DNH Guidance Note: Developing Options

Introduction

Do No Harm is, at root, about Options.

Do No Harm is not an ideal to live up to. It is not a principle to live by. It is not a lens through which to look at the world. Do No Harm is a call to action.

Using Do No Harm, with its concepts and frameworks, we can do our work better: more effectively, more efficiently, more economically, more ethically, and more powerfully.

We do that by coming up with new options for action and implementing them.

Do No Harm does not tell us specifically *what* to do in any situation. The context still matters. Using Do No Harm guides us in how we think about our options. When we use DNH, we see more clearly what *not* to do and why one course of action is likely superior to another. When we have made a mistake, using Do No Harm helps us to identify why and how we have erred. At our best, when we use DNH, we can see how to mitigate or even reverse that mistake, or even how to avoid that mistake in the first place.

This paper is about Options. How to generate them. How to prioritize them. How to explain them. Do No Harm helps us in all of these areas.

The Key Issue in Generating Options

Use the patterns. Use the patterns. Use the patterns!

The patterns of impact identified in the ABCs - Actions plus Behaviors equal Consequences[1] - are remarkably clear. We see them operating everywhere. By being alert to the patterns, we can learn important things about the situation that we can use to mitigate violence and tension and/or to support local capacities.

Use the patterns. If you don't, you're not being conflict sensitive.

Using the Patterns

Changes in Dividers and Connectors. As you view changes in Dividers and Connectors, you should identify the patterns at work. Dividers and Connectors, as they change, are changing in obvious and direct ways that can be mapped by the patterns.

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[1] See "The ABCs of Assistance: Actions, Behaviors and their Consequences" (http://www.cdainc.com/cdawww/pdf/issue/dnh_abcs_of_assistance_Pdf.pdf). Also see chapters 4 and 5 in Mary Anderson's *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War.*

Have the fighters committed Theft in a way that supports their efforts? Has there been an effect on the Market, with incentives toward violence? Have resources been Distributed to one group, but not others?

Has one group experienced Disrespect or Unfairness? Are powerful actors behaving with Accountability or without Accountability?

Options and Opportunities. It is important to address changes in Dividers and Connectors. When we see changes, we need to think about our options to respond and we need to take advantage of new opportunities as they open.

Paying attention to the patterns can show us where things are going wrong or provide guidance about what needs to change. Paying attention to the patterns can show us how things are going right and offer clues about where we can assist people.

Reviewing Options. When we generate new options, we *must* review the options through the patterns.

New options are not inherently good just because they are new. Options are only conflict-sensitive if they address the patterns that have been identified. If they do not address the patterns, they will not mitigate negative ones or support positive ones. *This is really important!*

The Challenge in Using the Patterns

While the admonition to "use the patterns" sounds simple, few people are truly comfortable making use of them. Why?

Many people feel that "using the patterns" is simplistic, that they will miss something important in the context and they will wind up worse off than they were before. Nothing could be further from the truth. Using the patterns is precisely what allows projects and programs to improve in directly observable ways. Ignoring the patterns or missing them is how projects and programs go in the wrong direction.

Others feel as though they have to run through every single pattern every single time they observe a change on Dividers or Connectors. They worry that this is time consuming and that little will be gained. They are correct that as they begin using the patterns, it does take time. This is true of all new disciplines, the inexperienced need more time than the experienced. However, as people grow more experienced in their use of the patterns, and they have seen how their work is improved, they find they move through the list much more quickly until the identification of the patterns becomes intuitive.

The most important thing to remember is that (usually) a choice can be undone. If the "wrong" option is selected, if something is missed, you can catch it with a thorough and ongoing analysis, and you can find an option that works better.

Noting the patterns at work, however, is not the same as changing or working with them. The hard work of creativity comes when trying to figure out how to affect or use the patterns. If you ignore the patterns altogether, you will have a more difficult time succeeding.

Using Connectors

Support Connectors. Don't miss Opportunities! Make sure you see the existing Connectors. They are there. Don't overlook or undermine them. Make sure you support them and, if you can, *drive* them.

Don't "Create" Connectors. As an outsider, do not try to create Connectors. Use Connectors that exist; you will not be able to create significant ones that do not already exist. New Connectors proposed by outsiders do not take root (no history) or are not significant (no long-term commitment).

Using Dividers

Counter Dividers. Dividers are often driven by negative patterns of Behavior (the negative side of the RAFT). Where you identify these negative patterns, use the corresponding opposite positive patterns.

Some Examples

One local NGO looked at how fighters were using the patterns to reinforce disrespect and fear and therefore heightening tensions in a region. They set out to "inoculate" people against the disrespect and fear by teaching the groups about one another. They used the positive patterns to directly counter the negative patterns being used by fighters.

An organization saw that its food aid had caused a Market Effect by lowering prices of a staple and that this led to farmers joining militias. They changed the staple, saw prices of the first staple go back up, and farmers returned to their land. They saw the pattern of the Market Effect and thought about why the things they had observed were happening.

An international organization providing jobs on an infrastructure project in a conflict zone saw how groups (and families!) competed for the resources coming in and how this, bolstered by the fear and uncertainty of the context, led to suspicion, anger, theft, and deep unfairness. The international NGO decided to address these impacts through open Transparency by providing an ongoing update to the community of the work on the infrastructure, the cost of all materials and wages and precisely how much of the resources every individual and family was receiving. They also opened a discussion on their criteria for hiring for the different jobs. Using the patterns of Transparency, they were able to help the community change its mindset from the pattern of competition to the pattern of cooperation.

Prioritizing Options

Teamwork. Brainstorm with your team. Quantity of ideas often provides quality. The more people you involve, the more options you'll have from more perspectives, and the more likely you'll find the right option for your context. No idea is too wacky (especially when thinking about responding to Theft). Don't forget to flesh out good or interesting ideas.

Teamwork also helps you prioritize, especially if local staff are involved in the discussion. Local staff can often readily identify which options would work and which would not in a specific context.

There are three main considerations for prioritizing options. The first is the patterns. In every discussion about options, people come up with great ways to make the program or project better. These ideas are valuable, but when faced by violence or the potential for violence, the aim must be on conflict sensitivity first. If an option does not address the identified patterns, then put it aside for now.

The second consideration is time. Options that take less time to implement are generally better. Staff members will not feel as though the additional work is onerous and results may well be observed more quickly. Again, take note of those that might take more time and keep them on hold if you need them. Or you can work on both short time-frame options and long time-frame ones at the same time.

The third consideration is resources. Can you actually do the options you have generated?

Never get rid of the options you generate but don't use immediately! You might want to return to them – sometimes sooner than you might wish.

Explaining Options

When you have come up with an option and you want to implement it, there is usually someone you have to explain it to and get their approval before you can put your option into action.

Prepare that person beforehand. Discuss the context with that person (or group of people) through Dividers and Connectors and the patterns you have identified. Make sure they understand how you and your team see the situation. Offer some thoughts on the sorts of changes that might occur and what your responses might be, always referring to the patterns and how certain actions will affect them one way or the other.

Bad Options

Some options turn out to be bad options. They won't or don't provide the results you want or expect. When you encounter ongoing or worsening problems, the first thing to do is to revisit your analysis of the patterns. You can always change what you are doing, but only if you have a solid idea of the change you want.

If, after reviewing the patterns you see that your organization is not responsible for the worsening problems, revisit your context analysis. What else is changing in the context that might be having an impact? Even if you didn't cause the problem, you can often find creative ways to respond to it!

Money. Money is such a specific option that we need to address it on its own.

Money is not an effective counter to violence. If giving money is your option for reducing violence or maintaining lack of violence, go back and try again. The evidence shows that money incentivizes toward violence, not away from it. Why?

Money tends to be bound up with respect and fairness. Those who do not receive it perceive they are being treated differently and as though they matter less (Different Value for Different Lives). Money for

"nothing" (no apparent goods or services) also looks like Ignoring the Rules. Money almost always spurs Competition among people or groups of people. This often leads to Suspicion, Anger, and Fear.

Money brought into a conflict zone creates an incentive to maintain low-level violence so as to maintain the flow of money. It does not lead to cessation of violence. If low-level violence is not enough to maintain the flow, then expect some major flare-ups until the money resumes.

Key Questions

What are the incentives for people in this area to participate in violence? Can we provide counter incentives? Are *we* currently providing incentives for violence?

Who is not engaged in or involved in the violence? Can they be supported?

Where are the locations, either geographical or social, that seem violence free? Can we grow them or build similar areas elsewhere?

What is being stolen? How do we stop or limit that theft?

How transparent are we? Are we using our transparency to have effects on the positive patterns side of the RAFT?

Checklist

As a team, think about the Patterns and how to turn them to our advantage.

As a team, review the Actions (Resource Transfers). Identify which patterns we see in the context, both emerging from us and from others.

As a team, review the Behaviors (Messages). Identify which patterns we see in the context, both emerging from us and from others.

As a team, identify which patterns are the most significant. Identify what we can do to affect it.