involved?

## Step 6 - <u>D</u>isseminate the successful initiative

Here are a few suggestions:

- Success driven geographical or network based expansion.
- Honor and amplify the success stories by storytelling.
- Enable the community actors to tell their story, coach others within their networks.
- Create a "Living University" for other communities to discover how the PD process could help them solve the same problem.
- Document, evaluate and share results.
- Reflect on what worked best.

PD Facilitation Questions:

- How to enable more communities or organizations to solve this problem?
- Who else needs to be involved?
- What can be scaled-up? How?
- What is the next step?

Sample Flow chart for PD Maternal & Newborn Care Pakistan

Preliminary Steps:

Preliminary visit(s)	Selection of activists
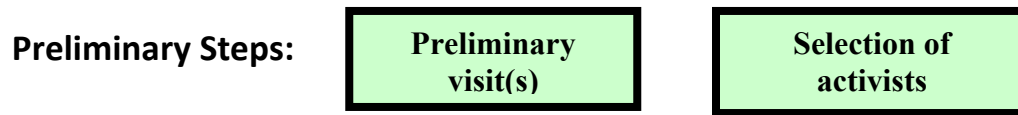
4 D's : Define, Determine, Discover, Design

⬇

PD Process: Four Steps to Promote Community Dialogue (3 weeks)

Community Orientation Meeting → **Participatory situation analysis** → **Positive Deviance Inquiries** → **Community Feedback Session /Action Plan**

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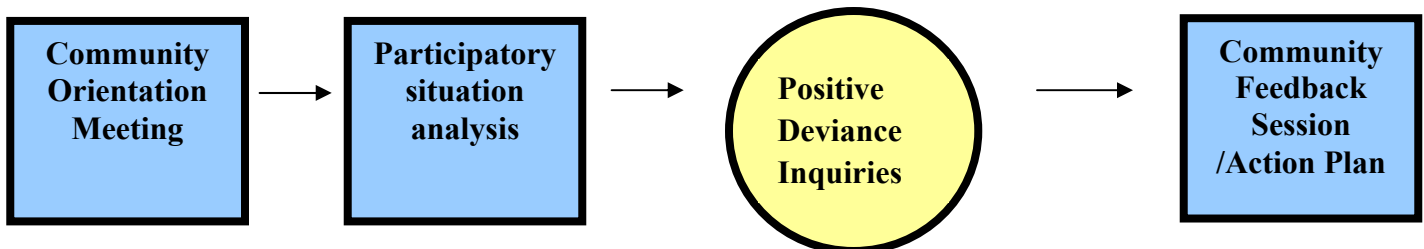
PD Informed Project Implementation: Collective Action (9 months)

Training of activists → **Village Action Teams (VAT) workshop** → **PD Neighborhood Sessions** → **Monthly VAT Meeting**

Participatory Evaluation

Healthy Baby Fair ←
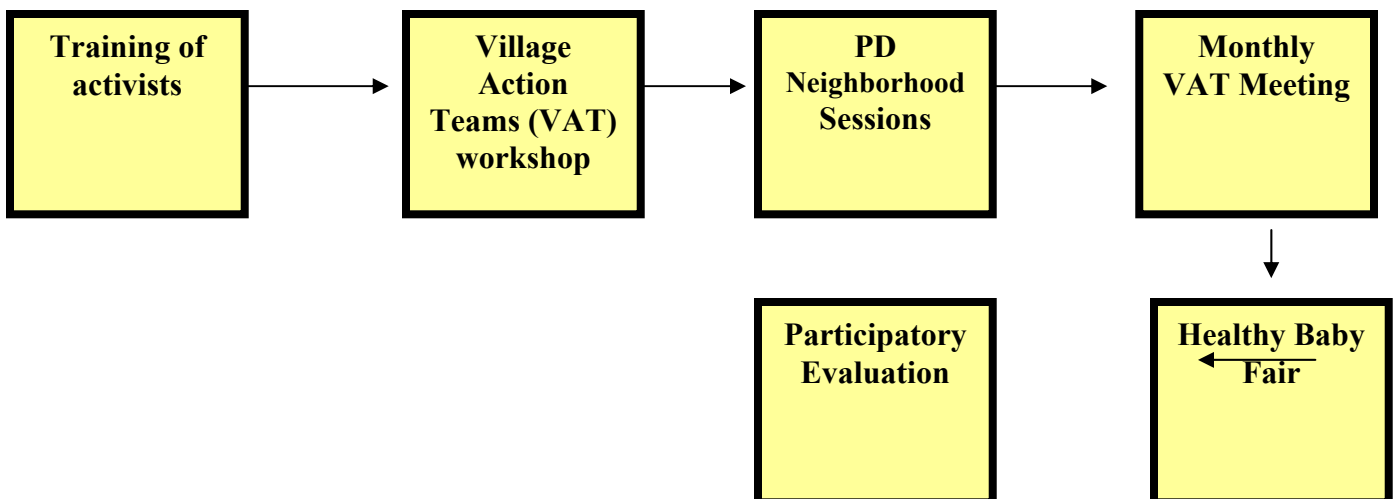
Sample PD Inquiry tools

At the heart of the PD approach is the inquiry into what makes some individuals or group successful despite all odds. There are many different ways the inquiry takes place and there are many different inquiry tools.

A- Discovery & Action Dialogue

This short conversation is used repeatedly in setting where there is not much time for the participants to go through a more didactic process. (for example: hospital setting to address MRSA). It is an interactive dialogue with a diverse group of community members.

1. What are your concerns about (the issue)? What examples of the problem have you seen or experienced (story telling)? What would you like to achieve or be able to do (practice)?

2. What do you currently do regarding the problem? (role play, demonstrations, etc..)

3. What are some of the obstacles, problems, barriers and challenges you face regarding this problem?

4. Do you know anyone or any groups (families, colleagues, relatives, etc.) who has/have a way of doing things that helps them overcome these barriers? Do you know any individual or groups, who have been able to overcome or prevent this problem?

5. How have they overcome/prevented the problem (successful strategies)? How can we find out? Who is going to do what?

6. Do you have any ideas or suggestions about how we could overcome some of the barriers you have identified, i.e. looking at demonstrably successful strategies/innovation?

7. What will it take to get there? What can we do now? Who else should be involved? How can we involve them?

8. Who volunteers to help make it happen?

B- In-Depth 8 Point Inquiry/ Interview for Advocacy

1. General opinion about the practice or issue at hand.

2. Personal experience regarding the practice(s). (Storytelling)

3. Specific factors (defining moment or turning point) enabling PD person to adopt uncommon behavior.

4. Actions or strategies used to overcome problems engendered by uncommon behavior.

5. Specific demonstrably successful strategies, words, metaphors, and arguments used by the PD person.

6. Ideas for community based actions for behavior change.

7. Willingness to get involved in advocacy (as advocate or peer educator).

8. Identification of other PD individuals in the community.

C- PD parents Interview Guide for Girls participation in primary school Ethiopia

1. Thanks and introduction of the team. We wanted to talk to you because your girl child, _____, has very good attendance. We appreciate that you send her to school when many of your neighbors do not send their children. We would like to learn about the challenges you and _____ have faced regarding her/his education. We would also like to discuss general issues about education in this community. We hope the information you give us can help more children in our community to attend school. Feel free to express your honest opinions. We would like to talk to both of you (the mother and father) as well as anyone else in the household who helps to care for the children (an older sibling, a mother-in-law).

2. Basic Family Information

3. How many of your children go to school, or have gone to school at all (formal)?

4. When did _____ start going to school?

5. How far do you plan to send _____ in school (age or grade level)? Why?

6. Who made the decision for _____ to go to school?

7. Was there any disagreement or discussion about whether _____ would go to school? Why?

8. Why did you decide that _____ should go to school?

9. What are the benefits of an education?

    a. Are they different for boys and girls?

10. Have you seen any changes in _____ since s/he started school? What are they?

11. What challenges have you faced sending _____ to school?

12. How have you handled these challenges?

13. What challenges does _____ face going to school?

14. How does s/he handle these challenges?

15. Probe for issues around distance, safety, expenses, and workload.

16. Are the challenges different for boys and girls? How so?

17. How many of your children would you like to go to school? Why?

18. How many of your children do you plan to send to school? Why?

19. What would you advise other families who want to send children to school but face challenges?

    a. Is your advice different for parents of boys and girls?

20. How can the school support families who have difficulty sending their children to school?

    a. Different for boys and girls?

21. How can the community support families who have difficulty sending their children to school?

    a. Different for boys and girls?

Ethiopia Girl accessing school - PD Household Observations check list

The person taking the notes during the interview should also observe the following things and make some notes about them quietly.

1. Relationships among family members

    a. Mother and Father with each other

    b. Mother with children

    c. Father with children

    d. Other adults or older siblings with children

    e. Others?

2. Household characteristics: is the compound clean? What type of house? Latrine? Can you see any food stored? Other characteristics?

Cultural Score Boards

There are many culturally acceptable, specific ways to share information such as innovations and instances of behavior change in organizations. It is important to always be mindful of the social and psychological impacts of how that is done.

OBJECTIVES: Cultural Score Boards are used as a way to build participation through shared information.

- To create a forum to expand dialogue.

- To highlight accomplishments

- To amplify change (behavioral and social) within an organization or a community

COMPONENTS:

- Place knowledge and information in the *public domain*

- Enable the ownership of the data by the actors

- Enable community to participate in creating *something new*

- Increase the amount of creative work done by *small groups*

- Increase *informal contact* outside of the hierarchy

- Focus on *observation of facts and problem solving*, instead of monitoring individuals and seeking to blame

The only way to learn is by doing it!

The PDI would love to hear about your project. Please give us feedback on your project with the following information:

Name of your organization:

Name of the project:

Problem statement:

Location of the project:

Population impacted by the project: **special target group:**

Project impact:

Documentation available: (stories, videos, photos, reports, articles, etc.)

Contact info:

Send information to:
You may submit your project on our website at: www.positivedeviance.org or you may send information to our office address:

<div align="center">

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The Positive Deviance Initiative greatly appreciates your participation in documenting the ways the PD approach is being implemented worldwide.