Digital Health Applied Leadership Program

Needs Assessment Findings
Context and methods
Why a Digital Health Applied Leadership Program (DHALP)?

Current trainings do not fully meet digital health leadership capacity building needs:

• Do not focus enough on implementation.
• Lack leadership and management skills.
• Focus on individual learners, dispersed across many regions and organizations.

Need to transform the field of digital health through training that addresses the expressed needs of those who will lead system transformation.
Our country work is revealing government frustration with existing learning opportunities in digital health

“The current model of [digital health] training and learning is not effective.”

“[Digital health capacity building] is truly a space that a lot of donors and organizations are struggling with.”

“People across different tiers and ministries don't talk to each other.”

Extracted from interviews with more than 60 stakeholders from country governments, donor agencies, education providers, and other digital health stakeholders.
Hypothesis: What do we *think* needs to change in digital health capacity development?

**From:**
- Individual learners at all levels.
- Non-governmental organizations (NGO)-developed learning objectives and competency frameworks.
- Time-bound, in-person workshops.
- Technical training separate from leadership and management training.

**To:**
- Teams of learners at mid-level.
- Learner-developed learning objectives and competency frameworks.
- Continuous access through digital platforms.
- Integrated technical, leadership, management training.
Methods for testing our hypothesis (I)

- Digital Square, with the support from PEPFAR, undertook a needs assessment to understand the goals for the consortium that would lead the DHALP.

- The findings from this assessment were used to inform the request for applications design and will be shared with the winning consortium to inform their execution.

**The needs assessment focused on:**

- Priority learners
- Course approach
- Course content
Methods for testing our hypothesis (II)

18 key informant interviews conducted

- **Experts** in digital health, ICT, and/or education
- **Sector representation**
  - Academia (7)
  - Donor (1)
  - Government (4)
  - NGO (9)
  - For profit (1)
- **Geographic representation**
  - South Africa (14)
  - India (2)
  - Vietnam (1)
  - Philippines (1)

*Some key informants represented multiple sectors, e.g., working in both academia and government.

**Intended methodological approach was to interview key informants who represented different regions of Africa and Asia. Due to the high response rate of key informants in South Africa, the final key informant list was geographically skewed. Care should be taken when interpreting results to extrapolate beyond the South African context.
Methods for testing our hypothesis (III)

Data analysis approach

• A priori codebook guided by needs assessment objectives and interview guide.
• Iterative coding using ATLAS.ti.
• 46-page thematic analysis with representative quotations.
Findings
Priority Learner: Sector

“They need to understand that they need to work with others. If there’s one lesson that has to be imparted to a digital health person, it’s this. Need to understand what your role is, otherwise, the multi-sectoral work will fail. Understand that digital health work is multi-sectoral.” (K13)

“If you want digital health platforms to be scaled-up, then it has to involve government.” (D12)

“Don’t leave out the NGOs as they play a key role in advising the department of health.” (D3)

Though “Ministry of Health” was most suggested by key informants, with many highlighting other sectors, including:

- Government: health, social welfare, information technology, and systems.
- Non-governmental organizations/private sector.
- National and regional levels.
Priority Learner: Career Level

“Look at stratification of participants – different levels of management, even the minister can be included at a high level.” (D11)

“There are those who are in touch with what is happening ‘on the ground’ but who has the power to make decisions.” (D10)

“The top leadership at the policy maker level might also benefit from the course specifically senior officers who have no prior experience of ICT programs.” (D15)

There was variability among key informants with respect to career-level of priority DHALP learners:

- Most recommended senior-level leaders.
- A few recommended mid-level or entry-level.
- Some recommended training those at different management levels.
Priority Learner: Was our hypothesis correct?

**Hypothesis**

- Individual learners at all levels.
- Individual learners at all levels.

**Summary of findings**

**From:**
- Individual learners at all levels.
- Individual learners at all levels.

**To:**
- Teams of learners at mid-level.
- Ministry of health staff are the priority, especially senior-level leaders at the ministry.
- Cross-sectoral government stakeholders, non-governmental organizations, and private sector would also benefit from this course.

**Recommendation:** Consider broadening priority learners beyond ministry of health teams and ensure senior-level leaders at the ministry are getting their learning objectives met, in order to maximize effectiveness of DHALP.
Course Approach: Recruitment and Selection

Key informants suggested best practices with respect to recruitment, selection, and inclusivity:

- Advertise widely.
- Have alumni recruit new students.
- Have an application process where people express why they want to participate.
- Prioritize women and other gender representation.

“Screening of candidates need to be done properly to select correct candidates.” (D11)

“Have an application process where people compete for the scholarship and why they want to participate.” (D1)

“Create an alumni and possibly an ongoing project where graduates become mentors and graduates need to recruit new students.” (D7)
Course Approach: Modality Overall

“Ideally you have some sort of combination of asynchronous and synchronous learning so that you feel some higher degree of commitment to it. There is a bit more of that personal touch which makes it easier to interact with peers or pose your questions to experts. It is a little too impersonal when it’s just the online learning platform.” (D5)

“If the training] hasn’t applied it to your working environment, it is kind of pointless. If it’s not aimed at my working environment, it’s wasting a day... if it’s not followed-up to ensure that learning is applied, then it doesn’t have value.” (D4)

“Structure, structure, and structure... it is essential that the facilitators and attendees have adequate structure to prevent confusion but to enable that everyone is actively present, even in an asynchronized manner.” (D9)

Key informants supported the blended modality presented and recommended:

- A structured program with clear, tangible deliverables and deadlines.
- Promoting communication and interaction in the online format and developing peer-learning networks.
- Include accountable and supportive mechanisms put in place at learner workplaces to ensure participation.
- Connect the course to the workplace by having learners develop and sign professional development contracts and re-entry action plans.
- Accreditation/certification to promote engagement and retention.
- Standard training evaluation approaches to help with understanding the impact of the program on learners.
Course Approach: Specific Modalities

Online
- Platform must be **easy to use** and clearly outline expected deadlines for assignments.
- Must have a system that **promotes communication and interaction**.

In-person
- In-person training should be very **interactive and support group learning**.
- **Time management** is important and should include breaks that allow these working professionals to answer emails or take phone calls.

Coaching
- Coaching should have **clear outcomes** and specific, intentional, structured activities.
- **Who the coach is matters.** They should be committed, knowledgeable, well-matched (e.g., career, language), and skilled in coaching.
Course Approach: Curriculum Development

“I find a lot of training are interesting and practical, but the struggle is taking learning and translating them into something hands-on.” (KI #12)

“Consider a regional approach as opposed to a US to Africa/Asia/Latin America approach – e.g., one size does not fit all of Africa (West, East, central, South are very, very different).” (D6)

“If the training is going to be very digital, it might exclude certain countries – how would you then create print-based plus recorded/other methods to reach participants.” (D3)

Recommended approaches to effective curriculum development include:

• Following adult education and instructional design principles (e.g., clear objectives, well-organized, applicable, interactive, practice-based).

• Ensure content is tailored to local contexts, requirements, and health system level (e.g., national vs. district).

• Offer training in multiple languages.

• Ensure examples and case studies used in training are inclusive.

• Consider how to reduce barriers to accessing online trainings.
Course approach: Was our hypothesis correct?

Hypothesis

From:
- NGO-developed learning objectives and competency frameworks.
- Time-bound, in-person workshops.

To:
- Learner-developed learning objectives and competency frameworks.
- Continuous access through digital platforms.

Summary of findings

- NGO-developed learning objectives and competency frameworks.
- Time-bound, in-person workshops.
- Generic and single-language offerings.

Recommendation: Ensure case studies, applied projects and initiatives are part of the overall curriculum; invest in translation to improve learning experience; develop a mixed-modality approach that includes but is not restricted to digital.

An applied approach to learning including case studies and practical uses of content.
A mixed-modality delivery including digital and other modalities.
Deliberate effort to ensure content is relevant to local contexts, and in different languages to meet learners where they are.
Course Content: Knowledge

Key informants had many recommendations for course content, spanning the gamut:

- **Basic understanding of the health** and public health sector.
- Comprehensive knowledge of digital health
  - Terminology and concepts (e.g., digital health, information and communications technology, monitoring & evaluation, health information systems).
  - **Benefits** of digital health.
- **Global frameworks** and goods (advantages/disadvantages, selection criteria).
- Ecosystem and architecture.
- Understanding of health information systems, including how it can inform **data-driven decision-making**.

“They need to know what the challenges are in health informatics, and they need to understand the challenges from a digital perspective. They need to understand the challenges from a patient’s perspective. They need to understand who they are working with [and] what digital intervention.

They need to have been in the frontline to know what is happening.”

(KI #4)

“A strong working knowledge of their subject field as well as strong ICT and technical background.”

(D16)
Course Content: Knowledge Outcomes

Course content recommendations provide a view into the ideal graduate from DHALP. Our learners should:

- **Have a well-rounded knowledge base** including topics in health care generally, digital health, and health information systems.

- **Understand existing tools, ecosystems, and architecture to scale** solutions rather than build more bespoke digital health tools.

- Be able to **evaluate digital health solutions and identify appropriate solutions** for their system.

- Be able to understand and **clearly communicate the benefits of digital health solutions**.

“Provide them with a very thorough understanding of ‘WHY’.” (KI #10)

“[They should understand] what digital health interventions will work for this country?” (KI #4)

“How and where everything fits together.” (KI #10)
Key informants identified a few traits that digital health leaders needed:

- **Management skills** to support:
  - Strategic program planning and priority setting.
  - Financial planning, resource allocation, and mobilization.
  - Program and adaptive management.

- **Advocacy and communication skills** that support **multisectoral collaboration and implementation**.

"[A digital health leaders] needs core leadership and management skills to oversee strategy development and translation into operational plans and budgets with appropriate resource allocation and oversee implementation of plans.” (KI #1)

"Should be able to coordinate technical efforts and projects, collaborate at a national level, engage stakeholders at all levels meaningfully and advocate for digital health.” (D6)

"Some sort of sense of what it takes to scale an application and, everything that goes into scaling an application.” (D5)
Course content: Was our hypothesis correct?

Summary of findings

**Hypothesis**

- Technical training separate from leadership and management training.
- Technical training separate from leadership and management training.

**Recommendation:** Leverage applied learning and case study approach to explore digital health topics from multiple lenses and reinforce an integrated curriculum; incorporate advocacy and communication skills in addition to technical, leadership, and management training.

**From:**

- Technical training separate from leadership and management training.
- Technical training separate from leadership and management training.

**To:**

- Integrated technical, leadership, management training.
- Integrated technical, leadership, management training.
- Advocacy and communication skills.
- Readiness to support multi-sectoral collaboration and implementation.
- Understanding of health, digital health, the current ecosystem, and how to evaluate options well when making a decision about digital health.
Summary of findings-based recommendations

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<td>• Broaden priority learners beyond MoH teams.</td>
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<td>• Ensure senior-level leaders at the ministry are getting their learning objectives met, so they can be effective sponsors and champions of mid-level DHALP learning cohorts.</td>
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Digital Square is supported by:

Digital Square is a PATH-led initiative funded and designed by the United States Agency for International Development, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and a consortium of other donors.

This presentation was made possible by the generous support of the American people through the United States Agency for International Development. The contents are the responsibility of PATH and do not necessarily reflect the views of USAID or the United States Government.