

THE VOICE INC | LOCAL LEADERSHIP AND COLLECTIVE ACTION PROGRAM (LLCAP)

A Case study of the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) Course 1



Photo source: Harvard Kennedy Website

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Summary

This case study on the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) Course 1, was undertaken by Latrobe University's Institute of Human Security and Social Change (IHSSC) in April- May 2023. The purpose was:

- To contribute evidence to the Local Leadership and Collective Action Program (LLCAP) Monitoring and Learning framework
- To provide The Voice Inc's (TVI) Board information on the outcomes and value of PDIA
- To contribute to LLCAP reporting for the Australian Government as per the LLCAP grant funding agreement
- To inform the next phase of Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) courses

The study involved a desk-based review of PDIA documents supplied by TVI, a small sample of interviews and group discussions with a select number of PDIA participants and TVI staff. The study occurred at the completion of PDIA course 1 and sought to summarise the feedback provided on the value of the course to participants and TVI and its contribution towards the progress of issues and reform. However, it will take a longer to understand how and if the PDIA course can be attributed to the growth of these individuals' developmental leadership and the progress of their specific reform objectives.

Value to participants

Overall, the survey data and interview feedback has shown that **the Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation course has been successful to date** with 32 (94%) of participants completing the course and 29 (97%) of the 30 respondents to a post course survey saying it met their expectations, and the same proportion saying they were already applying what they had learnt. Participants especially valued the PDIA fishbone and other analysis tools, having a structured space and the opportunity to think collectively, coaching from the Harvard team and the manageable learning. Participants highlighted a range of specific learning, including understanding their 'change spaces', the critical role of cross issue collaboration and how to unpack and begin solving complex problems.

Contribution to issues and reforms

PDIA teams evolved in different ways through and after the PDIA course. However, **there are strong indications that the course is contributing to reform efforts, and adaptive problem solving**. This includes in PDIA teams, organisations or individuals progressing 'education/ literacy' and 'sorcery accusation related violence'. However, it is noted the progression from PDIA courses into reform coalitions is not likely to be linear or immediate and the LLCAP network and is still in its early stages.

PDIA 'Education Team' Spotlight

A six person team united through the PDIA course and committed to address the issue of Education in PNG. Their first focus area was on existing early childhood literacy work in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville (ARoB). Through good connections and lobbying with the national and provincial government, the team were able to mobilise resources and implement a program at Prep and Elementary levels 1 and 2 with 32 schools across north, south and central Bougainville. The key successes of the program included the procurement and logistical delivery of Bilum Books including teacher training manuals. One of the PDIA Education team members was heavily involved in the training of teachers. Interviews conducted with the Education team members reflected the value of the PDIA course in helping to framing the problem and narrative (Fishbone). *"The course has helped to build our team, strengthen our problem narrative on the need to address education and literacy in PNG"*.



Provision of contextualised teams and issue group support

Alongside existing relationships **TVI applied a number of strategies to maximise the likelihood of participants completing the course and applying the lessons learnt.** These included; customising course to the PNG context (with Harvard team), assessing participant readiness to take the course, initial face to face engagement and team building, developing a custom TVI support model for teams, providing research and technical support eg. co-authoring issue framing papers.

Contribution to relationships for future collective action

Finally it was revealed that the high course completion and participant satisfaction rates were possible because of **TVI's prior investment in relationship and trust building with organisations and leaders over many years**, and their understanding of the context of PNG. All too often in the development sector this relational work is invisible, underemphasised, and often therefore under-valued (xi). TVI was able to leverage their relationships and networks to facilitate support for PDIA team reforms.

Improvements & Recommendations

This case study has noted the key strategies which have been successful in the delivery of PDIA course 1 and its contribution to some emerging positive outcomes. These have been things that have 'worked well' will be continued into PDIA Course 2. However, the PDIA surveys feedback and interviews have indicated some areas of possible improvement on the delivery of the PDIA course to better support LLCAP leaders and their reform efforts.

1. Improve planning of support for teams in order to better progress reforms more effectively. This includes planning team composition, locations, internet support during orientation and knowledge products to support team issue reforms
2. Assess participant competency in using information technology/ ability to navigate online learning prior to final team selection
3. Provide a more in-depth induction that helps explain key PDIA concepts & includes more time on reform discussions
4. Engage key authorisers and stakeholders for each issue team as early as possible
5. Where possible provide support for face-to-face connection between participants at multiple stages in the PDIA process
6. Better define and plan TVI's support for teams that continue reform work after the PDIA course.

Background

The Voice Inc. (TVI) was established in 2007 by a group of law students at the University of Papua New Guinea who recognized the need for young people to be active agents of change in their communities. TVI has now grown into an organization that has Centres for Leadership delivering programs on multiple University Campuses across the country, with an alumni network of over 600 people and is recognized as a leading and dynamic youth development organization. In 2021, TVI secured funding from the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to establish the Local Leadership and Collective Action Program (LLCAP). The LLCAP builds upon the foundational work of TVI to help connect and support developmental leaders within emerging and existing coalitions to address public policy reforms on social, economic and environmental challenges faced by people in Papua New Guinea (PNG).ⁱ

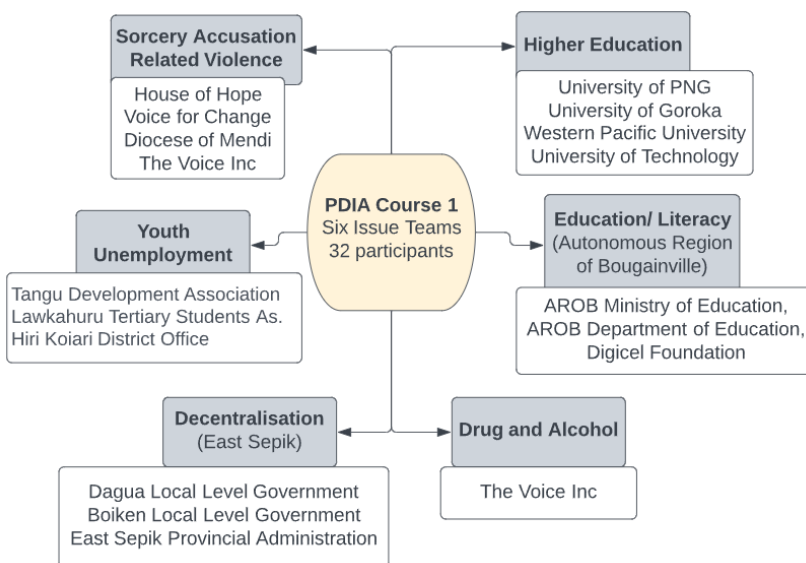
LLCAP’s role is to mobilise and build a network of motivated and strategic individuals and organisations with the right incentives, values, interests and opportunities to effect sustainable change through problem driven reforms. The program seeks to legitimise alternative ideas that support inclusive growth by equipping these leaders with the right tools to undertake problem driven reform processes that will promote sustainable policy reform processes.

Harvard University’s role is to support LLCAP with capacity and tools.

This includes the delivery of its *Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)* course which aims to train and engage development practitioners and create a community of practice for people working on implementing public policies. PDIA is a step-by-step approach which helps people break down a complex problem into bitesize chunks. This helps them identify the root cause(s) of their issue as well as viable actions, adaptations and more actions until the problem or part of it, is solved.ⁱⁱ

In September 2022, the first 12-week PDIA course was launched. 34 change makers from across Papua New Guinea (PNG) were invited by TVI to form teams focused on the issues they are already working on. The six issue-based teams and 17 organisations involved can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: PDIA cohort 1 teams and organisations



ESSENTIAL PROJECT DATA

34 participants enrolled

32 participants completed (94%)

18 male participants (56%)

14 female participants (44%)

30 participants completed the end of course survey of which 29 (96.7%) said that the PDIA course met their expectations.

4 PDIA issue framing papers were produced supporting issue reform teams.

Content

This case study includes;

- Essential project and participant data and study methodology
- A summary of participants' key learnings and feedback
- Information about the course's contribution to initial changes that have happened due to people's participation in the course
- An overview of the key strategies applied by TVI to support PDIA participants as well as an assessment of their effectiveness
- A set of lessons learnt and recommendations.

Study questions, methodology and timing:

The study asked;

1. What strategies and approaches did TVI use to initiate and support the first iteration of the PDIA course and how did this contribute to its outcomes?
2. What was the overall feedback and reflections of PDIA Cohort 1 on the training and its value?
3. How has the PDIA course added value to the reform work of PDIA Cohort 1 participants and teams to date?
4. How could the PDIA course be more effective in supporting reform/ more effectively delivered? What factors help make a better chance of success? What changes are suggested for the next Cohort 2 PDIA course?

The study is based on a desk-based documentation review of PDIA Course 1 survey reports, TVI mid-point health check reports and issue blogs, supplemented by Pause and Reflect interviews conducted by La Trobe with issue groups and interviews with TVI staff.

The study occurred at the completion of PDIA course 1 and sought to summarise the feedback provided on the value of the course to participants and TVI and its contribution towards the progress of issues and reform. However, it will take a longer to understand how and if the PDIA course can be attributed to the growth of these individuals' developmental leadership and the progress of their specific reform objectives.

What participants liked

Overall, participants highly rated the course (4.48/5). The elements they enjoyed most about the PDIA course were;

- **Problem Identification / Fishbone tool** - The majority of participants from Cohort 1 commented on the usefulness of this tool. They felt that the process of identifying the problem using the fishbone tool was most valuable as the process helped them to identify the root cause of their problem and break it down into smaller parts to be addressed.
- **Having a structured space and the opportunity to think collectively** – Participants felt it was useful to dissect issues in a safe space and in groups to share ideas and thoughts. One participant noted they could do this;



“without judgment then individually being allowed to dissect it alone and then regrouping again and be allowed to brainstorm it over and over and over. It gave me much insight into correctly identifying the issue and knowing that the problem or root problem can be adjusted at different points when identify those entry points and how much authority each one had in order to push change”.

- **Practical coaching and time with the Harvard Team** - Despite some noted issues with internet connectivity, people appreciated the face time with the Harvard team and mentors.

“Having two mentors per team has proven to be very effective”.

Support from [the] Teaching assistants [was] very good. Their understanding of students learning environment, especially in internet access by students at any given location has truly encouraged me to continue through the 12 weeks. (vi)

- **Manageable learning** - Participants shared that the PDIA course provides all the necessary videos and tools that were covered to the teams for future use after the course. People felt the curriculum was excellent as well as the approach to teaching. On average, people spent one to three hours per week to read through the materials for the weekly modules, completing individual and group assignments.

Participants’ key learnings

Participants shared that they learned a lot through their participation in the course which helped them to gather new insights, adapt their approach, and strengthen their reform practice.

Key learnings

Key learnings included:

- **A complex problem can only be solved if it is truly understood** - Participants shared that the course has helped them to gain a deep understanding of the problems they are aiming to solve. ^{iii iv v}

“Our key learning is the systematic process of solving complex problems ... Do not jump into conclusions or solutions based on narrowly framed ideas or emotions. It is important to spend more time breaking down the problem into small pieces and understand their root causes. In that way you will identify entry points to start mobilizing resources and energy to start the solution process.”(iii)

- **Understanding your change space is crucial** - To be able to solve a complex issue you need to understand it in its local context and the system within which it operates. This includes understanding the mindsets, power dynamics and relationships that are at play in keeping the problem in places. ^{vi(iii)}

We also reflected on the importance of understanding our change space by applying the AAA Analysis (Authority, Acceptance and Ability) ... We reflected that we need to be aware of the different synergies and power dynamics at work in an organisation, department, or even relationships – being aware allows one to find the right entry points.” (iii)



- **Collaboration is key** - To contribute to reform and solve complex problems it's crucial to work together with others. This includes different types of stakeholders and those working at different levels, as well as positive deviants ^{vii} (iii, v)

“One of the greatest learnings has been the need to work with people with different opinions and the importance of doing that.” (vii).

LEARNING: TVI highlighted the value of the PDIA course in further building relationships, trust and a common reform language with developmental leaders working on reform issues. TVI's prior investment in relationship and trust building with organisations and leaders over many years, and their understanding of the context of PNG helped provide a platform of support for PDIA team reforms.

- The organisations and leaders who graduated PDIA expressed that the course provided tangible value to their ability to solve the problems they face in their daily work.
- TVI has reflected that the value of this training combined with the relationships and trust built with 17 organisations during the PDIA course, will be an important foundation for future attempts at collective action.
- Alongside relationship value, PDIA provided participants a common language for understanding reform and how to take action in ways more likely to succeed.
- TVI believes this common language will help different groups work together to frame common approaches to reform and will grow over time as participants share PDIA concepts in their own spaces and future PDIA cohort graduates.

Contribution to issues/ reforms

The evidence highlights that the PDIA course is adding value to the reform work of its participants and teams. Participants have built new knowledge and skills which they are starting to put into practice, and which is helping them to find viable access points and influence others to contribute to their reform agendas.

- **Participants are applying their PDIA learnings into their own work and/or personal life** - 96.7% of the participants who filled in the Mid-point Health Check in survey shared that they have been able to apply the learnings of the PDIA course in their own work and/or in their personal life. For example, one participant who works at a Ministry has used the *PDIA tools and learnings as a cross reference for existing iterative work that they were involved in prior to joining the program. PDIA has helped them to refine an important engagement strategy in time for submission to decision-makers at the highest level (vii),*
- **Participants are adapting their approach to solving complex issues** - As a result of their learnings participants have adapted their approach on how to undertake their reform work and/or what ideas, activities and/or strategies to focus on. For example, one group identified that self-interests of people in power, weak governance, and a lack of transparency and accountability are barriers to positive change. To overcome this, they are now looking to secure buy-in at the local level from constituents and key stakeholders through consultative bottom-up planning. It is their expectation that following a co-design process combined with the public sharing of plans will increase awareness around the issues they are looking to solve as well as shared ownership. Additionally, they've identified a range of risk mitigation strategies to address the identified constraints. (iii)

- **Participants are finding viable access points** - Applying the positive deviance approach one group managed to get buy-in from a private organisation to champion and implement reform. This has had a ripple effect with two more donor agencies now being interested in providing financial support. (iv)
- **Participants are getting people and groups to contribute to reform** - One group's way of working has been adopted across their local institution and at the national level:

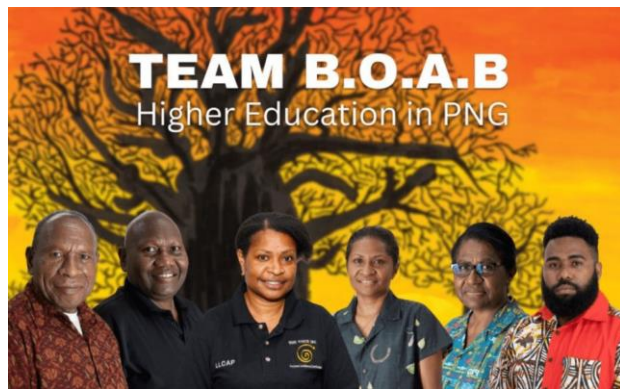
"The program started at the very time [the] earthquake struck the Institution I am working in. Right from the start the concepts guided me into dealing with problem solving, working in collaboration with colleagues and identify causes, sub-causes, entry points, work as authorized and to engage with authorizers to solve the problems. The process is ongoing, at institution level. On the national level, the same concepts are now being applied as team BOAB, works on the national issues." vi

PDIA 'Education Team' Spotlight

Based on the work of the Educations teams work on Early Childhood literacy in Bougainville, they have built strong relationships and trust within the provincial government and a recognition of the success of their program. As a result, the provincial government has agreed to scale up the program. Similarly, anecdotal feedback indicates learning from the program have been adopted by a similar DFAT education program.



Youth Employment Team. Photo source: ix



Higher Education Team. Photo source: viii

Key strategies applied by TVI to support the PDIA course

LLCAP applied a range of tailored strategies to initiate and support the first iteration of the PDIA course:^{ix}

- **Recruitment of course participants** - TVI utilised its existing relationships with partners and alumni. Additionally, staff travelled to partners working on the front line of issues in places difficult to reach through internet or phone.
- **Course customisation** - TVI worked closely with the Harvard team to customise the PDIA course and delivery approach. This included delivery format, preparing for limited internet and modifying training materials to cater for team's experience levels.
- **Participant readiness** - TVI assessed the readiness of prospective participants before signing them up for the course. This included preparatory information and a signed participant agreement.
- **Face to face engagement and team building** - TVI brought participants together to help them prepare their participation, co-design goals, and build an initial LLCAP network.



- **A PDIA support model** - TVI developed and implemented a model to support participants to participate effectively in the course. This included a TVI mentor/ support person for each group and small enabling support eg. phone credit, transport.
- **Research and technical support** – TVI helped prepare a PDIA Issues Framing Paper for each group which summarises the PDIA process undertaken by teams during the course and captures and frames their issue for further dialogue.

As a result of these strategies TVI achieved a strong attendance and completion rate for the PDIA course and increased the likelihood of lessons learnt from the course being applied. Additionally, teams facing challenges such as the highlands earthquake were able to continue their participation in the course by “*adapting and using whatsapp to submit assignments and finding time for the course even as they dealt with destroyed student accommodation and handled unrest*” (ix). This demonstrated a high commitment fostered by strong support from the LLCAP.

What could be improved (recommendations)

This case study has noted the key strategies which have been successful in the delivery of PDIA course 1 and its contribution to some emerging positive outcomes. These have been things that have ‘worked well’ will be continued into PDIA Course 2. However, the PDIA surveys feedback and interviews have indicated some areas of possible improvement on the delivery of the PDIA course to better support LLCAP leaders and their reform efforts.

How could the PDIA course be delivered more effectively?

Recommendation 1- Improve planning of support for teams in order to better progress reforms more effectively. This includes planning team composition, locations, internet support during orientation and knowledge products to support team issue reforms.

- **Getting teams right** – There was feedback from TVI staff and participants to dedicate time to the consideration of team compositions with the right structure and location. Some teams in different locations and organisations struggled to find time to meet and/or a clear shared reform goal.
- TVI suggested that teams from within a single organisation or a group already working together on a reform (eg. an existing coalition secretariat) may be able to embed PDIA more usefully in their existing efforts or daily work.
- **Knowledge products developed during the course have not been utilised to their fullest.** This includes issue framing papers and draft technical working papers. TVI supported four PDIA groups to co-author ‘issue framing papers’ that documented their issue, access points and their PDIA journey. Better understanding how teams and others can use these papers or other knowledge products that can be generated during the courses will be important to support the impact of future PDIA teams and LLCAP’s ability to influence issue dialogues.
- **Address the internet connection issues faced by many program participants** - An analysis of the negative comments revealed that internet connectivity was the main issue. People noted issues with connectivity in remote areas as well as some challenges with the technology such as ‘Canvas’ as well as hearing live online presentations. ^x Some suggestions include “send assignments via WhatsApp if emails and access to Canvas is down” and “For groups that are selected to present, a set time frame is provided, and they could do a power point and a voice over (screen casting) and post in the main forum for those in the course who are interested in the learning journey of other groups”.

Recommendation 2– TVI undertake competency/access assessments of potential participants prior to being accepted in the course and final team selection. Including information technology skills, ability to undertake online course/ written assignments, access to internet.

- **Screen participants prior to accepting them in the course and bring the right people together in a team** – Feedback provided noted issues with the selection of individuals and teams and ensuring they meet basic requirements such as education levels, ability to understanding concepts and how to participate in an online course. (x, vii, vi)

Recommendation 3 – Provide a more in-depth induction that helps explain key PDIA concepts & includes more time on reform discussions.

- **Better prepare participants with course information and concepts-** Comments included requests to better build people’s knowledge and skills in advance around what reform work is and how to effectively engage in it.

How could the PDIA course be more effective in supporting reform?

Recommendation 4: Engage key authorisers and stakeholders for each issue team as early as possible and try to keep them engaged through the PDIA process. Also consider having “a more authoriser driven group of people to help define and address the problem”, and to support the likelihood of teams progressing further into the reform.

- **Also, it was encouraged that TVI engage the key stakeholders** that teams need to be involved in their work to make their reform visions a reality. (vii)

Recommendation 5 – Where possible provide support for face-to-face connection, during the induction or orientation phase, but also at other points in the PDIA process.

- **Increase the opportunities and support for participants to meet face to face** – This was another area that received a lot of feedback suggesting the need for more in person contact. The rationale for this ranged from addressing internet connectivity issues but more broadly the challenge of better orientation and facilitating stronger bonding of LLCAP and issue group members and between groups as well. (x, vii)

Recommendation 6 - Better define and plan TVI’s support for teams that continue reform work after the PDIA course

- **Look at TVI capacity to support teams during and after the course** – Feedback on this highlighted some capacity constraints internally for TVI and the effort to get this course running. Also on how to build in better learning along the way (feedback loops) to inform TVI support.
- Also planning **how post PDIA support may work**, eg. comparing the ways of interacting with the SARV issue group which did not form from within the PDIA course but which is using the same players and relationships. In this later case there is a continuance of reform but not necessarily using the PDIA identified access points.

References

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- ^{vii} PDIA Teams Mid Point Health Check In Report
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- ^{ix} Excerpt from BCEP six month report April- Oct 2022- for IHSSC PDIA review
- ^x PDIA Cohort 1 - Teams Anecdotal feedback
- ^{xi} Peters, Rebecca Warne. 2020 *Implementing inequality: the invisible labor of international development*. Rutgers University Press.