

Evaluative thinking guides the way: A map to adaptive management for USAID partners

Murphy, Christine P., MA and Wyatt, Leah D., MSc (Independent Consultants)

Adaptive management is driving change at USAID:

Since 2017, USAID’s [foundational policy](#), ADS 201, has mandated that “USAID must be able to readily adapt programs in response to changes in context and new information.”

- Practically, it requires that USAID missions conduct annual portfolio reviews, as well as mid-course strategic stocktaking, both of which rely on data and insight from partners.

Recent [Agency-wide initiatives](#) emphasize the need to be adaptive:

- To better understand contexts and respond to crises on the Journey to Self Reliance
- To increase inclusion and minimize risk when using technology as part of the Digital Strategy
- To respond quickly to opportunities and develop new markets via Private Sector Engagement

Recent solicitations have included standard [contract requirements for collaborating, learning and adapting \(CLA\)](#). Standard CLA award language, originally developed by Leah Wyatt with USAID/Uganda, helps define expectations for processes and deliverables required of partners.




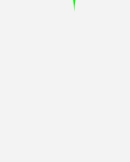
However, the primary intended audience for most of USAID’s guidance on adaptive management is missions, not partners.

Where can partners turn for directions?

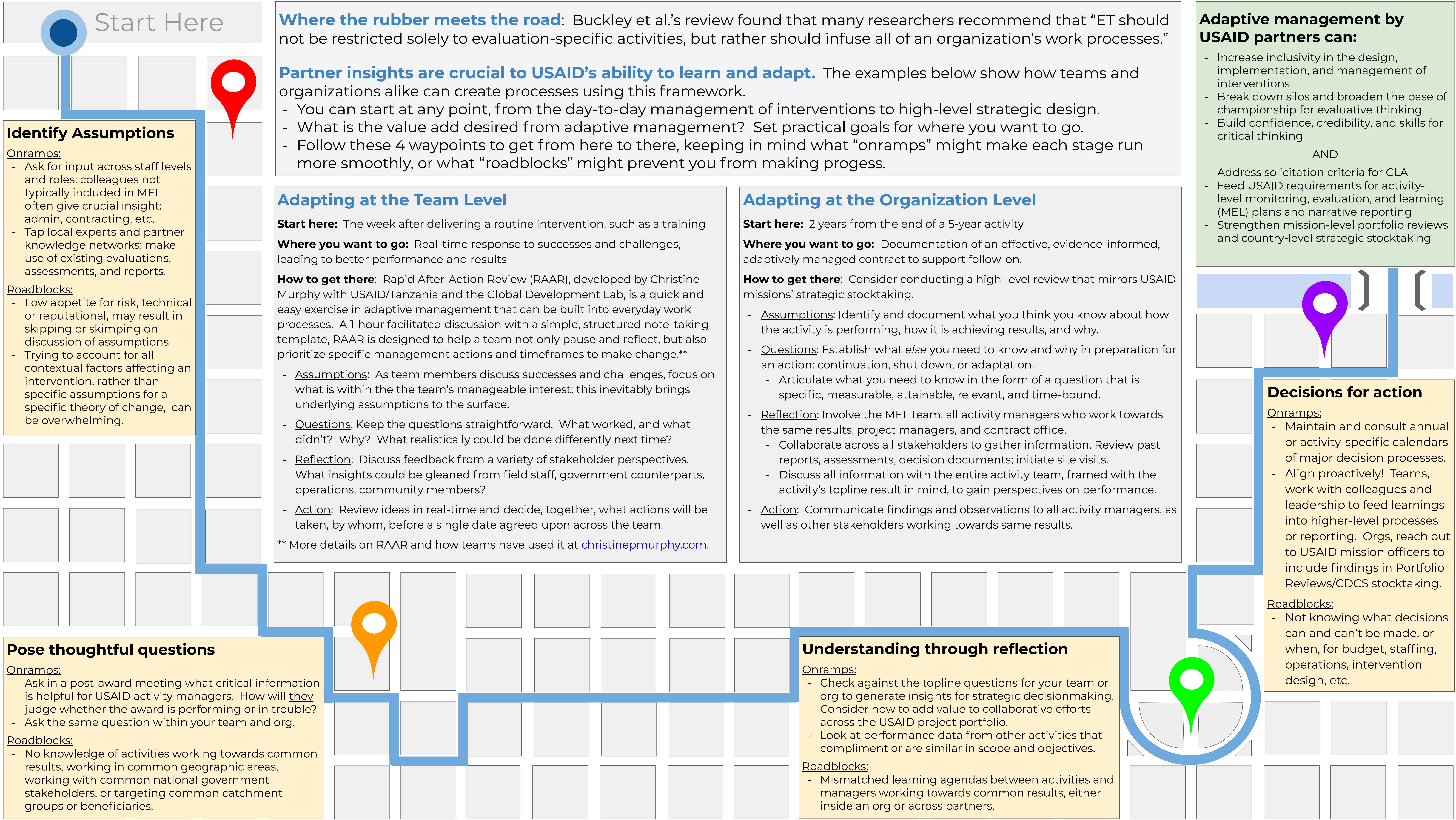
Based on more than 24 years of combined experience supporting USAID and international development partners, we present a 4-point path based on Buckley et al.’s (2015) definition of Evaluative Thinking (ET). These points can help implementing partners

- [articulate a process](#) for adaptive management,
- [leverage reporting requirements](#) to document adaptation, and
- [demonstrate a capability](#) to feed into program decisions at USAID.

Map Key: Components of Evaluative Thinking

-  1. Identify assumptions
-  2. Pose thoughtful questions
-  3. Pursue deeper understanding through reflection and perspective making
-  4. Inform decisions in preparation for action

Four crucial waypoints for adaptive management: assumptions, questions, reflection, action



Where to next? Our original session was intended to be a discussion, and there are many roads that can lead to successful adaptive management. We’d love to hear from you!

Christine Murphy, MA
[christinepmurphy.com](#)

Leah Denise Wyatt, MSc:
[leahdenisewyatt.com](#)