



THE POSITIVE DEVIANCE
INITIATIVE

Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance Approach



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www.positivedeviance.org

Basic Field Guide to the Positive Deviance (PD) Approach

Purpose of the Field Guide

This basic guide is to orient newcomers to the PD approach and provide the essential tools to get started. It includes a brief description of basic definitions, as well as the guiding principles, steps, and process characteristics. This guide also includes suggestions of when to use the PD approach, facilitation tips, and outlines possible challenges. These elements will help practitioners implement successful PD projects. Please use this guide as a resource to initiate the PD approach. Its brevity and simplicity are meant to invite curious and intrepid implementers who face complex problems requiring behavioral and social change. It is suitable for those who seek solutions that exist today in their community and enables the practitioner to leverage those solutions for the benefit of all members of the community.

PD is best understood through action and is most effective through practice.

Useful Definitions

The **PD concept** is based on the observation that in every community or organization, there are a few individuals or groups whose uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies have enabled them to find better solutions to problems than their neighbors who face the same challenges and barriers and have access to same resources.

The **PD approach** is a problem solving, asset-based approach grounded in the fact that communities have assets or resources they haven't tapped. It enables a community or organization to amplify uncommon behaviors or strategies discovered by community members among the least likely to succeed (positive deviants), develop some activities or initiatives based on these findings and measure outcomes. The PD approach brings about sustainable behavioral and social change by identifying solutions already existing in the system.

A **PD individual or group** demonstrates special or uncommon behaviors and strategies that enable the person or group to overcome a problem without special resources. However, a person is defined as a PD only in the context of a specific problem.

PD methodology consists of five basic steps (the four D's: *define, determine, discover, and design with monitoring and evaluation happening throughout the four Ds*). These comprise an iterative road map for the process.

The term "**PD inquiry**" refers to the stage in the process whereby the community seeks to discover demonstrably successful behaviors and strategies among its members.

The term "**PD process**" refers to the entire journey encompassing the skillful use of experiential learning methods and skilled facilitation applied to the four steps of the PD design; it results in community mobilization and ownership, discovery of existing solutions, creation of new networks, and emergence of new solutions as a result of community initiatives

Guiding Principles of the PD Approach

Remember these basic principles when initiating the PD approach in a community:

- The community owns the entire process.
- All individuals or groups who are part of the problem are also part of the solution and hence the PD process involves all parties who affect the problem. *“Don’t do anything about me without me.”*
- The community discovers existing uncommon, successful behaviors and strategies (PD inquiry).
- The community designs ways to practice and amplify successful behaviors and strategies and unleashes innovation.
- Community members recognize that “someone just like me” can get results, even in the worst case scenarios (social proof).
- PD emphasizes *practice* instead of knowledge—the “how” instead of the “what” or “why.” The PD Mantra is: “You are more likely to Act your way into a new way of thinking than to think your way into a new way of acting.
- The community creates its own benchmarks and monitors progress.
- PD process facilitation is based on deep respect for community, its members, and its culture, focuses on interactive engagement, and capacity to let the community lead.
- The PD process expands existing networks and creates new ones.

When to Use Positive Deviance

Positive deviance should be considered as a possible approach when a concrete problem meets the following criteria:

- The problem is not exclusively technical but also relational and requires behavioral or/and social change.
- The problem is complex, seemingly intractable, and other solutions haven't worked.
- Positive deviant individuals or groups exist solutions are possible.
- There is sponsorship and local leadership commitment to address the issue.

Getting Started – Preliminary Steps

The Invitation

Step 1: Leadership Involvement

10 Points for Initial conversations with leadership;

1. Introduction of the PD approach & concept, design & process to sponsors and interested leadership in the organization. Share examples.
2. Explain how the PD approach is different from other asset-based approaches: self-discovery & social proof, ownership and involvement of all stakeholders, focusing on a specific issue in worst case scenario, the people are the experts.
3. Ensure the availability of hard data on the issue.
4. Verify the presence of potential PD individuals, groups (families, tribal, union, staff) or larger entities) within the organization or community (schools, hospitals, villages, region, district, departments, etc.) through secondary data.

5. Get information on the organizational setting.
6. Outline with the leaders potential initial steps: rough description. Stress the importance of extending an INVITATION to potential stakeholders. The leaders can extend the invitation to their constituency by first exploring the issues to which PD can be most appropriately applied (adaptive challenges that require individual behavior and organizational change, (not skill or technology-based problems)*.
7. Who else should be involved? Participants & stakeholders: should include individuals from policy level to front line staff.
8. Discuss where to start to ensure success (experimental or pilot initiatives need to be successful). Required criteria: local champions and committed individuals, strong leadership support, etc.
9. Stress ownership of main stakeholders from day one: staff needs to be the one to identify and define the issue, staff participation is a prerequisite from day one.
10. Discuss potential time frame for impact: behavior & social change. Invite others who are willing, and at times eager, to become involved. Each person is valuable to the process

* (participants or actors: once potential participants are assembled and the PD concept is described through examples, the local leaders can ask "Does this make sense? If so, is there anyone here who would like to become involved?")

Step 2: Build a resource team of volunteers that is diverse and includes members of the community as well as local leaders.

Note: this group may vary in number throughout the PD process, as more individuals get involved, and others drop out.

Basic Steps carried out by the community resource team:

As defined earlier, PD methodology consists of five basic steps carried out by members of the community:

1. **Define** the problem, current perceived causes, challenges and constraints, common practices, and desired outcomes.
2. **Determine** the presence of PD individuals or groups.
3. **Discover** uncommon but successful behaviors and strategies through inquiry and observation.
4. **Design** activities to allow community members to practice the discovered behaviors.
5. **Monitor and evaluate the resulting project or initiative which further** fuels change by documenting and sharing improvements as they occur, and help the community discern the effectiveness of the initiative.

Step 1: The community defines or reframes the problem by:

- Inviting everyone to review or generate data that measures the magnitude of the problem.
- Articulating a desired outcome (both quantitative and qualitative) that is different from the present.
- Exploring the issues impacting the problem and current behavioral norms. Create or use existing conceptual frameworks relating to the problem.
- Conducting discussions with various groups in the community to learn about common practices and normative behaviors – it is important to involve everyone in the community around this discussion to strengthen community awareness and ownership.
- Listing common barriers and challenges related to the problem.
- Identifying all stakeholders who should be involved.

- Identifying human and cultural resources already existing in the community (formal and informal).
- Convening community wide meeting(s) to share the problem, develop the goal, and expose the community to the PD concept via stories from the community.

Sample Tools and activities

- Create or use baseline data through mapping, creating visual scoreboards.
- Develop a simple time line known and agreed to by all.
- Discuss with various groups in the community to learn about normative behaviors, common challenges and obstacles. (creative dialogues and situational dialogues)
- Using Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) activities such as mapping improvisation, Venn diagrams, transects, prioritizing, wealth ranking, trends, etc most appropriate for the problem at hand.
- Participatory photography and drawing, and other culturally acceptable media.
- Using discovery and action dialogues (DAD).
- Creation of culturally acceptable visuals that illustrate the problem.
- Use of different media to document the above activities to be shared with the community. (visuals, photography gallery, skits, poems, songs, etc..)
- Involving members of the community in generating or reviewing data that measures the magnitude of the problem.
- Using Participatory learning and action (PLA) DAD activities such as mapping improvisation, Venn diagrams, transects, prioritizing, discovery and action dialogues (DAD) to engage various members of the community.

Step 2: The community determines the presence of positive deviants by:

- Summarizing the current common practices that impact on problem, and the data.
- Identifying individuals, families, or entities in the community who already exhibit successful behaviors or desired outcomes from the data & information gathered from step 1.

- Establishing exclusion criteria—selecting only those individuals or entities who face the same or worse challenges and barriers as others.
- Creating the team that will carry out the PD inquiries.

Sample tools and activities

Analysis of data and information from previous activities for identification of PDs.

- make a list of exclusion criteria with community members

Step 3: The community discovers the specific uncommon practices that enable PDs to prevent or solve the identified problem by:

- Enabling peers and community members to design tools for the PD inquiry.
- Conducting a positive deviance inquiry with self selected individuals.
- Compile and document the findings.
- Applying exclusion criteria for discovered behaviors and strategies, selecting only those individuals or entities who face the same or worse challenges and barriers as others and have no extra resources (separating out the TBUs “True, But Useless.”)
- Identifying the PD practices, strategies, and behaviors.
- Vetting the results with the whole community.

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

Sample Tools or activities: (as informal as possible)

- Group work to develop In-depth interviews bullet points (not a questionnaire)
- Making an observation check-list for guided observations
- Logistics for On-site visits
- Discovery and action dialogues
- Community feedback sessions (see www.positivedeviance.org for examples of PD inquiry tools)
- Creative and interactive illustrations of PD behaviors and strategies (skits, photo-montage, theatre, displays, improvisation, etc.)

- Community feedback sessions

[See the Website, www.positivedeviance.org, for examples of PD inquiry tools]

Step 4: The community designs and develops activities to expand the PD solutions by:

- Developing a plan of action based on the PD inquiries findings that include: What, Whom, With Whom, How, For how long, Where, etc.
- Designing activities that enable people to practice the behaviors and strategies identified during the PD inquiry and vetted by the community. These can be multi-targeted and multi-level.
- Creating opportunities to practice and “learn through doing” in a safe environment with peer support.
- Using imaginative approaches to involve the community in the work (e.g. feeding workshops in Vietnam, Healthy Baby Fairs in Pakistan).

Sample tools or activities for designing opportunities for community members to practice the discovered behaviors and strategies

- Community meeting to share PD inquiry findings, vet the information and get galvanized to solve the problem making sure that the leadership is involved.
- Creation of an action team involving the resource team and self-selected volunteers who have participated in the process.
- Develop an action plan.; Pin down roles and responsibilities.
- Integrate activities with existing resources and activities already accessed in the community.

Step 5: The community measures, monitors, and evaluates the effectiveness of its initiatives based on the PD findings by:

- Developing a way to monitor progress of initiative.
- Making the data real by engaging the community in developing its own indicators to monitor progress (quantitative and qualitative indicators of behavioral and social change.)

- Creating culturally appropriate ways to communicate the data to the community as a whole.
- Evaluating its initiatives at regular, frequent intervals.
- Sharing the initiative's impact with others.

As the PD project evolves and a successful outcome emerges in the community, other communities and groups will hear and will want to apply this approach (Success driven).

Suggestions for dissemination might include:

- Documenting, evaluating, and sharing results.
- Honoring and amplifying the success stories by storytelling.
- Enabling the community members to tell their stories and coach others within their networks.
- Creating a Living University for other communities to discover how the PD process could help them solve the same problem.
- Reflecting on what worked best.

Characteristics of the PD Process

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

- Leverage innovations coming from the community, community members generated
- Engages multiple stakeholders in applying the discovered existing PD behaviors and strategies.
- Starting small to demonstrate success.
- Connects people or groups who haven't connected before.
- Targets the widest range of appropriate community members.
- Creates opportunities to practice and "learn through doing" in a safe environment with peer support.
- Uses existing resources and assets purposely and extensively.
- Uses multi channel, multi target culturally appropriate communication strategies.

Tips for PD Facilitators

- Tap the expertise in the group (To repeat: the people in the community are the experts.)
- Ensure the participants talk more than you do. Encourage them to exchange stories and information among themselves.
- Refrain from making suggestions or giving advice (unless *repeatedly asked*).
- Ask open-ended questions (e.g. *what, how, what if?*) (Avoid questions that elicit yes or no answers.)
- Don't try to exercise control; let the group guide the conversation.
- Invite participants to tell their stories or share their experiences about the issue at hand. Tap into emotions.
- Make the process personal and fun.
- Share relevant personal experience with participants to make them feel comfortable. Develop trust by admitting your own vulnerability.
- Let silence speak! (Pause for twenty seconds after asking a question. That's long enough to sing happy birthday!).
- Stay with the questions. Don't press for quick fixes. Insights often come when one is least expecting them.
- Support a climate where speaking the truth is OK, even when doing so may make the facilitator or a participant look foolish, confused, or unprepared.
- Believe that there will be enough time. "Go fast by going slow."
- Commit to learn, to be influenced, to be personally changed by the experience.

The Art of Asking Questions

For the most thoughtful and revealing responses, use open ended questions that ask *what, how, why, why now?* Here are some examples of what you might ask or say in specific situations to facilitate or refocus discussions.

To spur continued reflection and thinking within the group you might ask;

- *To answer your question, let me ask a question.*
- *Can I ask you a question about your question?*
- *I have a question for you.*

To generate more interactive discussion among the group:

- *Who can answer this question?*
- *Who wants to answer this question?*
- *Who has any idea about this?*
- *How would anyone here answer this question?*

To involve more stakeholders, ask:

- *Whose problem is it?*
- *Who else should be involved?*
- *How might we involve them?*

To uncover or identify PD individuals or groups:

Are there any groups of individuals who have overcome (or prevented) the problem?

Turn the question back to the group (use the somersault question):

- *So if I understand correctly, nobody here is [or has achieved] X?*
- *So, there are no people in your community who have overcome this problem?*

Once the group realizes that PDs actually exist in their own community, then follow up with some direct questions such as;

- *How can we learn from them?*
- *When is a good time to meet with them?*

To discover PD behaviors and strategies, ask probing questions:

- *You said that you did X; how were you able to do that?*
- *Most other people have had problems with X and Y; how have you been able to overcome them?*
- *Many people have explained to us how difficult it is to do X because of busy schedules, high costs, conflict with community customs or traditions, etc. I was wondering what you do to overcome these barriers or challenges encountered by others in your community?*
- *How are you able to overcome these common challenges and barriers?*
- *Can you show us how?*
- *What do you do when X problem happens or you are faced by the challenge of Y?*
- *Encourage participants to repeat what they've heard or understood to get more specificity: "So, if I understand correctly, you do X only during the day) you do not do Y at all during the day or night*
- *Do you know other individuals like you?*

To help define or target actions to be taken:

- *What are our next steps?*
- *Who is going to do what?*
- *What will it take to accomplish this?*

To ask permission to make a suggestion:

- *Would it be possible for . . . ?*
- *You are the experts, but would it make sense if . . . ?*

Minimum Specifications to classify a project as a “Positive Deviance” project

A Positive Deviance project promotes community ownership and sustained behavioral and social change. A project may be considered a “PD project” if it meets the following ten criteria:

1. All stakeholders/ a diverse group of community members are involved in the five steps:
 - 1) **Define** the problem, current perceived causes, challenges and constraints, common practices, and desired outcomes
 - 2) **Determine** the presence of positive deviant individuals or groups in the community.
 - 3) **Discover** uncommon but successful practices and strategies through inquiry and observation.
 - 4) **Design** activities to allow community members to practice the discovered behaviors.
 - 5) **Monitor** and evaluate the resulting project or initiative which further fuels change by documenting and sharing improvements as they occur, and help the community discern the effectiveness of the initiative.
2. The community carries out the five iterative steps (see above).
3. The facilitator(s) do not make the discovery of findings nor do they control the process.
4. The PD inquiry is carried out by community members and vetted by community members.
5. The inquiry findings are explicit and behavior based (not value-based, or dependent on the individual traits of positive deviants). The findings should not focus so much on WHAT the positive deviant practices are, but about HOW the behavior of the positive deviants (individuals or groups) enables them to overcome or prevent the problem at hand.

6. The plan of action is developed by the community and based on each of the inquiry findings.
7. The initiative is practice-oriented, multi-channeled and multi-targeted, and utilizes existing human resources and networks.
8. The community develops its own monitoring and evaluation plan, including the creation of their own tools for doing so.
9. Feedback loops are developed to keep the community informed and enable members to participate and innovate.
- 10 The community members are able to explain how they have been able to solve the problem and provide specific examples of behavior and social change directly linked to the PD inquiry and the inquiry-informed initiative.

Tell us about Your Project

The Positive Deviance Initiative (PDI) would love to hear about your project. Please send us the following information:

Name of your organization

Contact information

Name of the project

Location of the project

Problem statement

Discovered behaviors/strategies

Project impact

Population impacted by the project

Special target group

Explain how your project meets the ten minimum specifications outlined above

Any documentation that might be shared on our website (stories, videos, photos, reports, articles, etc.)

Send this information to:

contact@positivedeviance.org

or

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

This guide was developed by the Positive Deviance Initiative. For more information, go to our Web site at <http://www.positivedeviance.org>

