Learning from Results-Based Management evaluations and reviews

Discussion paper for the OECD/ DAC Results Community workshop on 29-30 October 2018, Paris

Abstract

This paper is targeted at the OECD/DAC Results Community and is intended to provoke discussion during the workshop session 3 on Learning from evaluations and reviews of RBM approaches and systems – Development of guiding principles on 30 October.

This paper is a step in a new project that aims to build on existing evidence to identify good practice and generate lessons that development co-operation providers can concretely use to design or refine their results-based management approaches and systems. This will ultimately translate into guiding principles for results-based management in development co-operation.

The concept note of the project is available on the OECD/DAC Results website.

This paper is a review and analysis of progress in results-based management (RBM) in development co-operation. Drawing primarily on findings from various evaluations and reviews of results-based management systems conducted by members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the Secretariat and other bodies in the past four years (2015-2018), this analytical work aims to:

i) identify recent trends in results-based management,

ii) explore challenges faced by providers when developing their results approaches and systems,

iii) select good practices in responding to these challenges that can be useful for the Results Community, considering new approaches, new technologies and evolving contexts.

This paper has been written by Janet Vähämäki, researcher and external consultant, with inputs from the Secretariat and members of the ad hoc working group that accompanies the project (Finland, Norway, Switzerland, USAID, JIU, and MOPAN).
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Executive summary

This paper summarises and analyses findings on progress, challenges and unintended consequences from implementation of results-based management (RBM) in development co-operation. The review draws primarily on findings from various evaluations and reviews of RBM systems conducted by members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the Secretariat and other bodies in the past four years (2015-2018). It also draws on emerging lessons from new methods for managing development co-operation that are being undertaken by a number of initiatives.

The main findings of the review of recent evaluations are as follows:

- While they assume that results-based management approaches and systems will enhance the effectiveness of their development co-operation, a number of providers have not defined explicitly the purpose(s) of their RBM. As a result, staff interpret RBM in the way that makes most sense to them, and RBM is therefore applied in many different ways. Among the providers which have defined a purpose, a number give weight to RBM serving direction and accountability needs, while others see its main function being learning.

- Providers have made progress in integrating RBM in their internal systems (planning, implementation and reporting). As a result, they are better equipped to monitor and report on output data and short-term outcome data, and they are increasingly using results data for communication and domestic accountability purposes. Uneven progress is however noted on the use of results information for direction and learning, and while some evidence points to a positive correlation between the quality of monitoring and evaluation at project level and ratings on project outcomes, there is still a need for further evidence through reviews and evaluations on whether RBM implementation at agency level has supported development outcomes.

- Challenges noted with RBM implementation relate to: i) a lack of understanding and guidance on RBM; ii) structural and system issues; iii) capacity constraints and costs; iv) measurement and method issues; v) a lack of a results culture and vi) limited uptake of the ownership and harmonisation dimensions. Many of these challenges were already reported in earlier RBM reviews. The review has also identified four unintended consequences: i) measure fixation; ii) suboptimisation; iii) reduced motivation and risk taking; and iv) increased transaction costs and administrative burden.

The review also found that these challenges and unintended consequences do not lead organisations to dramatically reconsider the RBM approach; recommendations rather aim at improving how the approach works in practice (for example through improved guidance and training).

Meanwhile, a number of initiatives aim to develop or pilot management tools that promote adaptability and learning to address complexity better. Based on theories focusing on how problems are understood and how evidence and learning are used to solve these problems, these approaches are sometimes presented as “alternatives” to results-based management. The review however shows that learning, ownership and adaptation are actually key features of RBM theories, in particular as they were developed at the time of the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness (2005). New approaches can nevertheless provide useful lessons to improve results approaches, in particular at the project level.
These approaches emphasise adaptation to local contexts and the need for organisations to be flexible enough to allow re-adaptation in response to changes and performance feedback. This requires: i) focusing on better understanding the local contexts; ii) tailoring interventions to local contexts during project design; and iii) adapting interventions and management methods as the context evolves during implementation. Using planning tools where outputs are fully specified at the outset in a fixed logic are more likely to succeed in highly predictable environments and in projects where one can easily verify the change process. Bottom-up and flexible approaches, with continuous re-adaptation depending on context, are probably most suitable in environments with low predictability and where change processes are difficult to verify. In order to know how and when a certain model is most suitable, providers need to develop knowledge both on different management methods, and support staff to make their own decisions in the field.

At the corporate level, development co-operation providers need to develop a solid theory of change capturing how all channels (bilateral and multilateral) and instruments will contribute to the overall objectives set for the development co-operation programme, throughout the results chain. They also need a system that enables assessment of performance and contribution to the achievement of development results across the entire portfolio. While there is not a “one size fits all” approach, given that organisations operate in various environments and are subject to different governing processes, a number of elements need to be in place, such as: a clear purpose for RBM, theory(ies) of change, results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation processes, documented feedback loops and related decision-making and reporting processes, knowledge management and learning systems, and staff incentives. These building blocks, informed by lessons from the reviews and from new approaches, along with the principles that should underpin all results approaches (e.g. ownership and alignment) will be combined to constitute the core guiding principles for RBM in development co-operation.

Accountability - and the belief that communication in the form of simple measurable facts will lead to increased trust and legitimacy - drives to a large extent the results-based management agenda. The previous points show the need to make better use of results information for direction and learning. A challenge for providers is to build and communicate a narrative explaining how development co-operation works and the conditions in which it supports sustainable development – building on a solid theory of change. An effective communication approach could support providers in reconciling accountability requirements with the need to use results information for decision making and learning - freeing space for the organisations to make informed decisions that will enhance their contribution to sustainable development.

Finally a conclusion drawn from this review is that many of the difficulties encountered with RBM can be explained by difficulties with implementing the approach in practice. Conducting regular reviews of RBM systems – including how a chosen management approach affects practice - is therefore important.
List of Acronyms

ADAPT - Analysis driven agile programming techniques
CLA – Collaborating, Learning and Adapting
CLEAR – Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results
CSOs – Civil society organisations
DAC - Development Assistance Committee
DDD – Doing Development Differently initiative
Dev Com – OECD Development Communications Network
DFID – UK’s Department for International Development
EU – European Union
GAO – United States Government Accountability Office
GDI – Global Delivery Initiative
GEF – Global Environment Facility
GLAM – The Global Learning for Adaptive Management Initiative
GPSA – Global Partnership for Social Accountability
ICAI – Independent Commission for Aid Impact
IEG – Independent Evaluation Group
International IDEA – International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
JIIU – Joint Inspection Unit
M&E – Monitoring and Evaluation
M4R – Managing for development results
MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MfDR - Management for Development Results
Norad – Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
ODA – Official Development Assistance
ODI – Overseas Development Institute
OECD – Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PbR – Payment by results
PDIA – Problem Driven Iterative Approach
PMIS – Project Management Information System
RBM – Results-based management
SCORE – Stockholm Center for Organisational Research
SDC – Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs – Sustainable Development Goals
Sida – Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
TA LEARN – Transparency and Accountability Initiative
TWP - Thinking and Working Politically
UK – United Kingdom
USAID – United States Agency for International Development
WB – World Bank
1. Background

This paper is a review and analysis of progress in results-based management (RBM) in development co-operation. Drawing on findings from various evaluations and reviews of RBM systems conducted by members of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), the Secretariat and other bodies in the past four years (2015-2018), this analytical work aims to:

i) identify recent trends in results-based management,

ii) explore challenges faced by providers when developing their results approaches and systems,

iii) select good practices in responding to these challenges that can be useful for the Results Community, considering new approaches, new technologies and evolving contexts.

The review is part of a broader project entitled “Learning from evaluations and reviews of RBM approaches and systems – Development of guiding principles” headed by the OECD/DAC results team. This paper has been written by Janet Vähämäki, researcher and external consultant, with inputs from the Secretariat and members of the ad hoc working group that accompanies the project (Finland, Norway, Switzerland, USAID, JIU, and MOPAN). It addresses the following questions: What have we learnt from implementing RBM in development co-operation organisations? What progress and benefits can be seen? What are the main challenges and unintended consequences? Are there good practices to respond to these challenges? What could be done differently?

RBM is used as an approach that will ultimately support achievement of development results. Yet RBM implementation often faces challenges and unintended consequences. The review of RBM practices suggests that these obstacles become more acute when an organisation has not clearly defined and worked out the purpose of its results approach and system. The reviewed documents suggest several solutions to address challenges. While some assume that the full benefit of RBM can be gained by implementing the approach and system correctly (e.g. doing more measurements), others argue that it is the main assumption behind RBM - change is technical, linear and predictable - that makes RBM challenging. Approaches such as problem driven iterative adaptation assume that change is political, unpredictable and non-linear, as it relies on local leadership and quality of relationships. While taking into account these different assumptions, the synthesis intends to discuss how useful perspectives from the alternative approaches could be combined with learnings from current RBM implementation to minimise challenges and unintended consequences.

2. Material reviewed and method

a) Approach and outline of the report

Figure 1 below illustrates the analytical approach, putting in perspective the overall objective of RBM, its various purposes, and three possible destinies during implementation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Overall objective</th>
<th>Purposes</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The ultimate purpose of development cooperation i.e. achieving development results</td>
<td>Accountability Communication Direction Learning</td>
<td>Progress (purpose partly or fully fulfilled) - Chapter 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Challenges (purpose could still be fulfilled) - Chapter 5</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Unintended consequences (Effects contradict purpose) Chapter 6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. RBM objective, purpose and implementation destiny
As shown in the figure, the overall objective of RBM should be the same as the ultimate purpose of development co-operation, since it is a management strategy that aims to support the achievement of development results.

RBM can serve various purposes. Chapter 3 summarises if and how the reviewed organisations have defined a goal and purpose(s) for RBM, and analyses these different purposes and definitions.

During implementation, RBM either supports the purpose(s), as is described in chapter 4, or it could face challenges (Chapter 5) or lead to unintended consequences that are contrary to the RBM purposes (Chapter 6). While the distinction between challenges and unintended consequences is not always easy to make, especially as the reports reviewed have not been structured in this way, this distinction however helps to discuss the degree in which RBM can be seen as supporting the achievement of development results.

Chapter 7 provides a summary and analysis of the solutions and recommendations made in the reviewed evaluations. Chapter 8 presents an overview of the changing development co-operation context, and the alternative theories, approaches, initiatives and methods that are being developed. It discusses whether the alternatives could be considered as different from, or complementary to, classical RBM approaches. Finally Chapter 9 summarises the report, looking back at what was learnt.

b) Documents reviewed

The review draws primarily on findings from evaluations and reviews conducted on whole or parts of the results-based management systems of development co-operation providers during the past four years (2015-2018). Criteria and process for selecting documents (Box 1) have led to review of three main types of documents:

1. Evaluations and reviews on RBM performance among providers
2. Evaluations and reviews on results-based financing mechanisms
3. Other evaluations, reviews and papers analysing RBM experiences, including experiences with evaluation utilisation as well as alternative approaches among providers.

Box 1. Criteria and process for selecting the documents

A choice was made to select recent evaluations (past four years). Given that evaluations and reviews rely on information dating at least 1-2 years back, considering earlier material conveyed the risk of not addressing the interesting questions of adaptation/agility, use of technology or engaging in partnerships. However, whenever necessary to assess progress over time, a number of evaluations conducted prior to 2015 have been included. The process involved the following steps:

- Identification by the results team of a first series of evaluations that had been earlier shared by members.
- Call to the Results Community to share any past or projected reviews and evaluations of RBM systems that could inform the synthesis (May 2019). This call was reiterated to members of the ad hoc working group.
- Call to the Evaluation community at the EvalNet meeting on 28 June 2018 for sharing any evaluation relevant to the synthesis.

The following criteria applied: evaluations and reviews should: a) deal with challenges and progress in RBM implementation at the provider level; b) provide a broad organisational overview of RBM implementation within the aid provider; and c) be conducted by a third/independent party.

Finally the learning synthesis on RBM based on the DAC peer reviews conducted in 2016-17, and a synthesis of RBM case studies conducted by the DCD Results Team are reflected in this paper. Similarly, this synthesis will seek to integrate in a next version findings from the MOPAN assessments conducted since 2015.
Annex 1 includes tables listing the documents reviewed in each category, summarising: a) the organisation studied and title of the evaluation; b) the purpose of the study; c) the main method used; and d) whether earlier evaluations or reviews have been conducted.

The documents reviewed are different in scope, focus and methodology. Whilst some have analysed the RBM systems as a whole, others have only looked at parts of it. Most of the reviews have a focus on the performance of RBM within development co-operation providers. Most studies have thus not examined the influence of the RBM systems on recipients and none of them have this as a main focus. Some of the studies have however included field visits which examined how partner countries are affected by the providers’ RBM systems and requirements (e.g. SDC, 2017; Norad, 2018a; EU, 2017).

Most of the reviews have not included the organisations’ evaluation function and evaluation systems as part of their analysis. RBM systems are thus typically seen as including continuous planning and monitoring of the organisations’ corporate, country strategy and project activities. However, since evaluations and the evaluation function are important for RBM, this paper includes a box on evaluation use, based on three recent evaluations on the topic (USAID, 2016; Norad 2018b; GAO, 2017).

3. The purpose of RBM

This section provides a brief overview of the theories behind RBM. These theories serve as a reference point for the discussion on how they have worked out in practice (chapters 4, 5 and 6) and ways in which RBM ideas can be considered different from alternative approaches and initiatives (chapter 7).

The term results-based management was first used in the 1990’s. It originates from concepts such as management by results or management by objectives commonly used in other policy areas since the 1960’s. The 2002 OECD DAC Glossary of key terms in evaluation and results-based management defines RBM as “A management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impact” (OECD, 2002).

In the early 2000’s, an enlarged results focus in development co-operation was vividly discussed in the high-level roundtables that led to the 2005 Paris Declaration on aid effectiveness, during which related norms and principles were developed. As a result, when defining Managing for Development Results (MfDR) in 2006, the OECD assumed that: “global development assistance can be made more effective by enhancing country ownership, aligning assistance with country priorities, harmonizing development agencies’ policies and procedures, and focusing more consistently on the achievement of development outcomes” (OECD, 2006). MfDR came with five principles:

1. Focus the dialogue on results at all phases of the development process
2. Aligning programming, monitoring, and evaluation with results
3. Keeping measurement and reporting simple
4. Managing for, not by, results
5. Using results information for learning and decision making.

The focus in the MfDR process was thus on ownership and use of results for learning and decision-making, making a shift from the earlier focus put on accountability. The MfDR Sourcebook stressed that no penalties would apply for missed targets and encouraged a flexible approach to analysing reasons for failure to inform adaptation. It provided several examples of how adaptation and learning from results had led to the achievement of development results.

1 Interviews will be conducted in a second phase to complement information where needed.
Other handbooks such as the 2004 World Bank “Ten Steps to Results Based Monitoring and Evaluation” emphasised the need to set goals, outcomes, indicators and targets and have a baseline. Meanwhile the handbook also stressed the importance of involving many actors with a participatory approach when defining problems and setting goals to ensure ownership on the part of the main internal and external stakeholders. It also brought up the importance of adaptation to changes in legislative and organisational priorities. However, it also argued that despite these changes, maintaining indicator stability over time was important to ensure comparability over time (Kusek and Rist, 2004). Consistency in measurement was thus seen as more important than continuous adaptation.

What RBM is, how it should be applied and the purposes of RBM have evolved since 2005. There does not exist today one definition of RBM and its purposes. A recent OECD study comparing development co-operation providers’ RBM systems states that “the ultimate purpose of development co-operation is achieving development results (outcomes and tangible change). Development co-operation contributes to development results and results-based management supports this effort” (OECD/DAC, 2017:8). If comparing the 2002 OECD/DAC definition with the latter, one can see that the ultimate purpose of RBM has been clarified and connected with the ultimate purpose of development co-operation.

In a recent study, the OECD assigned four main purposes for results information (OECD, 2016):

- accountability
- communication
- direction
- learning.

Accountability and communication are important to gain legitimacy and credibility, both internally and externally, by actors such as domestic stakeholders and development partners. Direction and learning support the organisation’s performance in achieving development results, with results information used for policy formulation and strategic decision making; quality assurance; portfolio, thematic, programme and/or project cycle management.

RBM applies at three levels in development co-operation: corporate level, country/thematic programmes and/or at individual project level. At all levels, results frameworks or a basic results chain link inputs to activities, outputs and ultimately outcomes and impact. The OECD has distinguished between three tiers to which results information can contribute: i) development results (tier 1); development co-operation results (tier 2); and performance information (tier 3) (OECD, 2017).

All four RBM purposes are valid at the three levels. However, a common finding in RBM research is that different purposes can come in conflict with each other (Vähämäki, 2017). If organisations have for example not defined what type of results information to collect, they can end up in collecting a lot of information in vain and overburdening partner organisations with too many requests. Meanwhile not knowing why, when and who needs results information for decision-making can imply that decision-makers are provided with information they cannot use. It is therefore important to know what type of information serves the different purposes and different audiences at the different levels. As noted by the OECD, results-based management (RBM) approaches benefit from a clear purpose and ambition that is aligned to the agency profile (size, modalities used etc.) and strategy (OECD, 2017).

Table 1 below collates how/if the organisations as well as the evaluations have defined an ultimate goal and purpose for RBM. The following questions have been asked of the material:

- Has the organisation and/or the evaluation defined a purpose for RBM?
- If several purposes are defined, is a priority given within the different purposes?
- Who is the audience for the results information? (internal, external partners, constituencies, development partners etc.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country/Source</th>
<th>Purpose of RBM defined by organisation</th>
<th>Purpose of RBM defined by evaluation team</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GEF (GEF, 2017)</td>
<td>Officially: 2002 OECD definition: “management strategy focusing on performance and achievement of outputs, outcomes and impacts” Also: improve management effectiveness and accountability by defining realistic expected results, monitoring progress toward their achievement, integrating lessons learned into management decisions and reporting on performance.</td>
<td>A management strategy by which all actors, contributing directly or indirectly to achieving a set of results, ensure that their processes, products and services contribute to the desired results (outputs, outcomes and higher-level goals or impact) and use information and evidence on actual results to inform decision making on the design, resourcing and delivery of programmes and activities as well as for accountability and reporting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland (Finland, 2015)</td>
<td>No clear definition of RBM. According to evaluation: “The MFA has utilised results-oriented tools since the 1990s. Since 2012, driven by an earlier RBM evaluation and an explicit focus on results in its most recent development policy, a RBM Action Plan has been formulated in 2012 and is being implemented. MFA still lacks a comprehensive corporate approach to RBM.”</td>
<td>A management strategy that focuses on results (as opposed to budget and activities) to improve decision-making, learning, and accountability.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Norad (Norad, 2018a)</td>
<td>No clear definition of RBM. According to evaluation: “The only guiding documentation is the Norwegian Directorate for Financial Management’s definition of RBM. The administration has not articulated what RBM looks like for Norwegian development assistance, how it should operate at different levels, or the value it brings to achieving development outcomes.”</td>
<td>A management strategy that seeks to ensure the effective, efficient and transparent delivery of development assistance using results evidence (e.g. partners’ results reporting and evaluations) to inform the allocation of funds and shape development policy. Done through setting objectives, measuring achievement, using this information to analyse, adapt (learning) and report (accountability).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank (WB, 2017)</td>
<td>Not stated in evaluation</td>
<td>A management strategy or approach aligned with achieving organisational results. M4R refers specifically to managing for development results. Two principles: • Developing a robust system for measuring results (for example, a results framework) • Instituting adaptive management and ongoing learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC (SDC, 2017)</td>
<td>Management strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way organisations operate, with improving performance in terms of results as the central orientation. Its primary purpose is to improve efficiency and effectiveness through organisational learning, and secondly to fulfil accountability obligations through performance reporting.</td>
<td>Purposes: 1. Management for results: - Decision-making, - Management of results information - Learning 2. Accountability for results: - Accountability to domestic partners, - Accountability by and to partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Dept of State (US, 2015)</td>
<td>Not defined. According to evaluation: “The management for results framework is an approach to linking strategic planning, budgeting, managing, and measuring programs and projects”.</td>
<td>Not defined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK (ODI, 2017)</td>
<td>Not defined</td>
<td>Using measurement and target setting to drive improved performance.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Purpose of RBM defined by organisation | Purpose of RBM defined by evaluation team
--- | ---
CGIAR (CGIAR, 2017) | Ten principles of RBM: Results focus, Consistent leadership, commitment to measurement, change in organisational culture, systems thinking, investment in learning, practical understanding of accountability, wide participation, integration of monitoring and evaluation, investment in information systems.

The table shows, that from the material reviewed, only the UN, GEF and SDC have formally defined a purpose for RBM in their organisation\(^2\). This is interesting since without a purpose and/or a strategy on what RBM is expected to contribute to, it ought to be difficult also to evaluate RBM implementation in the organisations. The Finland, Norad and CGIAR evaluations specifically note that since the organisations have not specified why they are doing RBM, this has affected the implementation of the RBM reforms in the organisations. The NORAD evaluation for example argues that in the absence of guidance on RBM, individuals within the administration have interpreted RBM in the way that makes most sense to them, and as a result how RBM is practiced varies considerably (Norad, 2018a). Similarly, the CGIAR evaluation argues that this has reduced the learning potential of RBM, created a confusion within the organisation about what RBM was meant to do and undermined the motivation for RBM (CGIAR, 2017).

Among the documents reviewed, the UN has the broadest definition and understanding of RBM. JIU has produced a comprehensive RBM model with a benchmarking framework to define its approach and methodology and to assess stages of RBM development and outcomes. The model includes a strategy for different management functions of RBM, explaining how different purposes should serve different audiences. In turn, ODI’s definition of RBM is the narrowest; it defines RBM as an approach where measurements and target setting are used to drive improved performance (ODI, 2017).

Some of the organisations and the evaluations give weight to RBM mainly serving decision-making purposes (UN 2017b; GEF 2017; NORAD 2018a). Interestingly, these three definitions do not at all mention learning as a purpose of RBM. In line with Meier (2003:6), only SDC clearly defines learning as a priority purpose of RBM, accountability being the second priority. Both the Norad and WB evaluation teams have used the word adapting in their definition. The WB evaluation team for example argues that one of the principles of RBM is adaptive management and ongoing learning. This shows that whereas some organisations and evaluations see RBM from narrower perspectives, mainly serving purposes of direction and communication, others see it as a method for adaptive management.

The UN also has the broadest concept for accountability, “collective accountability”, which is seen as accountability relations at the vertical and horizontal levels, including recipient partners. The UN is also the only provider, and the SDC evaluation team is the only evaluation team, that recognises that RBM also plays a role for development partners. This is interesting since the idea of RBM being developed for partner countries was at the core of the MfDR definition. In the Paris Declaration (clause 46) partners and providers jointly commit to “work together in a participatory approach to strengthen country capacities and demand for results-based management”.

In sum, this analysis shows that many providers have not defined a purpose for RBM. Among those who have, the purpose definitions vary, with a number giving weight to RBM serving accountability needs and others to learning and direction. One conclusion is that it is difficult to evaluate how something has worked out in practice if the organisation/s have not defined a purpose for the RBM reforms. Moreover, the outcomes of the RBM reforms, which are the subject of the next chapter, need to be understood in light of the various purposes pursued by providers in implementing RBM reforms.

\(^2\) Providers may however have defined a RBM purpose in other documents.
4. State of the art – Findings from the reviewed documents

In line with findings from the OECD report (2017), this review found that development co-operation providers are at different stages in the implementation of RBM in their organisations. Even though RBM has been a preferred management approach in most agencies during the past 15-20 years, some agencies are still in a stage of defining and exploring what RBM means for them. Others have a clear perception of RBM and a well-defined plan under implementation. All organisations have adopted RBM, but none of them has reached a stage where RBM is broadly mainstreamed with implications for system-wide operation, partnerships, coordination and collaboration.

All organisations which had conducted previous evaluations or reviews of RBM (UN, GEF, Finland, WB and SDC) state that they have made progress over time.\(^3\) This finding is in line with DAC peer reviews, OECD surveys and workshops (OECD, 2017a). It is therefore possible to assume that organisations which have conducted evaluations of their RBM systems have learnt from these evaluations.

Main areas of progress relate to: i) RBM formalities and systems; ii) output and short-term outcome data; and iii) results reporting and use of results for domestic accountability purposes. Uneven progress is noted on the use of results for decision-making and learning purposes. Finally, little support can be found in the reviewed documents on the fact that results-based management is supportive to the ultimate goal of development cooperation i.e. achievement of development results. These findings are discussed below.

a) Progress with RBM formalities and systems

Development co-operation providers have made progress with establishing formalities and systems for RBM implementation. The Norad evaluation for example states that “a number of the foundational features of RBM are in place in the aid administration” (Norad 2018a:8). Foundational features include some of the more technical aspects of RBM such as measuring results, making sure results evidence is reported at the right time, and having systems in place to bring different data sets together to create a summarised picture of results. The report moreover argues that progress has been made at the level of grant management and on improving the quality of partner results data, meaning that the availability of data has improved (Norad 2018a).

Similarly, the UN evaluation states that there now is a “significant level of readiness for enhancing the value of results-based management for organisational effectiveness and for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda” (UN 2017b:px). The report argues that most of the UN organisations are at stage 4 out of 5 of development, tied to a theory of change process in the adoption of innovation and the standards of result principles defined by the UN. This means that RBM is mainstreamed within the UN system, with particularly good coverage across the organisations, continuous learning for refinement of the system and an outcome-focused approach. However, the approach remains predominantly internally-focused and is not fully integrated in all aspects within the organisation. The evaluation therefore concludes that the “added value of results-based management to organisational effectiveness has not been fully realized” (UN 2017b:x).

Similarly, the WB evaluation notes that the World Bank Group “has made good progress on building a measurement system, though fundamental measurement issues remain” (WB, 2017:xi).

The evaluation on Finland also notes that important progress has been made towards integrating RBM in planning, implementation and reporting. There are now comprehensive results-oriented country strategies

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\(^3\) See for example: “Reforms over more than a decade have clearly led to positive changes within the World Bank Group, particularly with respect to the steady emphasis on results measurement. These changes signaled the growing importance of M4R and placed the World Bank Group at the forefront of these efforts” (WB 2017:7). “The evaluation comes to the overall positive conclusion that, in conception and execution, the RBM System is a success” (SDC 2017:iv). “The United Nations system has done quite well” (UN 2017b:px).
and multilateral plans with results frameworks that continue to be developed (Finland, 2015). The SDC evaluation notes that the RBM guidelines and instruments on corporate, country and project levels are largely purposeful and well understood, and that they allow flexibility and contextualisation. It concludes that the system and instruments in place supports a pragmatic and effective results management perspective in virtually all aspects of aid delivery (SDC, 2017). The evaluation on Canada found that programme evaluations were of improved quality when RBM tools had been used during planning and when there were clear logic models and precise and suitable performance indicators and monitoring processes in place (GAC, 2017).

More broadly, DAC peer reviews show that the twelve DAC members that have been subject to a peer review in 2016-17 have all made efforts to improve results-based management. Overall, members are moving from defining and measuring outputs at project level towards defining and measuring outcomes (OECD, 2017c).

Consequently, systems for measurement and reporting are today integrated and mainstreamed in many development co-operation agencies, with systems, guidelines and tools for RBM. Moreover, some providers are incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their agency-wide results frameworks. For example, the Netherlands and SDC have mapped tier two indicators to the SDGs at goal level, and around half of New Zealand’s tier one indicators map directly to relevant SDG indicators (OECD, 2017a).

b) Progress with output and short-term outcome data

Organisations are better equipped to monitor outputs and short-term outcomes. The WB evaluation notes that “IEG finds good focus on the outputs of World Bank Group operations” (WB, 2017:7). The GEF evaluation also mentions that progress has been made “in terms of tracking of results, while expected outputs and outcomes of supported activities are clearly specified” (GEF, 2017:5). The OECD report echoes this finding and argues that information about development co-operation results (outputs and immediate outcomes) and performance information (inputs) are often favoured over information about development change or long-term outcomes. Moreover, policy-level steering and decisions among providers are often based on performance information only (OECD, 2017a).

An increasing number of providers are using standard indicators in their corporate results frameworks. While some providers take a contribution approach, others claim direct attribution, using standard indicator sets to aggregate project-level data and summarise agency-wide achievements. As noted by the OECD, these standard indicator sets are increasingly used for agency-wide reporting. They require results information that is easy to aggregate, which is the case with output data. In addition, some providers include, or plan to include, measures of project effectiveness and quality by aggregating project-level ratings. These ratings assess the extent to which output and outcome results have been achieved or are on track to be achieved in projects (OECD, 2017a).

The increased focus on output can be seen as a consequence of the more fragmented development landscape that involves a greater number of actors, channels and instruments. Many DAC members tend to reduce government-to-government co-operation, adopting more “project-based” approaches and using non-governmental channels, private sector instruments and multilateral organisations (OECD, 2017a).

Whilst organisations have improved output and short-term outcome level information, they have not succeeded in becoming more outcome or impact focused in their tracking of results data. This lack is criticised in several of the evaluations, since the organisations then lack data to explain how they contribute to changes in the countries where they work as well as how they contribute to overall global goals such as the SDGs.
c) Progress in reporting and using results for domestic accountability purposes

Most evaluations report progress on results reporting. Some see this progress as the most important achievement of RBM. The UN evaluation for example states that: “the most significant contribution of results-based management for United Nations system organisations is in providing a structure for reporting evidence of results to their respective governance bodies” (UN, 2017b:xii).

Many evaluations argue that accountability has been the principal driver of RBM. The Norad evaluation for example clearly states that the main focus of RBM within the administration is to gather and use results evidence to demonstrate what partners have achieved with Norwegian taxpayers’ money and to report this to senior management, parliament and the public (Norad, 2018a:8). The evaluation mentions as a positive effect that RBM has contributed to greater transparency in the use of Norwegian development assistance and improved public understanding and possibly trust in development co-operation.

Similarly, the GEF evaluation notes that the RBM system facilitates reporting on progress in the use of GEF resources, the efficiency and effectiveness of its activities and processes, and the environmental results. The annual portfolio monitoring report and the Corporate Scorecard system provides useful information to both the governance bodies, in particular the Council, and the management. Meanwhile the GEF evaluation notes the difficulties of collecting measurable and reliable results data that can be aggregated for reporting purposes (GEF, 2017).

The SDC evaluation notes that while there is a clear perception within the organisation that results reporting will satisfy information needs of domestic constituencies, perceptions vary considerably on how to best meet the perceived needs. Domestic demand, and the type of results information that is actually needed, is seen as unclear and changing over time. The evaluation however points out that building trust through conveying the message that the agency has a sophisticated system in place could be a centrepiece in future communications for accountability purposes (SDC, 2017).

d) Uneven progress on use of results for decision-making and learning

Some evaluations (UN, 2017b; Norad, 2018a; SDC, 2017) mention progress in the use of results for direction and learning. However, this progress has been uneven. The UN evaluation for example notes that use has been exercised principally in managing the portfolio of programmes and projects, minimally in shifting resources, and not in areas such as human resource management” (UN, 2017).

The Norad evaluation argues that the administration’s RBM requirements have spurred partners to invest in and strengthen their own systems. While pointing to a number of down-sides and unintended consequences, the evaluation states that they found “instances” where results data was used to inform decisions about for example how resources should be allocated between countries and to improve partners’ understanding of change. RBM is therefore considered as “adding value” and plausibly leading to better development outcomes (Norad, 2018a:9). However, the Norad evaluation also states that they found little evidence that results evidence was systematically used to inform decisions on either what or whom to fund or in the design of grant schemes, at the provider agency level. It concludes that “other factors such as political priorities or the fact that an organisation was a long-term partner seemed to have the most significant bearing on the final allocation decision” (Norad 2018a:8).

Both the SDC and GEF evaluations found an uneven use of results information for direction. The SDC evaluation found progress in use of results data in some geographical departments of the organisation, whereas other geographical departments had not used results data for analysis or planning (SDC, 2017). Similarly, the GEF evaluation notes that the role of RBM in evidence-based decision making has not received
as much attention as accountability to the Council (GEF, 2017). This statement echoes findings from several of the other evaluations, i.e. that use of results for decision-making had not been the primary focus of RBM efforts. The US Department of State evaluation notes that there is little evidence that results had been used for decision-making or learning (US, 2015). The evaluation on Finland also states that much of the information gathered by individual units is neither transmitted nor used by management (Finland, 2015).

On the learning aspect, the WB evaluation states that “projects are generally weak in their attempts to learn empirically about the validity of the change theory underpinning the project or programme, and about other factors that might affect outcomes”. Staff rarely discussed diverse factors that might have affected project outcomes; there are either negative or get no incentives for candid self-evaluation that would lead to learning (WB, 2017). Similarly in Finland, learning from results “happens in an ad hoc fashion rather than in a regular and systematic process” (Finland 2015:22).

Box 2. Evidence from evaluations on evaluation quality and utilisation

The two evaluations conducted on evaluation utilisation arrive to relatively positive conclusions about evaluation utilisation (USAID, 2016; Norad 2018b). The USAID evaluation for example argues that in general there is a high rate of evaluation use in USAID. Evaluations are being used to improve programming in ways that contribute to better development outcomes. Moreover, learning from these evaluations is happening in the form of evidence-based decision-making and an increased understanding of the context in which USAID operates. The evaluation concludes that evaluations are used both in project design and implementation phases to modify USAID activities. Similarly, the Norad evaluation on evaluation/review utilisation found that reviews were generally considered to be timely and to present relevant and realistic recommendations. Timeliness was linked to the eventual use of a review and whether it influenced upcoming decisions. The GAO (2017) evaluation and the evaluation on Finland (2018) did not evaluate use of evaluation findings but overall quality of evaluations within the agencies. GAO found that evaluations in general were of high or acceptable quality through quality varied by criterion and agency the evaluation. The evaluation on Finland notes that around two thirds of the evaluations had satisfactory Terms of References, and report quality.

The use of results information for direction and learning thus seems uneven among the donors. The OECD notes in its analysis of the 2016-17 DAC peer reviews that five members mentioned challenges with building a culture of learning from results, and only two DAC members use results data to inform budgetary decisions (2017c). In sum, although a number of reviews show that performance information and findings from evaluations are used for improving programming and implementation, the reviewed documents suggest that RBM systems are not systematically used for decision making and learning.

e) Little evidence that RBM supports development results

The topic of whether RBM is supportive to development results is discussed in three evaluations (SDC, 2017; Norad 2018b; WB, 2017). All three evaluations discuss methodological difficulties for proving whether or not RBM supports development results. Outcomes and impact are in general more difficult to measure, and it is seldom possible (nor desirable due to global agreements on alignment to partner countries’ results frameworks) to attribute an provider’s interventions to development outcomes in a country. The WB evaluation discusses at length challenges with data availability on outcomes and impact and insufficient emphasis in WB programmes on measuring outcomes, which results in a paucity of data on how they contribute to outcomes (WB, 2017).

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4 A explanation is that results information is perceived as incomplete and unreliable. Moreover, although the GEF website provides a wealth of information, it is difficult to access in a readily usable form (GEF, 2017).

5 The evaluation intended to discuss how RBM had contributed to poverty reduction.
The WB evaluation refers to two studies (Raimondo, 2016 and IAD, 2015) which have found a positive correlation between the quality of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at project level and project outcome ratings done by WB staff as well as the Independent Evaluation Group\(^6\). The evaluation notes that there are common markers of good M&E quality, such as clear institutional set up and division of labour, a simple M&E framework well aligned to partners’ frameworks and a good integration with operational tasks (Raimondo, 2016). Meanwhile the evaluation discusses whether the number of indicators at corporate level makes sense to support adaptive management and learning appropriately. It also notes that focusing the corporate results reporting on achievement might distort incentives and lead staff to favour reporting positive outcomes. The evaluation therefore highlights the need to better understand which factors might affect outcomes.

Both the SDC and Norad evaluations point to factors implying that RBM is supportive to development results; simultaneously they argue that there is no direct evidence supporting this point. The Norad evaluation for example argues that whilst greater transparency on how resources are used might improve public understanding and trust in development co-operation, use of results information for decision-making, analysis and learning has not evolved, concluding that RBM efforts do not contribute to the delivery of better development outcomes by partners. The SDC evaluation argues that whilst RBM has led to an improved evidence base, the programming focus, monitoring capacity and results frameworks in key SDC strategic instruments are on the whole insufficient to support effective poverty orientation of SDC programming. The evaluation therefore states that “It cannot be generally concluded, for example, from SDC results reporting that poverty impact has improved” (SDC, 2017:iv).

The UN evaluation states that since development outcomes are typically conjoint and indivisible they require a systems mode of operation (ranging from planning, programme development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation). However, results-based management failed to influence system-wide operations (UN, 2017b:xii). Meanwhile the OECD argues that the increased focus on input and output data for accountability purposes has undermined attempts to foster country ownership of results information and the ability to use it for insights, learning and ultimately to understand how to achieve outcomes. As a result, “in many cases development co-operation results have become detached (and de-contextualised) from development results” (OECD, 2017a:9).

To conclude, whilst some progress has been made with RBM at systems level and in collecting data, implying progress in meeting the purposes of accountability and communication, uneven progress is noted on meeting the purposes of learning and direction. Whilst there exists some evidence pointing to a positive correlation between the quality of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) at project level and ratings on project outcomes, there is no evidence in the reviewed documents on the fact that RBM implementation at agency level has supported development outcomes.

5. Challenges

In the previous section progress was discussed. However, when the reviewed documents note progress, there is always a but, in the sentence, meaning that despite progress being made, challenges and difficulties still remain. This section discusses the challenges described in the evaluations. They include a lack of understanding and guidance on the purpose of RBM; structural and system issues; capacity constraints; measurement and method issues; a lack of a results culture; and challenges related to ownership and harmonisation.

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6 Raimondo notes that the positive correlation holds even when controlling for factors such as project manager identity (Raimondo, 2016).
a) Lack of understanding and guidance of what RBM is and why we are doing it

A commonly reported challenge is a lack of guidance or understanding within the organisation of what RBM is and why they are doing it. This finding reflects the fact that few providers have defined a purpose for RBM (Chapter 3).

The evaluation on Finland for example argues that whilst the Development Policy Programmes successfully and convincingly convey the values and overall guiding principles of Finnish development policy, they “provide very little guidance with relevance for RBM” (Finland, 2015:17). Similarly, the Norad evaluation states that “Commitments to being ‘results orientated’ and ensuring ‘funds deliver results’ are consistently found in government documents, but there is no detail on what this should look like in practice” (Norad, 2018a:7). This lack of guidance results in difficulties in evaluating effects of the policies (Finland, 2015) and/or in disparities in which the staff understand RBM (Norad, 2018a). Similarly, the CGIAR evaluation notes that the organisation lacks a shared conceptual understanding of RBM and that this reduces the learning potential of RBM (CGIAR, 2017).

Even though the UN has developed a comprehensive framework and strategy for RBM (Chapter 3), the evaluation notes that this has not been mainstreamed within the organisation. A reason for this lies in the externally driven process that UN organisations are subject to, as they need to respond to external constituencies, including bilateral providers, who influence their approach to results management. This externally driven process “has the effect of favouring a reactive and fragmented approach, rather than a comprehensive and integrated mainstreaming of results-based management” (UN, 2017b:28).

The RBM training guidance of the Office of US Foreign Assistance predominately focuses on the implementation of individual processes or products rather than of the entire RBM framework. It does not sufficiently reinforce linkages between RBM processes and lacks guidance to help stakeholders to incorporate RBM processes in their regular responsibilities (US, 2015).

Consequently, a common challenge in implementing RBM is that organisations have not defined a clear purpose and guidance for RBM; these are not understood by staff and training initiatives do not provide sufficient insights to RBM theory.

b) Structural and systems issues

Structural and systems issues, i.e. issues dealing with inconsistencies in policy and budget; inconsistencies between planning and reporting as well as organisational responsibility for RBM processes or systems are commonly raised challenges.

Both the Norad and Finland evaluations note a disconnect between policies and budget. The Norad evaluation argues that while the goals and objectives are often specified at a broad policy level in the annual budget proposal, these are not operationalised in either the Norad allocation letters or in the funding allocations to departments and sections within the MFA. This makes it very difficult for the administration to practice RBM at a strategic level (Norad, 2018a). Similarly, the Finnish evaluation states that “Policy formulation and budgeting processes at the MFA remain largely separate and budget planning itself is not results-driven” (Finland, 2015:7). This poses inherent problems for RBM since it is difficult to commit to results without knowing what resources will be available7. The evaluation concludes that this also constitutes a problem for Parliament and the society at large since they remain without an adequate

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7 The Finnish evaluation raises several other organisational system challenges related to RBM implementation: i) annual reporting is not systematic and seldom done with reference to original targets; ii) no discussion takes place on why objectives have not been met; and iii) there is no comprehensive corporate level reporting that covers entire aid channels or aid instruments, or policy coherence work.
understanding of whether originally intended objectives have been reached and whether Finnish development co-operation represents a good social investment (Finland, 2015).

On a similar note, both the GEF and US evaluations discuss challenges with integrating planning and reporting. The GEF evaluation notes that the long duration of the projects constrains the reporting on actual results on the ground against the targets and the use of this information in future work. Similarly, the US evaluation reports that the strategic planning process is constrained by timing challenges, inconsistent or ambiguous high-level policy guidance, and competing country-level planning models. This complicates adoption of RBM framework and limits visibility in overall performance. The evaluation also notes that strategic plans are too broad or inflexible to serve as useful management tools. As a result, some stakeholders are less inclined to use their strategic plan, hindering US Department of State’s ability to effectively communicate with stakeholders (US, 2015).

The UN evaluation notes challenges with several systems issues such as: i) engaging with multiple actors, which makes the UN system subject to a variety of external governance frameworks, limits its global leadership role and, at times, increases its exposure to various types of risks; ii) the financing system, which creates competition and reinforces functional silos, thus limiting joint and integrated ways of working; and iii) the integration of results principles into the human resources management system (UN, 2017b).

Meanwhile, the evaluation of SDC finds that the constraints do not relate to instruments and guidelines but rather to a lack of clear management structure with lines of responsibility for the different processes (SDC 2017:iv).

In sum, provider organisations have met challenges in RBM implementation with inconsistencies in systems for planning, budgeting, financing and reporting as well as systems for human resources.

c) Capacity constraints and costs of RBM

Several of the reports discuss the challenge of capacity constraints. Capacity constraints include:

i) the need for matching staff capacity to the different requirements needed in RBM (WB, 2017; SDC, 2017; UN, 2017b);

ii) strengthening staff competencies in measurement, analysis and evaluation, e.g. in methods for evaluation in complex and unpredictable contexts (WB, 2017; SDC, 2017; UN, 2017b);

iii) linkages with national capacities for results and data and related limitations (UN, 2017b).

A common argument is that RBM requires significant resources and that insufficient staff resources have been devoted to RBM activities. This requirement tends to increase over time with for instance the need to access disaggregated data. The topic of cost/effectiveness of RBM is not discussed to a large extent in any of the evaluations. The SDC evaluation however brings up this topic in a discussion of the “value for money” for one of the RBM products, the Effectiveness reports, which are produced by SDC with the intention to contribute to both organisational learning and public accountability. The reports cost between 250 and 400 thousand CHF (260 to 410 thousand USD) per report which is not found to be a cost-efficient investment nor to support the two purposes (SDC, 2017:9).

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8 The evaluation mentions that information for personnel performance management is constrained by “the paternalistic approach of the United Nations system, as well as the preferences of and political interference by members of the Executive Board” (UN 2017b:x).

9 The US evaluation for example argues that while the Office’s responsibilities for managing resources have grown, corresponding policies, guidance and staff resources have not expanded (US, 2015).
d) Measurement and method issues

All evaluations note challenges with collection of quantitative results data/information. Challenges relate to:

i) **tracking tools and measurement formats**; this includes gaps in submission of tracking tools at midterm and project completion (GEF, 2017), inconsistency in measurement formats (GEF, 2017); organisation’s measurement systems that do not support the longer-term data collection required (WB, 2017); inadequate intervention information system(s) for monitoring and reporting results across the MFA aid channels (Finland, 2015); lack of useful feedback on agency performance provided by RBM reporting (GEF, 2017);

ii) **Poor data quality** due to generally weak client systems that generate results data; weaknesses in measurement of outcomes and long-term impacts (WB, 2017); the absence of impact indicators (GEF, 2017); inconsistencies with quantitative reporting and original targets (Finland, 2015);

iii) **Using the data**; for adaptive management based on evidence (WB, 2017), ranking and prioritising results (EU, 2017); attribution and aggregation (UN, 2017b); and for systematic reporting on results along policy implementation channels (Finland, 2015).

Challenges with measurements can form a vicious cycle. During project or programme planning objectives are often vague, baselines are often not specified and projects often do not collect data when the projects begin. A clear theory of change is not presented. During implementation, data is of poor quality and cannot therefore be used for further purposes. Results frameworks often measure processes instead of outcomes. Staff struggle to focus on outputs that are within one’s control and achievable. They can also be cautious of the consequences for non-achievement of outcomes, which leads to favouring reporting positive outcomes or to become excessively risk averse” (WB 2017:x).

The EU evaluation suggests that all these challenges become even more difficult in multi-stakeholder programmes: “with a dozen or more donors involved, unless results are ranked and prioritised, a joint results framework tends to be nothing more than a compilation (or ‘shopping list’) of participating donor objectives drawn from the country results framework” (EU, 2017).

Some challenges directly result from the lack of understanding of RBM and a clear theory of change articulating how results are linked to goals, as mentioned above. The WB evaluation for example declares that “despite instituting results-based country assistance strategies, the results frameworks in country strategies had weak links between designed interventions and outcomes and weak indicators to track outcomes” (WB, 2017:8). Similarly, the UN evaluation argues that there is often a confusion over the application of the concepts of outputs and outcomes and accountability for what one can control, compared with responsibility to ensure outcome achievement through coordination, collaboration, co-management, partnership, advocacy, and building on the comparative value of the United Nations system (UN, 2017b).

In sum, providers face challenges with tracking tools and measurement formats, poor data quality and in making good use of the data. They also struggle with defining and communicating the theory of change, and measuring how interventions contribute to achievement of goals.

e) Lack of a results culture

Several evaluations discuss the lack of a “results culture” within the organisation (Finland, 2015; WB, 2017; OECD, 2017a; Norad, 2018a). The Finnish evaluation for example argues that “the MFA has not yet been able to create an organisational environment conducive to RBM. The organisational culture remains largely risk-averse and prioritises diligent compliance and accountability over careful experimentation and learning” (Finland, 2015:18). Similarly, Norad evaluation notes that a results and learning culture is not yet
in place; staff do not systematically seek out and learn from results data and evaluations what works and what does not, and take action based on this. The OECD also note that staff are often incentivised more towards design and disbursement than results-based management of projects during implementation and at completion.

The WB evaluation has found progress within the WB on building a culture of “evidence-based adaptive management and learning” but argues that it still needs a stronger, more systematic, and holistic push (WB, 2017). It notes for example that disbursements have priority over outcomes in staff incentives (WB, 2017).

Some evaluations argue that the lack of a results culture is due to staff attitudes who lack an “appropriate mindset”. The UN evaluation suggests that the UN system faces challenges in addressing behavioural aspects that are important for transformative change and for applying a human-centred paradigm (UN 2017b:ix). Other evaluations link the lack of a results culture to management challenges. The US evaluation for example argues that a comprehensive human resource management strategy is not in place to ensure appropriate staff and staff incentives for RBM implementation and usage (US, 2015). The Norad evaluation emphasises the importance of senior management pioneering the use of results data in their day-to-day work (Norad, 2018a).

Subsequently, despite being often is considered as a prerequisite for RBM, the establishment of a results culture supported by appropriate staff incentives remains a challenge in provider agencies.

f) Ownership and harmonisation

Development co-operation providers have committed in the Busan Partnership Agreement (2011) to using partner countries’ data and systems to measure the contribution of their interventions to the outcomes and change that these countries seek to achieve. In addition to supporting partner countries’ capacities in managing national results frameworks and associated systems including strengthening their statistical capacity, they have agreed to minimise the use of parallel frameworks.

Only three of the reports (OECD, 2017a; SDC, 2017 and UN 2018b) review the extent to which the development effectiveness commitments are followed. The OECD draws a mixed picture: “Providers intend to honour this commitment, but evidence suggests this is not being realised”. Country results information is seldom used in corporate results framework. At partner country level, while most providers include country-level data in their country strategies and results frameworks, limited use is made of country results information and monitoring systems. In most of the case studies, country level results-based management is viewed as the most challenging aspect of their results approach. In particular, the extent to which partners are actively consulted during development and ongoing monitoring and review of provider specific country-level results frameworks appears to be limited. Accountability requirements, proliferation of additional frameworks at country level and greater use of project modalities all contribute to a reduced focus on country results (OECD, 2017a). The SDC evaluation state that “SDC can do more to align with the results management principles of the development effectiveness agenda” (SDC, 2017:iv).

The UN evaluation brings up challenges with “collective accountability” which means accountability both at vertical and horizontal levels across the United Nations system and with development partners. The evaluation argues that collective accountability around shared outcomes across organizations is difficult to enforce since its success rests on a set of conditions for collective impact, including: a common agenda; shared measurement; mutually reinforcing activities; continuous communication; and backbone support. Collective accountability also depends on “a system that values trust and integrity, and a culture of results that values innovation, measured risk-taking, an internal locus of control and a reasonable amount of self-accountability” (UN 2017b:65). The evaluation suggests that there is a need to conceptualise a coherent framework for collective accountability across United Nations system organisations with common, integrated criteria for success.
The WB evaluation discusses whether the agency supports partners with their RBM work. Although the Bank is addressing client capacity to manage for results through various instruments and approaches, there are indications that they focus comparatively less on helping clients strengthen capacity for their own use of data and evidence for adaptive management and learning. While the effectiveness and results of these efforts have not yet been assessed, a strategic approach to strengthen client capacity, based on systematic diagnostics, is needed (WB, 2017:xi).

EU Joint programming aims to promote harmonisation through the joint planning of development cooperation by the EU members working in a partner country. The EU evaluation notes that joint results frameworks typically do not have a specific institutional home and thus tend to suffer from a lack of champion and unclear mandate as to whom should facilitate their use (EU, 2017:18). The ongoing task of co-ordinating joint results frameworks is seldom recognised by EU delegations and in many cases is not supported by external technical assistance, thereby threatening institutional memory (EU 2017:18). Moreover, the evaluation found that in some cases, joint results frameworks have been treated simply as administrative exercises, adopting the high-level indicators of partner governments regardless of how well they fit with the intended joint programme results (EU, 2017:19).

6. Unintended consequences of RBM

While the challenges presented above are perceived as manageable and can potentially be solved, this section discusses some of the unintended consequences of results-based management; i.e. outcomes of the RBM reforms that were not foreseen. Unintended consequences can be either negative or positive. This section only discusses unintended consequences that are negatively contrary to the original RBM purpose. Four unintended consequences have been identified and are discussed below.

a) Measure fixation

Measure fixation can be defined as an emphasis on some quantified measures at the expense of other parts that are not measured, for example, an emphasis on:

- quantified aspects that are part of the performance measurement scheme, at the expense of unquantified aspects of performance;
- short-term targets (inputs or outputs) at the expense of legitimate long-term objectives (outcomes or impact)
- single measures of success rather than on the underlying objective (Smith, 1995)

Chapter 4 notes progress on reporting of input and output data and a trend towards using standard indicator sets. This trend can occur at the expense of improved knowledge, measurement and reporting on outcomes and long-term objectives (OECD, 2017a; UN, 2017b; Norad, 2018a; GEF, 2017). The Norad evaluation for example argues that the RBM requirements have led to a push for partners to use quantitative indicators which can be aggregated across the portfolio of grant-supported projects. While some organisations have been able to do this, others have struggled. This has led to a focus “on what can be easily measured rather than what is important” (Norad, 2018b:45). Overall a growing body of literature critiques the use of standard indicator sets to aggregate, attribute and apply targets to project-level results information. Such efforts have contributed to a range of unintended consequences, in terms of reporting burden, poor data quality, perverse incentives (related to both reporting and programming), inability to capture the totality of results achieved, and a loss of focus on learning (see Holzapfel, 2016; Shutt, 2016; ICAI, 2015; World Bank, 2016).
The UN evaluation notes that the focus on accountability has engendered “organisations that focus on outputs as opposed to outcomes, or on what can be measured”. Moreover, it has led to a fear among staff of being seen as unsuccessful when outcomes are not reached (UN, 2017b:vi). Similarly, the GEF evaluation argues that “less attention has been given to tracking of the long-term impacts and environmental trends relevant to the GEF’s work” (GEF, 2017:5). The absence of impact indicators and arrangements to track them are likely to constrain future assessments of the GEF’s impact. The OECD notes that the increased attention on output rather than outcome information results in providers being unable to explain how they contribute to changes in the countries where they work as well as how they contribute to overall global goals such as the SDGs. Moreover, “this has undermined attempts to foster country ownership of results information and the ability to use it for insights, learning and ultimately to understand how to achieve outcomes” (OECD, 2017a:9).

Measure fixation can also lead to systematic collection of baseline data, which, according to the Norad evaluation, has a mixed impact on CSOs. A key RBM requirement for the Norwegian administration is that all results frameworks should have baseline data and targets. While this has been reported to have generated useful insights and provided CSOs with a much better picture of change, it has caused a tension with local partners because they are being asked to set baseline information before funding has been guaranteed (Norad, 2018b:46).

In sum, RBM implementation has led to prioritise what can easily be measured at the expense of focusing on what happens in reality in programme implementation. Moreover, short term targets have been given weight at the expense of long-term outcomes.

**b) Suboptimisation**

Suboptimisation is defined as a focus on narrow local objectives, at the expense of the objectives of the organisation or the sector as a whole. Suboptimisation could for example imply that:

- one part of the organisation becomes more effective at the expense of pursuing effectiveness of the organisation as a whole
- one of the RBM purposes is pursued at the expense of the other/s (Smith, 1995; Thiel and Leeuw, 2002).

Several of the evaluations (US, 2015; SDC, 2017; UN, 2017b; Norad, 2018a; CGIAR, 2017) argue that RBM reforms have led to a skewed focus in favour of accountability and reporting, at the expense of learning and decision-making. RBM is perceived as a compliance exercise designed to satisfy external reporting requirements (US, 2015) without balancing the two main purposes of RBM – learning and accountability (Norad, 2018b). It has also skewed partner’s RBM systems to generating data for reporting, rather than for improvement and learning. In some cases, this focus on reporting is the driving force behind the partner’s entire RBM system. Data is being collected because it is a reporting requirement, but partners don’t see the value of it and do not used it to inform internal decision making (Norad 2018a).

The SDC evaluation differentiates between partner accountability and domestic accountability: the RBM reforms have led to a management culture that mainly emphasises domestic accountability. In practice, this draws attention away from strategic analyses and from using performance information as a basis for decision-making and learning (SDC, 2017). Similarly, the UN evaluation notes that the effective use of results evidence is hindered by the high pressure and response “to the copious amount of information on results for reporting to the parliaments of donor countries and the public” (UN 2017b:xi). The focus on form over function limits the value of reporting on results.

Suboptimisation raises questions of responsibility. When different persons/units are responsible for specific parts of the organisation - who is then responsible for the effectiveness of the organisation as a whole? The
UN evaluation for instance mentions that the RBM reforms have led to “a leadership that is responsive but not responsible” (UN, 2017b:vi). While leadership for the implementation of results-based management focused on responding to the accountability needs of the member states, it has not exercised responsibility for meeting the demands for managing for achieving results, which includes a focus on making the changes and adjustments necessary to ensure success and sustainability (UN, 2017b:ix). Similarly, the US evaluation argues that the Department leadership does not consistently participate during RBM processes or use RBM products (e.g. strategic plans, performance reports). Inconsistent leadership engagement at each level within the organisation is a barrier that continues to hinder the adoption of the RBM framework (US, 2015).

This suboptimal implementation also raises questions on what has driven the RBM systems in this direction and what allows to keep moving in different contexts. The CGIAR evaluation has evaluated the drivers of RBM and argues that the requirements for outcome oriented data, the need for performance measurement, results-based budgeting and discussions on value-for-money are all factors driving RBM systems in favour of accountability and more measurements. The evaluation also argues that funding providers, who all have different visions, objectives and operating principles as well as various motivations for RBM, are drivers of suboptimisation. Some funders require performance contracts, standardisation of measurement and annual review of achievement, whereas others believe that measuring high-level outcomes is inappropriate (CGIAR, 2017). Since receiving funding is important for any organisation, they simply comply with what is requested from them. Another factor of suboptimal implementation might be the perceived need of consistency in measurements for comparisons over time or over contexts (Kusek and Rist, 2004).

In sum, suboptimisation has happened since the purpose of accountability has been pursued at the expense of learning and direction. One reason for this is the drive for measurable data at different levels of the development co-operation chain and compliance with requests from funding providers.

c) Reduced motivation and risk taking

Reduced motivation and risk taking occurs when performance measurement schemes become overly bureaucratic and rigid, thus inhibiting innovation and creativity amongst staff, or when top-down management approaches reduce workers’ autonomy and trust, hampering flexible and context-based approaches (See for e.g. Diefenbach, 2009; Smith, 1995; Honig, 2018).

The UN evaluation for example points out that RBM “has not engendered trust, creativity, and innovation as one would expect of the philosophy for managing for achieving results” (UN 2017b:vi). It has rather led to the development of organisations that operate with external locus of control, as they seek to address the power dynamics governing their respective organisations.

The Norad evaluation notes that relations with the recipient partners have worsened as a consequence of RBM reforms. CSOs feel that the way RBM is being promoted by the administration risks a shift in the nature of the relationship with its CSO partners towards a more transactional, rather than partner-based relationship (Norad 2018a:46).

RBM reforms have resulted in burdensome procedures with damaging effects on staff relationships, motivation and performance, which can be traced back to intense ministerial oversight. As an example, DFID staff operating at country level has little decision-making power and that standard indicators have a negative effect on contextually relevant programming, leading to compliance rather than risk taking. Staff were allegedly so disempowered that they were disinclined to challenge the results culture (Shutt, 2016). The latter effect has also been observed at Sida, where RBM reforms first led to staff opposing and challenging the reforms but then to compliance and silence, because of fear of consequences (Vähämäki, 2017). The SDC evaluation also notes that due to fear of consequences, staff are disinclined to report on failures. This is probably a common unintended consequence among many development co-operation agencies, that can prevent honest and creative discussions in project implementation.
d) Increased transaction costs and administrative burden

Increased transaction costs and administrative burden occur when staff are spending increasing amounts of time collecting data and monitoring their activities at the expense of time for managing the programme and engaging with partners.

Several of the reviewed documents note that RBM has led to a significant increase in the amount of administrative work (EU, 2017; GEF, 2017; Norad, 2018a; UN, 2018b; SDC, 2017). The UN evaluation for example argues that: “This implies an excessive use of professional capacities of staff are used to report on results” (UN, 2018b). Similarly, the GEF evaluation argues that “Administrative burden in terms of overworked results management is high” (GEF, 2017).

In a similar vein, the GEF evaluation argues that although the administrative burden has decreased since the previous evaluation (2013), the organisation is “still tracking too much information”, which is complex and burdensome for the organisation (GEF, 2017:10). Over-reporting and overdoing what are requested is a common strategy taken by staff and organisations in situations of uncertainty (Vähämäki, 2017). Organisations track more information than necessary to safeguard eventual requests from external constituencies.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Box 3: Unintended consequences: Norad evaluation findings</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Norad evaluation specifically focuses on unintended consequences of the RBM reforms. Using hypotheses on intended and unintended consequences the team found several specific unintended consequences of the RBM reforms. The evaluation argues that the administrative requirements have led to significant amounts of time required to collect the necessary results information. Since results data cannot be used before it is considered as robust and credible, a challenge is that partners are in some cases reporting data which they perceive to have questionable value for their own purposes, but do so because they think the provider needs it. The study argues that the aid administration has rarely thought through exactly why it needs the requested data, other than to monitor what partners are doing. Moreover, a particular challenge is responding to ad hoc requests that are directed at partners in response to media or parliamentary questions. Since these cannot be predicted they often require extensive consultation with national level staff to answer. All of this has led to partners over-reporting and increased transaction costs. The evaluation argues that the CSOs “report more than necessary to cover all eventualities”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Source: Norad, 2018a:45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In sum, the reviewed documents have reported unintended consequences with measure fixation, suboptimisation, reduced motivation and risk taking as well as increased transaction costs and administrative burden. Whereas some of these unintended consequences have in earlier reports been discussed as risks, they are today noted as actual effects of the RBM reforms.

7. Overview over time and suggested solutions

When examining the challenges and the unintended consequences created by RBM implementation one can easily become exhausted. Is the progress made worth all efforts and challenges? Why do the challenges of RBM implementation persist over time? This section provides a short analysis of changes over time and summarises the solutions and recommendations presented in the reviewed documents.

10 The GEF Corporate Scorecard reports on 32 indicators. At another level, the GEF RBM system tracks seven strategic focal area outcomes and 68 strategic programme-level outcomes. Each of these outcomes has at least one agreed indicator for measuring progress, for a total of 117 indicators (GEF, 2017).
a) Summing up - overview over time

Comparing the current study with earlier studies (Vähämäki et al. 2011; OECD, 2014) shows that many of the challenges and also the solutions and recommendations are similar. Comparison between the 2011 study and the current study reveals that:

i) More evaluations in the current study note progress with RBM implementation. Development cooperation providers are increasingly aware of why they are doing RBM, and formalities around RBM have improved.

ii) The challenges are more or less the same. They relate to leadership, measurement, building a results culture and staff motivation for RBM.

iii) A larger number of the evaluations note that there are unintended consequences of RBM. In 2011, the unintended consequences were often discussed as risks of RBM, today, some of these risks are noted as actual effects of the RBM reforms.

These findings are in line with a recent analysis showing that the focus on results have had some positive effects on organisational monitoring and evaluation capacity, and that this has helped to maintain public support for aid and contributed to certain types of learning for practitioners. However, the focus on results appears to have increased the provider control and related transaction costs, while the potential for partner learning happens in somewhat unhelpful ways (Shutt, 2016).

b) Suggested solutions to the challenges and unintended consequences

The following table sets out the most common recommendations and “solutions” provided in the reviewed documents to the seven different challenges as well as the unintended consequences identified in the previous section:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Challenge/unintended consequence</th>
<th>Solution/Recommendation -as suggested by the evaluation team:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lack of understanding and guidance of what RBM is and why we are doing it</td>
<td>Develop guidance and strategies for RBM with a purpose statement or a theory of change for RBM, Conduct more/new evaluations to assess progress on RBM implementation, Deliver more training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural and system issues</td>
<td>Improve guidance documents, Improve systems, Improve human resources strategies, Change management style; avoid a regime dominated by compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity constraints and costs of RBM</td>
<td>Increase resources for RBM, Recruit other types of competencies, Deliver training, Re-organisations and re-structuring within organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement and method issues</td>
<td>Improve measurement systems, Increase measurements on different aspects, Introduce quality assurance mechanisms to ensure measurements are robust, Deliver more training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of a results culture</td>
<td>Enhance the mindset and value systems for RBM, Improve staff commitment to and incentives for RBM, Stimulate improved leadership and support leadership responsibility, Encourage staff initiative, risk-taking and learning from failure as well as from success</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The table shows that the most common solution is simply to do more or better where there is a challenge: improve or increase guidance or training, improve or increase measurements, improve staff capacities by training with more appropriate competencies. The evaluations often recommend improved leadership and management. In general, there is therefore a perception that the solution to challenges and unintended consequences of RBM is to maintain, but improve, the current approach so that the real benefits from RBM can arise. The UN evaluation for example states that: “Results-based management is relevant and has value when implemented correctly, in an intellectually honest manner, and managed on the basis of lessons learned” (UN, 2017b:ix). The quote implies that there is a correct way to implement RBM and if this just would be done, RBM would be an effective management strategy.

A common critique is that due to the complex nature of reality, it is not possible to predict processes in a linear fashion, like that applied in the logical framework used in RBM. Reality is never linear in the sense expected in the models or in theory. Predicting outcomes and which success are expected is thus difficult, since these predictions are something that the organisations do not have control over (Chapter 8). The same critique could go for RBM implementation as a management strategy, i.e. it might be difficult to expect RBM implementation to follow a linear process and fulfil a predicted outcome. This is why conducting evaluations and reviews of its progress is important in itself.

Some of the evaluations pose statements such as “A clear expression of a program’s theory of change is necessary to identify appropriate indicators to track outcomes and impact, and to monitor change” (GEF, 2017:6). These statements are based on a premise that problems can be identified and that change processes are predictable and controllable. Other evaluations however raise the importance of being cautious and the importance of continuously balancing and following up effects of RBM implementation. The Finnish evaluation for example recommends that a realistic understanding of the effort related to introducing RBM be established (Finland, 2015:22). It argues that RBM implementation requires cultural and procedural changes in organisations that are often underestimated, and a balance between the benefits and risks for both accountability and learning when determining the number and type of indicators. In the same vein, the OECD recommends that providers be realistic about aggregation and attribution, focusing more on the contribution of development co-operation (OECD, 2017:5).

Meanwhile as shown in Table 2, some recommendations propose alternative approaches (e.g. adaptive management) and solutions such as reducing the number of indicators or measurement requirements.
8. A changing development co-operation context and new approaches

This chapter discusses how the changing context influences management methods, introducing “new” approaches. It explores how these could be considered different from RBM. The chapter starts with describing the changing context and implications on RBM, then presents alternatives theories and initiatives and the evidence supporting these approaches, and ends with context-based approaches.

a) A changing development context

Theories and methods on how to achieve results and how to monitor and evaluate development results evolve depending on the changing development co-operation landscape. This includes:

1. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs, with its 17 goals, 169 SDG targets and 232 indicators, is universal and has now been implemented for three years. Not only poverty and development, but inequality and sustainable development are at the core of the SDGs. Agenda 2030 represents an opportunity for RBM as a common results platform geared towards outcomes and change providing a basis for harmonisation and dialogue at country level (OECD, 2017a). However, a commonly raised risk is that the breadth and numbers of SDG goals and targets hamper international assessment of progress, since each country can pick the number and range of indicators that best suits its need.

2. Agenda 2030 and the SDGs require, more than ever, data to demonstrate progress towards the agreed goals. This is both an opportunity and a challenge for RBM implementation. A vast increase in the volume of digital data can potentially enhance the evidence base for development policy and programming, and ultimately support development impact on the ground (OECD, 2018a). However, the “data revolution” also contributes to a global data divide since there is continued scarcity of basic data in developing countries, and weak incentives and capacity to fill these gaps.

3. Agenda 2030 and the leave no-one behind pledge put increased pressure on providers to work in fragile contexts. From an RBM perspective, it is generally harder to achieve and demonstrate development results in fragile contexts, since the external environment is more unpredictable and institutions are unstable. This has brought about new alternative methods such as adaptive management in which managing uncertainty and complexity are emphasised (ODI, 2017b).

4. Agenda 2030 requires a massive step up in resource mobilisation for development impact. New actors such as the private sector are considered as increasingly important players for its achievement. It is expected that more than 50 per cent of the financing needed to achieve the SDGs could be mobilized through the private sector (OECD, 2018b). However, challenges lie in that the SDGs do not appear yet as a driving factor for many private sector actors and the amount of private finance actually mobilised is below expectations. It is also argued that there is limited evidence of the achievements of outcomes of partnerships engaging the private sector, and that many projects involving private sector partners have weak monitoring systems that do not produce the information required (OECD, 2018b).

5. Official Development Assistance (ODA) has shrunk in comparison to other resources such as private financial flows (OECD, 2017b). For many providers other motivations beside altruism or solidarity are being emphasised, including political influence, commercial opportunities and security considerations. Meanwhile a number of new providers, particularly South-South co-operation providers, emphasise the ‘mutual benefit’ dimension of their co-operation, and develop alternative approaches to assess their results.

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11 The data revolution is commonly described as a vast increase of digital data that has resulted in the phenomenon known as “big data”, characterised by the four “V’s” of volume, velocity, veracity and variety (OECD, 2018b).
In summary, nothing in the current development co-operation environment suggests that the pressure for demonstrating results and evidence will diminish, one could rather expect a trend of increased interest in how to best manage, achieve and demonstrate how development cooperation interventions contribute to development results.

b) Alternative theories and assumptions

There is a trend towards presenting alternative concepts for planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning. Scholars such as Ramalingham (2013), Chambers (2010), Eyben (2005), Hummelbrunner and Jones (2013), Patton (2011), Root et al. (2015) and Honig (2018) have all demonstrated weaknesses in the fundamental assumptions underpinning classical RBM theory. Complexity science and adaptive management theory are used to propose ‘best fit’ rather than best practice solutions to support complex development problems.

Table 3 summarises how scholars have presented the main differences in five assumptions behind the classical RBM approach and “alternative” management approaches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assumption area</th>
<th>More like the classical RBM approach</th>
<th>More like an alternative approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition of problems</td>
<td>- Problems can be identified, are bounded and mutually understood; best practice solutions can be mutually agreed</td>
<td>- Different actors have different understandings of problems and solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How change happens</td>
<td>- Linear, proportional, predictable and controllable</td>
<td>- Unpredictable and the result of multiple human interactions and feedback, shaped by politics and power</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Understanding of knowledge, learning and evidence | - It is possible to generate objective evidence and use it to inform optimal policy options and programme plans  
- Rational, behavioural approach to learning that is a response to top-down rules and incentives | - No knowledge is value free, thus, policy decisions are based on partial information and political pressure  
- Planning is based on consideration of different scenarios in light of understanding of political context  
- Local learning from participatory monitoring of results is key to real-time learning and adaptation  
- Learners learn and adapt through behavioural, cognitive and social means |
| Power, relationships and capacities    | - Formal between atomised individuals, managed by contracts and rules  
- Capacities are easy to organise to achieve common goals | - Informal relationships, trust and flexibility are important; political and relational skills count  
- Capacities are distributed so collective action is a challenge  
- Power is everywhere and relationships are messy |
| Management approach/roles and behaviours | - Top-down management  
- Managing and controlling to satisfy upward accountability and achieve results  
- Driven by concerns about efficiency | - Bottom-up approach  
- Facilitative and trusting, allow discretion and encourage learning and quality assurance  
- Ways of working cannot be dictated from above  
- More concerned about effectiveness than efficiency |

Source: adapted from Shutt (2017); Chambers (2010: 46–47), Ramalingham (2013); Root et al. (2015); Pritchett et al. (2010)
The most common weakness pointed to in classical RBM approaches are how problems and change are understood in development co-operation. Tools such as the logical framework, commonly used in project planning and monitoring are criticised for suggesting that complex problems can be commonly understood and defined, and that progress forward can be predicted and planned. Those promoting alternative management approaches assume that different actors have different understandings of a problem and its solutions. They also note that reality is never linear and possible to predict in the sense expected in the models or in theory. High levels of uncertainty must therefore be taken into account and problem solving needs to be locally led (ODI, 2017b).

Another critique to classical RBM approaches is that it brings about a diminished quality of learning since it prioritises a decontextualised, technical approach to learning, driven by the desire to identify ‘best practice’ or ‘what works’ (Chambers, 2010). Classical RBM approaches have been criticised for excluding the voices of the recipient partners with incentives focused on justifying rather than identifying and learning from failure. Alternative approaches propose that learning involves a deeper examination of system dynamics to assess whether goals or strategies are the most appropriate. This would make it possible to test assumptions about whether interventions were the most appropriate when compared with alternate goals and theories of change (Hummelbrunner, 2015). Scholars argue that RBM approaches and tools like the logical framework merely ask the question: ‘Are we doing things right to reach the target or goal?’ and that such narrow line of questioning excludes possibilities for the kind of double loop learning that is necessary to answer the question: ‘Are we doing the right thing?’ (Shutt, 2016). Moreover, it is argued that what matters is who asks the questions, what kinds of knowledge are considered valid and who learns, uses and controls the information.

Classical RBM approaches are also criticised for being based on the principal agent theory which assumes that one party is made accountable to another through the use of contracts and performance management tools (Shutt, 2016). Managing and controlling is typically done top-down. Alternative approaches consider that successful development cooperation depends rather on the quality of relationships and the ability of individual staff to improvise and take relational approaches to their work (Eyben, 2010); rules and procedures as well as providers’ behaviour need to be more empowering and focusing on mutual learning processes (Chambers, 2010). The emphasis is thus on avoiding directly provider-driven approaches (Pritchett et al., 2010), which implies putting some distance between the providers and the partners who should be driving reform or change processes (ODI, 2017b).

Despite the differences mentioned above, there are also similarities in the different approaches. The MfDR guidance from OECD from 2002 for example promotes learning, dialogue, a flexible approach, analysis of reasons for failure to inform adaptation, importance of keeping measurement simple and ownership aspects. There is nothing inherent in the RBM theory that prevents joint problem-based action, deeper learning processes, or adaptation of results frameworks to context (Shutt, 2016).

Hummelbrunner and Jones (2013) note that two of the three RBM challenges could be understood as problems that arise in practice. For example, they pose that RBM was meant to allow teams the flexibility to experiment, adapt and learn, and is hence based on an appreciation that there may not be clear knowledge on how best to achieve an outcome. However, in practice, often the level of ‘results’ at which teams are meant to perform is that of ‘impact’, which achievement is not realistically in the control of any single unit (or even agency). The approach dis-incentivises learning and innovation. They also argue that RBM was designed to empower different management units, giving the space and responsibilities required to innovate and formulate their own approaches to achieving results. However, in practice, RBM has been implemented in addition to procedural regulations. Therefore, RBM has contributed to additional rules and rigidities rather than freeing up space to learn. Many of the problems with RBM could thus be explained by the everlasting difficulty in applying theories to practice.
Others argue that the crucial difference between classical RBM and adaptive management concerns the relationship between ends and means. “In classical RBM the outputs are fully specified at the outset and there is a fixed logic... In an adaptive approach the desired outcomes are fixed but programme outputs are not” (Booth et al., 2018:9). From an outset, the main difference between classical RBM and the alternative approaches thus lies in the way of deciding, handling and using results information. The main critique thus lies in the pathway towards achieving the outcome goals and the fixed logic often used for that, not the principle of setting clear outcome goals and managing for results. A driver for this suboptimal implementation of RBM (section 6b) might be the perceived need of measurable output and outcome information as well as the perceived need of consistency in these measurements to enable comparisons over time and contexts (Kusek and Rist, 2004).

Moreover, in practice organisations often apply a mix of different management ideas and theories. Sound RBM systems could therefore be seen as a precondition, or a way forward for adaptive management. The Sida evaluation for example argues that RBM is particularly important for projects which are designed to adapt in response to evidence of what works and what does not, and to changes in the context in which they operate (Sida, 2018).

c) Alternative initiatives and methods

This section summarises alternative methods and global initiatives that have been influenced by the alternative theories and assumptions outlined above.

Initiatives promoting adaptive management

Adaptive management refers to a management strategy used to reduce uncertainty over time via monitoring. Flexibility, continuous re-adaptation and adjusting programming depending on context is at core of adaptive management. USAID Learning Lab defines adaptive management as “an intentional approach to making decisions and adjustments in response to new information and changes in context” (USAID, 2017). Adapting management is not about changing goals during implementation but it is rather about changing the path being used to achieve the goals in response to changes. Adaptive management could be captured under the RBM purpose “direction” which means decision making across all levels of the organisation, i.e. using results information to adapt the programme(s) as needed.

Table 4 summarises new global initiatives which promote more adaptive management methods. The first four initiatives (DDD, TWP, GDI and GLAM) have a focus on the whole development sector. GPSA and TA LEARN focus on governance and accountability, and ADAPT, Smart Rules and CLA focus on targeted aspects of development co-operation. All initiatives have in common that they comprise a mix of providers and practitioners. Three of the initiatives are anchored in provider agencies (CLA at USAID, Smart Rules at DFID and GDI at the World Bank).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>What is it?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Doing Development Differently (DDD)</td>
<td>Community of researchers and practitioners convened by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) and Harvard’s Kennedy School. Has a core manifesto calling for development to focus on locally defined problems, tackled through iteration, learning, and adaptation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thinking and Working Politically (TWP)</td>
<td>Semi-regular convening of representatives from various providers, think tanks, and international NGOs that discusses the use of politically aware approaches to aid and development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global Delivery Initiative (GDI)</td>
<td>Cross-provider collaborative (spearheaded by the World Bank, which currently serves as the Secretariat) to deepen the know-how for effective operational delivery of aid and development.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Initiative | What is it?
--- | ---
**The Global Learning for Adaptive Management initiative (GLAM)** | Globally networked learning alliance that aims to actively identify, operationalise and promote rigorous evidence-based approaches to adaptive management funded DFID and USAID and hosted at ODI. Rolled out in 2018.
**Global Partnership for Social Accountability (GPSA)** | Funds and convenes CSOs and governments on social accountability initiatives. Established by the World Bank in 2012.
**TA LEARN** | Community of practice composed of transparency and accountability practitioners from many countries.
**ADAPT (analysis driven agile programming techniques)** | Collaboration of two major NGOs (Mercy Corps and International Rescue Committee) to identify, develop, and spread the use of adaptive management approaches in complex aid and development projects.
**Smart Rules** | DFID’s internal operating framework for programs, emphasizing how the agency adapts to and influences local context. Rolled out in 2014.
**Collaborating, Learning, and Adapting (CLA)** | USAID’s framework and internal change efforts for incorporating collaboration, learning, and adaptation at its missions and with implementing partners.

Source: Adapted from Algoso and Hudson, 2016

The initiatives see adaptive management and learning in different ways. Algoso and Hudson have distinguished between adaptive learning as “All about it”, i.e. central to better aid and development or “tactic only”, i.e. used to tweak existing approaches within providers. In their table the ADAPT initiative, for example, is an initiative which views adaptive management as central to better aid, i.e. the alternative whereas for example DFID’s smart rules initiative is seen as a tweak to existing approaches within DFID.

Algoso and Hudson have also differentiated whether the approaches have a “revolutionary uptake”, i.e. whether they propose a wholesale shift away from traditional aid approaches or whether the initiatives have an “evolutionary uptake” and thereby give more attention to politics within traditional aid approaches. The Doing Development Differently initiative is an approach having a “revolutionary uptake” while arguing that moving to adaptive learning is central to better development co-operation. The initiative has two main foundations. The first is to move to locally-led problem solving, meaning that change is best led from within, and is weakened when it is externally-driven, purposely or otherwise (ODI, 2017b). The second, is to continuously re-adapt focus during implementation; instead of delivering activities determined at the outset, programmes should identify core needs, and test and demonstrate workable solutions. This means that programmes (or portfolios of programmes) should have clear goals or objectives, in terms of their contribution to improved development outcomes, that are set out and agreed in advance. However, the means of achieving these goals – the activities and outputs, or what a given intervention commits to producing – cannot be specified in similarly concrete terms. Instead, what needs to be clearly articulated at the outset is a structured process for testing and learning, to discover what will work best to achieve these aims, also known as ‘learning by doing’. What exactly gets done, and by when, is open to change, based on the findings of the testing process, as opposed to relying on a detailed plan developed ex ante (ODI, 2017b).

All the initiatives promote or use different methods or approaches to tackle complexity and uncertainty. Both the DDD and TWP for example promote and use Problem Driven Iterative Approach (PDIA). Instead of assuming that actors have a mutual understanding of problems that can be tackled by proposing predefined technical solutions with predictable results, PDIA adapts ideas to contextually specific issues that are political in nature. It is described as a locally led and politically smart process for identifying ‘best fit’ solutions (Andrews et al., 2012:6).

**Other initiatives**

Other initiatives and networks do not have the concept ‘adaptive management’ in focus, but rather work with improving current RBM methods. The CLEAR (Centers for Learning on Evaluation and Results) initiative
has for example as its aim to improve policy decisions through strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems and capacities. They are a conjoint programme of academic institutions and providers (multilateral banks, Australia, Belgium, Sweden, Switzerland and UK). The network Better Evaluation promotes outcome mapping and outcome harvesting, two methods that have been used and tried out by providers such as Sida and International IDEA. Whilst outcome mapping is a methodology for planning, monitoring and evaluating behavioural change and the strategies to support those changes in development initiatives, outcome harvesting can be used in evaluations to verify and interpret outcomes in contexts where relations of cause and effect are not fully understood. Outcome harvesting tracks evidence on what has changed – outcomes – and then works backwards to determine whether and how an intervention has contributed to these changes.

Payment by results (PdR) (with other names such as Results Based Aid or Cash on Delivery) is a financing modality which was initially, about a decade ago, promoted by Center for Global Delivery (CDG). PbR has become a financing modality taken on board by several providers. It is promoted as a method which would help partners and providers agree payment milestones in terms of outcomes, without providers advising on approaches or solutions to be used. The modality is meant to encourage innovation and provide partners with flexibility since it would have an “hands off approach” and not specify how to, for example, reduce maternal mortality, merely reward partners when they achieve it.

d) Evidence for alternative approaches

The literature offers evidence and support for factors that are promoted by the alternative approaches. The USAID Learning Lab, for example, concludes that:

1. Strategic collaboration improves performance.
2. Taking time to pause and reflect on our work is critical to learning and improved performance.
3. Continuous learning is linked with job satisfaction, empowerment, employee engagement and ultimately, improved performance and outcomes.
4. Quality knowledge management (KM) systems have a significant and positive impact on project performance.
5. M&E are both positively and significantly associated with achieving development outcomes when incorporated into program management and designed to support learning and decision-making.
6. Adaptive management contributes to sustainable development particularly when it has leadership support, public support, and an adequate investment of time.
7. Locally-led development is most effective.
8. Managing adaptively is more likely to improve outcomes when decision-making autonomy is placed as close to frontline staff and local partners as possible.
9. Evidence-based decision making is more likely to occur when decision makers demand, define and interpret evidence.
10. Leaders are essential to creating a learning culture, the foundation of learning organisations.
11. Teams that have high levels of trust and psychological safety tend to be better at learning and adapting.
12. Individuals who are curious, have growth mindsets, and are able to empathize with their colleagues are generally better able to adapt to changing circumstances. (USAID, 2017)
The review done by USAID is based on a broad literature review on whether collaborating, learning and adapting can make a difference to organisational effectiveness and development results. Point 5 on the list above (good quality M&E contributes to development outcomes) is based on evidence from the same study as cited in the WB evaluation (Raimondo, 2016, section 4e) who found a positive correlation between the quality of M&E at project level and project outcome ratings. The USAID Learning Lab study, based on literature findings from other studies, points to the importance of incorporating M&E into project management and to not view it as a separate activity.

A recent study drawing on a database of over 14 000 discrete development projects within DFID and USAID concludes that providers do benefit from adaptive management and from decentralising planning and decision-making authority to field offices (Honig, 2018). Tight controls and focus on reaching pre-set measurable targets prevent staff from using skills, local knowledge and creativity to solve problems that maximise the impact of development co-operation. Meanwhile project outcomes improve when decision-making authority is placed as close to frontline staff and local partners as possible.

However, there are likewise studies showing that new approaches also face challenges in their implementation. All three evaluations on PbR mechanisms for example report challenges with identifying good measures, high management costs and burdensome verification of results in terms of time, cost and complexity (Box 4). The Norad evaluation also noted that the incentives had perverse effects but states that the magnitude of such challenges has not been documented (Norad, 2015).

**Box 4: Evaluation findings on Payment by Results mechanisms**

Among the evaluations conducted on effects of Payment by Results mechanisms all three evaluations have found positive effects on, or at least some of the, targeted results by the programmes. The Norad evaluation noted positive impact on the utilization of some incentivized services, while there found no effect on others. The evaluation claims that “Results based financing seems to have affected the behaviour of frontline service providers in the short run, but the extent and depth of the changes are unknown. Long run impacts are also unknown” (Norad, 2015:x). The (DFID, 2017a) evaluated four theoretical claims of PbR. They found evidence confirming the logic that offering financial reward to incentivise performance around particular measures leads to greater effort in achieving these targets. They also found fairly convincing evidence that PbR leads to the implementing partner focusing more attention and energy around the specific PbR measures being incentivised. However, they did not find compelling evidence to suggest that PbR programmes help drive greater accountability of partner governments or of implementing organisations to beneficiaries in developing countries. They also did not find evidence for that PbR programmes lead to greater space for autonomous decision making amongst implementing partners. Moreover, little evidence was found that PbR engendered greater innovation in these programmes reviewed. Other studies have found similar findings on the fact that PbR mechanisms do not support increased local ownership nor build capacity as stated in theory.

Source: Shutt, 2016; Green, 2015; Savedoff, 2014

Moreover, Shutt, who has tried to summarise some evaluations and findings from providers using new approaches concludes that “efforts to enhance results through these alternative methods have not lived up to expectations” (Shutt, 2016:67). He notes that the few examples of success often “raise age old questions about whether performance monitoring systems are going to run in parallel with learning systems, generating data that is only useful for political accountability and for managers or researchers interested in performance management” (Shutt, 2016:68). Moreover, it has been argued that the new approaches such as DDD and TWP are more staff intensive and skill intensive than management of traditional aid programmes (Green, 2017); staff must be able to read the vagaries of the domestic political economy in real time and respond appropriately, which requires technical depth, political skills and deep experience.
In more recent debates, several scholars emphasise the role of trust in supporting learning and adaptation (USAID, 2017; Honig, 2018; Honig & Gulrajani, 2018; Bringselius, 2018). Employees’ trust in their organisations, employees’ trust of one another and trust by political authorisers are all associated with better organisational performance. Trust can be a virtuous cycle under certain conditions, with a trusting relationship between service providers and monitoring services motivating better performance, as well as further trust. Moreover, lack of trust or low trust can explain why a number of adaptive management approaches do not work (Green, 2018). In Sweden, Trust Based Management is currently seen as an alternative to the New Public Management paradigm.12

There is not clear evidence on which management approaches works best. Moreover neither the new approaches nor continuous RBM can expect to come without challenges when implemented. Practice will simply probably always be messy and no fully aligned with theory. A question is then in what way the theories and methods posed by new initiatives help to improve how we manage for development results.

Honig and Gulrajani (2018) present three main lessons from alternative approaches:

1. Provider agencies need to focus on better understanding the local contexts in which they operate;
2. Providers’ interventions need to be adapted or tailored to local contexts based on features of the context during project design;
3. As contexts change, so must providers’ interventions change. Organisations must be flexible enough to allow re-adaptation in response to exogenous shocks and performance feedback.

The classical RBM approaches do not run against these lessons. However, in practice, the focus tends to be put on quantitative measurements, indicators, and proving causality. Therefore, the three lessons above could be considered as important for any management strategy chosen by a provider.

e) Management approach depending on context and the authorising environment

Development co-operation contexts differ from each other. Problems in Afghanistan are not the same as in Tanzania. Moreover, some projects are obviously ‘simpler’ than others in terms of actors’ perceptions of the problems that a project addresses, their ability to get together, and what is known about the causal mechanisms that determine whether proposed ‘solutions’ will work or not in a given context. Different scholars have thereby proposed that organisations choose which management model will serve best depending on context and type of project. Honig for example proposes a model of “navigation by judgement”, i.e. relying: i) on agents’ own judgement as the preferred model when predictability of the environment and verifiability of projects is low; and ii) top-down models, which often means reporting against quantitative output targets, as the preferred model in highly predictable environments and highly verifiable projects. Honig shows that navigation by judgement returns in terms of project outcomes are in fact greater for projects in less predictable environments (Honig, 2018).

Although many providers are aware that the management model needs to be adjusted depending on context, alternative initiatives and approaches remain implemented only as smaller scale pilot initiatives. However, these small scale pilots may meet similar challenges as classical RBM approaches; one of the main reasons being that they operate in the same broader organisational and bureaucratic environment, e.g.12

Although trust and control may be seen as to ends on a scale, control and measurement (as in traditional RBM methods) may in some cases foster trust rather than distrust. A clear contract and straightforward communication may for example be valued in cases of complexity and ambiguity. There are also some dilemmas with trust – such as that trustful relationships require a sense of closeness and like mindedness. This is not compatible with for example the DDD prerequisite of a need for an “arms lengths” distance between the donor and the recipients in planning and monitoring of development co-operation interventions.
with the same incentive systems. Merely changing the rules may not yield desired results in the absence of broader changes in how agents are evaluated and promoted. Provider organisations need to respond better to their environmental context and to work more on internal organisational behaviours. The role of workers’ autonomy, motivation and trust are seen as key factors for organisational change needed in order to succeed with any management method (Honig and Gulrajani, 2018).

It is obvious that factors such as the organisation’s history, how it is constituted, the type of authorising environment it has, etc. does affect both the chosen management approach as well as how well the organisation has succeeded with it. As an illustration, the UN funds, because of their governance structures, and sources and types of funding, and accountability requirements cannot manage for results in the same way a bilateral development co-operation agency accountable to its domestic constituencies does.

All organisations must respond to their authorising environments. Commonly, organisations not only respond to the current pressure but also to an anticipation of future threats. For example when the level of ODA is under threat, providers do what they believe is the most appropriate to re-gain external support and confidence, e.g. adopting standard indicators as they believe that numbers showing the scale and reach of aid can justify continuous support to development co-operation. However, this adaptation can “prompt international development organisations to get “navigation strategy” wrong”, leading to management strategies which only comply with what they believe is expected from them and what will support their survival, and not a management strategy that supports them to achieve their organisational goals (Honig, 2018:41). Providers with insecure authorising environments are associated with less risk-taking, greater principal control, and greater use of “legitimacy-seeking output measurement” (Honig, 2018).

This review has shown that accountability to domestic and international constituencies is the principal driver for how RBM internal systems have evolved. RBM reforms have translated into a disproportionate focus on accountability and the belief that communication in the form of simple measurable facts will lead to increased trust and legitimacy. This lack of balance is probably the main explanation of the unintended consequences of RBM. Therefore, in order for providers to free up time and space for working with internal matters, such as choosing their navigation strategy, they would need to build a “shield” against external pressure. This could for example mean to not always answer to the accountability pressure first, but rather do what they often implicitly know is best for the achievement of development results.

**Narrative and communication**

A challenge for providers is thus to build a narrative and a communication approach explaining how development co-operation works and the conditions in which it supports development. There is limited research on whether and how different kinds of messaging influence public support and understanding of development co-operation. However, it has been shown that despite costly accountability systems, DFID for example is not engaging the public directly in a meaningful discussion about international spending (Shamas et.al, 2013). Some research suggests that those who support development co-operation would like a more nuanced explanation of what it does (Glennie et al., 2013), and that there is a public fatigue with messages about need (Wild et al., 2015). Both the UN and the SDC evaluation discusses the effectiveness of reporting to the public. Does all the reporting actually affect public opinions of aid? And would they be equally satisfied with qualitative reporting? The SDC evaluation states that: “Much is done in the name of domestic accountability, even if the effectiveness of corporate communications for this purpose remain largely unknown” (SDC, 2017:iv). Similarly, the UN evaluation argues that public does not only desire numbers but more qualitative information about the development process and the complexities involved in achieving results (UN, 2017b:xi).

The OECD Development Communications Network has promoted five principles for effective communication:
1. Craft results messages that appeal to both hearts and minds. Citizens want to hear the real stories behind development. Numbers alone will not resonate with most people.

2. Choose results messengers to whom people can relate. Citizens want to hear from the beneficiaries of aid or from passionate field workers, not just politicians, diplomats or celebrities.

3. Use countries’ own frameworks to find results data and stories. The most compelling stories come from the programmes and projects that local actors care about.

4. Build public trust over time by telling it how it is: development is complicated, risky and long term. Providers need a confident, but humbler, narrative about the role and impact of aid.

5. Use data to understand your audiences. Web analytics, public attitudes research and consultations can shed light on how to reach different constituencies. They can also tell communicators whether their work has been effective.

According to Dev Com “Data are an essential part of development communications, but narratives and emotions help bring them to life. Effective communication to external audiences could have the effect that aid providers save time and have more freedom to navigate among different management approaches.” (DevCom, oecd.org/dev/devcom).

Meanwhile providers should keep in mind that, as was noted at the October 2017 workshop of the OECD/DAC Results Community, “the SDGs represent a rallying point for communication about development results and can link the efforts of providers, partners and other stakeholders. Most of the SDG targets and priorities deal with real-life change for people, communities, countries and planet earth. They are globally known and brand recognition is high, and therefore promise to be a unique opportunity for communication about results.”

9. In sum, where are we today and what have we learnt?

This review has found that many organisations have not defined a purpose for why they are doing RBM. This has been raised as a concern by some of the evaluation teams and has had the practical implication that staff interpret RBM in the way that makes most sense to them and thus that RBM is practiced in many different ways. Among those which have defined a purpose, a number give weight to RBM serving direction and accountability needs while others see its main function being learning.

The review has noted that progress has been made in the establishment of RBM formalities and systems reporting on output data and short-term outcome data as well as use of results for communication and domestic accountability purposes. Uneven progress is noted on the use of results information for direction and learning. While there exists some evidence pointing to a positive correlation between the quality of M&E at project level and ratings on project outcomes, there is no proven evidence in the reviewed documents on the fact that RBM implementation at agency level has supported development outcomes.

Many of the challenges noted with RBM implementation are similar to challenges reported in other and earlier RBM reviews:

a) Lack of understanding and guidance of what RBM is and why we are doing it
b) Structural and system issues
c) Capacity constraints and costs of RBM
d) Measurement and method issues

e) Lack of a results culture  
f) Ownership and harmonisation

The review has also identified unintended consequences of RBM and notes that whilst unintended consequences have been discussed as risks of RBM in earlier reports, today some of these risks are noted as actual effects of the RBM reforms. Four unintended consequences were found:

a) Measure fixation;  
b) Suboptimisation  
c) Reduced motivation and risk taking  
d) Increased transaction costs and administrative burden

Common recommendations or solutions to the challenges and unintended consequences are to do more or better to address the challenge/unintended consequence (for example improving or increasing the amount of guidance or training) while maintaining RBM as the principal management approach. In general, there is a perception that there are solutions to the RBM challenges and unintended consequences, and, if just done better, the real benefits from RBM will arise.

However, other recommendations propose turning to new management approaches, such as adaptive management. These approaches argue that they are based on other theoretical underpinnings and assumptions, such as how problems are understood and defined and how knowledge, evidence and learning is understood. As a consequence, there are today several global initiatives, some hosted within development co-operation, who pilot or develop management tools that are more adjusted to complexity and promote adaptability and learning.

There does exist research evidence supporting principles promoted by these new approaches, such as that locally-led development is most effective and that managing adaptively is more likely to improve outcomes when decision-making autonomy is placed as close to frontline staff and local partners as possible (USAID, 2017; Honig, 2018). However, scholars have found that these approaches and methods also face challenges when implemented in practice. Moreover, when analysing RBM theory, as expressed during the time of the Paris Declaration, one can note that learning, ownership and adaptation were in fact some of the key aspects also in the original RBM theories. A conclusion drawn from this is that many of the difficulties encountered with RBM can be explained by difficulties to implement the approach in practice. Since practice never fully align with the theory, this will be most likely so for the alternative approaches. Continuous reviews on how a chosen management approach affects practice is therefore important.

However, since it is evident from this and other reviews that classical RBM implementation can be skewed toward upward accountability and can hamper learning, there is a need to learn from the theories that underpin new management approaches. Three lessons are important:

1. Focusing on better understanding the local contexts in which they operate;  
2. Adapting and tailoring interventions to local contexts based on features of the context during project design;  
3. Adapting interventions as contexts change. Organisations must be flexible enough to allow re-adaptation in response to exogenous shocks and the feedback from intervention performance.

These three points are applicable irrespective of the management method chosen by a provider.

One of the key learnings from this review is also that “one size does not fit all”, i.e. providers’ management methods and approaches would need to be adapted and depend on context. Classical RBM methods, and using planning tools where outputs are fully specified at the outset in a fixed logic could probably serve in
highly predictable environments and in projects where one can easily verify the change process. However, more bottom-up and flexible approaches where continuous re-adaptation is done are probably most suitable in environments with low predictability and where change processes are difficult to verify. In order to know how and when a certain model is most suitable development co-operation providers need to develop knowledge both on different management methods, and support staff to make their own judgement.

Moreover, this review has shown that accountability to domestic and international constituencies is for most providers the principal driver for how RBM internal systems have evolved. Many providers have a disproportionate focus in favour on accountability and a belief that communication in the form of simple measurable facts will lead to increased trust and legitimacy. A challenge for providers is to build and communicate a narrative explaining how development co-operation works and the conditions in which it supports sustainable development. There is for example evidence that public does not only desire numbers but more qualitative information about the development process and the complexities involved in achieving results. An effective communications approach could support providers to build a shield against external pressure, which in turn could free up space for the organisation to focus more on internal organisational matters such as building capacity for more effective achievement of development results.

At the corporate level, development cooperation providers need to develop a solid theory of change capturing how all channels (bilateral and multilateral) and instruments will contribute to the overall objectives set for the development cooperation programme, throughout the results chain. They also need a system that enables to assess performance and contribution to the achievement of development results across the entire portfolio. While there is not a “one size fits all” approach given that organisations operate in various environments and are subject to different governing processes, a number of elements need to be in place. They include aspects as diverse as the purpose of RBM, theory of change, results frameworks, monitoring and evaluation processes, feedback loop and related decision-making aspects and reporting processes, knowledge management and learning, incentives. These building blocks, informed by lessons from the reviews and from new approaches, will come along with the principles that should underpin results approaches (e.g. ownership and alignment) to constitute the core guiding principles for RBM in development co-operation, to be reflected at the different management levels.
References


CGIAR (2017), Evaluation of Results-Based Management in CGIAR, Vanderberg, Wibguldus.


Finland (2018), Meta-evaluation of Project and Programme Evaluations in 2015-2017 - Evaluation on Finland’s Development Policy and Cooperation, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland


ODI (2017b), *Putting theory into practice. How DFID is doing development differently*. Wild L, Booth D, and Walters C.


### Annex 1

**Table 5. Evaluations on RBM performance in donor agencies**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Title of evaluation</th>
<th>Purpose/context of evaluation:</th>
<th>Method:</th>
<th>Earlier RBM evaluations/reviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NORAD</td>
<td>The aid administration’s practice of results-based management</td>
<td>To understand how RBM has been operationalized; to understand the consequences of the current RBM approach; to look at how RBM contributes (or not) to development outcomes.</td>
<td>Both MFA and Norad and their support to CSOs. In three levels: Strategic level, Portfolio level and Grant level Multiple sources, 90 interviews.</td>
<td>RBM evaluation in 2014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>World Bank</td>
<td>Results and Performance of the World Bank Group. 2016</td>
<td>Status and degree of success with integrating M4R’s key principles, measurement of outcomes and use of evidence for adaptive management and learning to drive results. Developing M4R capacity</td>
<td>Based primarily on a desk review of project-level evaluations and the limited number of existing country strategies since</td>
<td>IEG evaluation from 1998.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Office of Foreign Assistance at the Department of State (US).</td>
<td>Evaluation of the Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance resources’ implementation of the managing for results framework.</td>
<td>To assess the effectiveness of the Managing for Results framework as it relates to the management of FA programs and resources.</td>
<td>Review of Management for Results (MfR) training, guidance, communications as well as management documents and prior studies. Electronic surveys, stakeholder interviews, and focus groups. Analysis of MfR products from two regional and two functional bureaus.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDC</td>
<td>Evaluation of SDC’s Results Based Management System with a Focus on Poverty Reduction. 2017.</td>
<td>The relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of SDC’s RBM System; a system covering most SDC management processes from the corporate to the project levels and all domains.</td>
<td>Review of SDC RBM documentation and processes. Three field visits to Ukraine, Rwanda and Bangladesh, Two surveys for 700 staff, 60 surveys and three e-discussions.</td>
<td>Short review in 2013.</td>
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</table>
To provide evidence and lessons as an input to implementing the RBM framework. To formulate recommendations for increasing RBM relevance, efficiency and effectiveness. Review from 2009-2017. Examination of institutions and actors across CGIAR system. Examined drivers of RBM, lessons from piloting RBM, support for RBM and experiences for optimising it.

Table 5 Evaluations and reviews on results based financing mechanisms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name of evaluation</th>
<th>Purpose:</th>
<th>Method:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NORAD:</td>
<td>Experiences with Results-Based Payments in Norwegian Development Aid. 2015 Evaluation Department.</td>
<td>To summarize the experiences from results-based initiatives in Norwegian development cooperation and enhance the knowledge base for future decisions involving results-based payments.</td>
<td>Desk review, supplemented with interviews with key people involved in Norwegian results-based initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID:</td>
<td>Semi-systematic review to understand Payments-by-Results mechanisms in developing countries. 2017 Dr Maren Duvenback</td>
<td>Identify all available high-quality quantitative research of international development programmes using payment by results; Identify trends and generalizable lessons on how, whether and under what circumstances PbR programmes were successful in international development contexts.</td>
<td>Out of thousands peer-reviewed evaluations sifted, 100 were analysed to assessing whether PbR programmes in development had statistically significant effects. Of the 100, DFID funded 23 programmes. The researchers only considered quantitative approaches and screened them against quality criteria.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID:</td>
<td>Review of Payment by Results in DFID. 2017. Dr Paul Clist</td>
<td>Lessons from 20 innovative PbR programmes within DFID’s portfolio</td>
<td>Review of evaluation reports (where available), annual reviews, informal and internal lessons-learned products, notes, and interviews with programme teams.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6. Other studies and reviews related to RBM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Name of study</th>
<th>Focus</th>
<th>Method:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>Analysis of Joint Results Frameworks in EU Joint Programming Alexander O’Riordan Katarina Courtnadje-Kovačević</td>
<td>To inform and discuss current experience in developing joint results frameworks To assess to which extent data quality mechanisms are active in the view of formulating approaches how to best engage in this process.</td>
<td>Analysis of 7 country case studies, interviews. Desk-review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DFID</td>
<td>The politics of the results agenda in DFID 1997-2017</td>
<td>Questions: What exactly is the results agenda in the UK context? Where did it come from? Why did it emerge? How have people reacted? And what can we learn from this experience?</td>
<td>Literature review. 60 interviews.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>Evidence base for collaborating, learning and adapting Dexis Consulting Group</td>
<td>Does an intentional, systematic and resourced approach contribute to organisational effectiveness or development outcomes? Under what conditions? How do we measure CLA contributions to development results?</td>
<td>A literature review to discover what information exists in the peer-reviewed and grey literature to answer the questions above, as well as the methods others have used to try to answer them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country/Source</td>
<td>Description</td>
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</table>
| Canada, Netherlands, New Zealand, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom and the World Bank. | *Strengthening the results chain: Synthesis of case studies of results-based management by providers. 2017. OECD/DAC*
| Global Affairs Canada | *Synthesis of Evaluations of Grants and Contributions Programming funded by the International Development Assistance Envelope, 2011-2016, 2017 Universalia*
| Sida | *Evaluation of the market systems development approach - Lessons for expanded use and adaptive management at Sida. 2018 Itad.*
| NORAD | *The quality of Reviews and Decentralised Evaluations in Development Cooperation. 2017. Itad & Chr. Michelsen Institute*
| USAID | *Evaluation Utilization at USAID. 2016. Management Systems International*

| Analysis of results-based management approaches by development co-operation providers. To identify and document key themes, current challenges and good practice in results-based management, and to make use of this analysis to encourage dialogue and drive collective learning amongst the OECD/DAC Results Community. | Evidence from seven case studies conducted by the OECD in 2016-17, literature on results-based management of development co-operation. Desk-based review of materials (supplied by providers) and phone interviews with staff responsible for results at provider headquarters. |
| Identify lessons and recurring challenges to inform future departmental programming and foster horizontal learning Including. How well RBM tools are used in programme evaluation | Review of forty evaluation reports. Review of how RBM tools were used in the evaluation reports. |
| To support ongoing efforts to enhance effectiveness, promote learning, foster the move toward a “Solutions Bank,” and simplify processes. | Review of WBs self-evaluation systems |
| Forthcoming | |
| Assess the quality of reviews, Examine the use of the review findings Identify factors contributing to quality and use | Meta-evaluation: survey of grant managers, quality assessment of 60 reviews and TORs conducted in 2014, case studies from five of the reviews, online survey of staff Norwegian MFA, embassies and Norad. |
| To help USAID determine the extent to which its evaluations are being used and what guidance, tools, or Agency practices might be improved to enhance evaluation utilization | Thorough document review, survey and group interviews with USAID staff in 24 Agency Operating Units in Washington and overseas. Interviews with key informants in USAID and nine partner organisations that conduct evaluation for USAID. |
| The quality, cost, and dissemination of foreign aid program evaluations. | Assessed 173 FY2015 evaluations for programs at the six agencies: USAID, State, MCC, HHS’s Centers for Disease Control and Prevention under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, USDA’s Foreign Agricultural Service, DOD’s Global Train and Equip program. Analysed cost and contract documents; reviewed agency websites and dissemination procedures.
Finland
Ministry for Foreign Affairs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To provide recommendations enabling the MFA to enhance the quality of decentralised evaluations, to improve evaluation management practices and to foster evaluation capacity development; to provide insights from the evaluation reports for recommendations on how to improve development cooperation.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A methodological quality assessment using a standardised assessment tool (a detailed checklist for 51 evaluation reports and their Terms of References).</td>
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</table>