

The DIF: Designing For Lasting Impact At Scale

Mulago Foundation Summer 2018

The DIF – Design Iteration Format – is a tool to help you design a model to create lasting change at a big scale and an organization that can take it there. The DIF process guides you through an initial (or remedial) iteration of design that can serve as the vehicle for a continuous process of refinement and evolution.

It's really a sequence of steps, like this:

The Mission: exactly *what* you're setting out to accomplish.

Big Idea: *how* you're going to accomplish it.

Impact: the key outcome that fulfills the mission and focuses design.

Behavior: *who* must do *what* differently to create that impact.

Interventions: what you're going to do to drive those behaviors in a lasting way.

Model: a replicable, scalable process that integrates the intervention.

Doer & Payer: who will replicate and who will pay for your model at scale.

Scalability Audit: a simple and systematic assessment of the model.

The best way to use the DIF is to:

Read through the whole thing quickly to get a sense of the process.

Think long and hard about your mission. Everything downstream depends on it.

Do the same with impact. Get it right. It's the focus of the whole process.

Read each section carefully as you lay out each step.

Use the scalability audit to drive your first iterative tweak of the model.

Relax. You're probably going to change most of it anyway.

Three things to think about throughout the process:

1. Scope of the problem
2. Simplicity of your solution
3. Cost to do it

These are the key elements of scalability. You can't have a superficial engagement with this thing.

We'll illustrate the DIF process with the fictional work of a guy we'll call Jack. Follow him as he staggers through the process.

Jack throws nets out of a plane

Imagine this: our flight delayed, we meet a guy named Jack in the airport bar in Kampala. He's a garrulous guy in his 60's, made a bunch of money in his 40's and wants to "give back." Jack was a pilot in the Vietnam War and still flies a lot. He falls in love with Africa on a safari trip, and his adored grandkids have left him obsessed with the well-being of children.

Jack says he's started a project in a remote part of southwest Uganda. We brace ourselves. We think: we've heard this one before. "I'm throwing mosquito nets out of a plane!" Jack can see that we think he's nuts, so he starts telling us about the Poverty Action Lab study demonstrating that free distribution of nets is the best way to get kids under them, and how his analysis of the area showed him that lots of people are out of reach of government services or even roads. We perk up. Just then the loudspeaker announces that we'll be in the bar for four more hours, so we persuade Jack to be a guinea pig and go through the DIF process with us.

1. Mission

Decide on and say exactly what you're trying to accomplish with your big idea. This is what everything you design and do will be shaped by. Capture it in **eight words or less**, and include a **verb**, a *specific* **target** population or setting, and a big **outcome** that implies something to measure. The mission is about **what** you're going to do, **not how** you're going to do it.

A good mission statement is generic – even kind of boring – but specific, like this:

- "Get African one-acre farmers out of extreme poverty" (note: "extreme poverty" means not enough to eat.)
- "Prevent HIV infection in Brazil"
- "Save coral reefs in the South Pacific"
- "Educate slum kids in West Africa"

Notice how specific these missions are about the target populations/settings. That is absolutely essential to a useful mission statement. Also note modifiers like "extreme" that focus the mission further. Have a look at **this** if you want more explanation.

<p>Jack's Mission</p> <p>Jack knows that children are the ones most at-risk of dying from malaria, and that anything that benefits children will also benefit adults. So, he formulates his mission as:</p> <p>"Prevent childhood malaria in remote regions of Uganda"</p>	<p>Your Mission</p> <p>8 words or less. Include a verb, target and outcome.</p>
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2. Big Idea

This is about your central, distinctive idea about **how** to accomplish the mission – the idea at the core of all you do. Usually it's about how you drive behavior. Get your idea down to a sentence that captures your special sauce. Keep working on it until you really like it. This distillation of your idea to its essence, both to help you communicate it and think about it.

Some examples:

- “Design, market and sell money-making products that farmers can afford and will use.”
- “Train young people teach their peers how to have safe sex and prevent HIV infection.”
- “Eradicate devastating invasive species from islands so that endemic species and ecosystems can recover.”
- “Use high school graduates as primary school teachers by delivering scripted curriculum via a tablet.”

Jack's Big Idea	Your Big Idea
Get kids under mosquito nets by delivering insecticide-impregnated bed nets in high-malaria regions that can't be reached by road.	

3. Impact

Identify the *single best* outcome – an outcome, not an activity, not a behavior – that best thing that captures the fulfillment of the mission via your idea. This makes you focus in on something granular and specific to design for. Yes, it's hard to narrow it down to one, but do it anyway. It needs to be at least theoretically observable and measurable, even if perhaps really hard to do in the real world (don't worry about actual measurement yet, this is for design).

Here are some examples from the missions above:

- “Increase in farm income”
- “Decrease in HIV infection rates”
- “Healthy coral”
- “Functional literacy”

Jack's Impact	Your Impact
Decreased malaria rates in kids under five	Make it observable & measurable.

4. Behavior Mapping

Impact comes from action, from someone doing something differently. Given your idea, who must do what to create impact? Design for impact is focused on behavior – what must happen, how to drive it, and how to maintain it.

To start, put down the most critical behavior you must change to get impact.

- “Farmers adopt new set of farming practices”
- “Teenagers practice safe sex”
- “Island communities guard reefs”
- “Teachers show up for work”

Behaviors that directly create impact don’t happen in isolation, though – getting to impact usually requires a connected sequence of behaviors. To get to impact, you’ve got to “connect the dots” and run through all the behaviors necessary to get there. List them in sequence as a simple flow diagram of who must do what all the way to impact. Start with outcome, add in your most critical behavior and construct the sequence.

<p>Jack's Behavior Map</p> <p>community member picks up the net ↓ that someone takes it to a house with children ↓ caregivers hang and use it right ↓ <u>kids sleep under mosquito net</u> ↓ decreased malaria rates</p>	<p>Your Behavior Map</p> <p>Connect the dots all the way through to impact.</p>
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A behavior map is about what people must **do**. It’s not about attitudes, thoughts, or awareness – it’s about behavior. And it’s not about you and your organization: It’s about those out in the world whose behavior must drive the impact you seek.

5. Interventions

Look at your list of behaviors. Figure out which ones would happen without you and take them off the list. Of those that remain, put down – in brief – what you’re going to do to make them happen. These are your *interventions*. This is the list of the things you have to do – the activities that you must craft into a scalable model.

Bear in mind that changing behavior is hard, and that ideas that require you to change more than 3-5 behaviors are going to be pretty complicated (i.e., not very replicable).

This is the step that often sends people scurrying back to do more research. Here’s something worth doing once you’ve listed your interventions: Look at each necessary behavior in terms of **conditions and incentives**: are the conditions in place such that the behavior *can* happen, and are the incentives there so that it *will* happen? This is a systematic way of checking that the intervention is sufficient and it often suggests way of adding or modifying interventions. Can happen, will happen, can happen, will happen: that’s your mantra. A good starting point for **can happen** is “make it easier to do it than not do.” A good starting point for **will happen** is “link to something people already want.”

<p>Jack’s Interventions</p> <p>Uh oh. Jack now realizes that he isn’t certain that any of those behaviors will happen if all he does is throw nets from a plane. He makes a desperate stab at some initial ideas:</p> <p>Someone picks up the net:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Map and target the right drop sites ● Radio announcements, posters at markets ● Bright packaging <p>Someone takes it to a house with children:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Radio announcements, mobilize churches, posters ● Saturation – excess nets until market is saturated <p>Caregivers hang and use it right:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Radio, posters, sermons ● Effective instructions in packaging ● Net design tweaks <p>Kids sleep under it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Radio, etc. 	<p>Your Interventions</p> <p>What <i>you</i> ensure happens to change key behaviors.</p>
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Those are just some initial ideas. Now Jack has to do some homework and he has to iterate: This is where user-centered design, rapid prototyping, A-B testing and all that stuff comes into play.

Somebody sends Jack a good behavior change booklist:

- [Switch: How to change things when change is hard by Dan Heath](#)
- [Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth and happiness by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein](#)
- [Predictably Irrational: The hidden forces that shape our decisions by Dan Ariely](#)
- [Influence: the psychology of persuasion by Robert Cialdini](#)
- [Thinking Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman](#)
- [The Last Mile: Creating social and economic value from behavioral insights by Dilip Soman](#)
- [The Power of Habit by Charles Duhig](#)

That turns out to be a good start, and Jack heads down the exploratory, iterative path of design for behavior change.

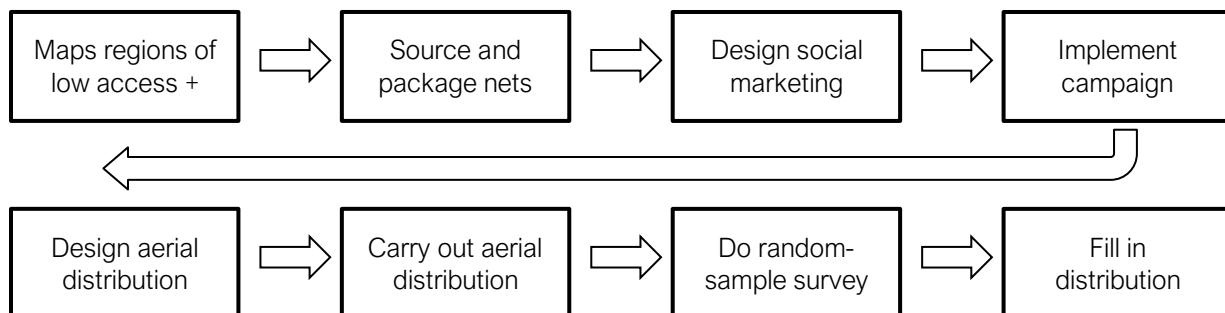
6. The Doer Model

This is different than a map of (beneficiary or customer) behaviors. This is what the organization has to do.

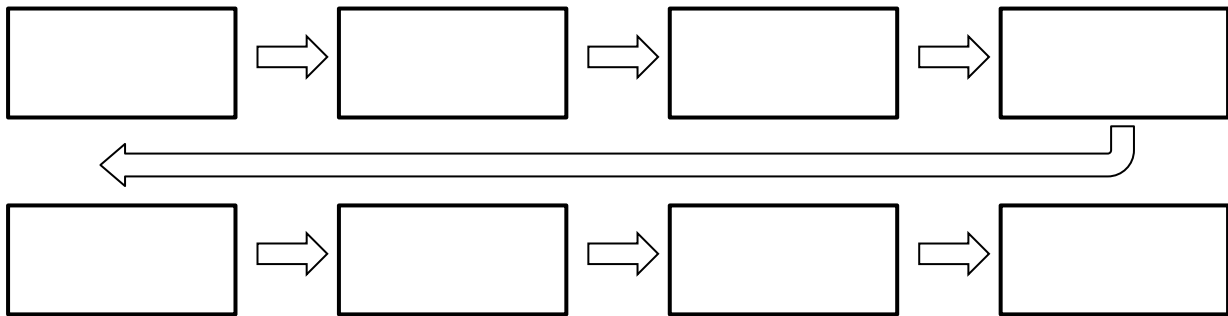
Nothing is replicable unless it's systematic. Any doer – you or someone else trying to replicate what you do – needs a systematic operational model to follow. This is a way to get you thinking systematically inside a format that allows you to continually mess with your model. Don't worry about the exact form – just try it. You can use a boxes-and-arrow format, some other kind of flow diagram, or simply a list. *Use a pencil and blank paper – or post-it notes or whatever – if that works better than doing it on a computer.*

First, list all of your interventions. Then try to integrate them into a minimal number of discrete steps in an operational. There is no prescribed right way to map out; just keep fiddling with it until you have something that makes sense to you. The result is a flow diagram of your impact model. Look back and forth between Jack's interventions above and his model below to get a sense of how it translates.

Jack's Impact Model



Your Impact Model



Another option is to fill it out in list form:

- Map regions of low access and high malaria →
- Source and package nets →
- Design social marketing campaign →
- Implement campaign →
- Design aerial distribution operation →
- Carry out aerial distribution →
- Do random-sample survey of the region →
- Fill in distribution gaps

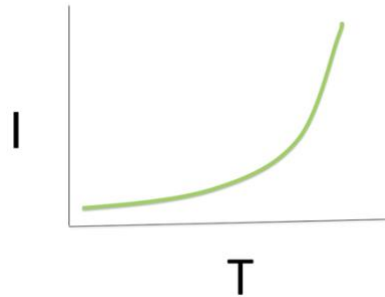
However you do it, make it describe a systematic process of sequential steps that somehow integrates all of your important interventions. Here's one approach: imagine the steps you would take if you or someone else went to implement your model in a new place.

The devil is, of course, in the details. Once you've sketched your impact model to capture a replicable process, you'll probably find it useful to articulate a brief narrative that captures what is necessary for each step. Imagine that you're trying to describe what you do to someone interested in doing it for herself. Don't put too much effort into this; just capture the detail that makes it actionable.

<p>Some of Jack's Detail for each step</p> <p>Design social marketing campaign</p> <p>Systematically determine what channels exist: radio, other media, churches, markets, other widespread groups, grass-roots communication, and key social networks. Explore the possible role of each channel in each necessary behavior. Integrate promising ideas into a cost-effective campaign.</p>	<p>Some of Your Detail</p> <p>Keep this part brief but actionable.</p>
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7. Doer & Payer: Who's going to take it to scale?

You've figured out your model, and you're serious about impact at scale. Scale is more than just growth. It's this:



Call it exponential, geometric, what have you – the point is that the curve steepens and impact accelerates dramatically over time. It's “getting to a million”—a million lives saved, kids educated, etc.—and on to subsequent orders of magnitude.

If you want to get to real scale, there are two critical questions that really matter: 1) who's the doer and 2) who's the payer? You've got a model – the thing you do. Who's going to replicate – do – it and who is going to fund that replication?

You've got to pick a **doer** at scale. When you eventually get your model dialed in – proven, tuned, and through initial rounds of replication – somebody has to replicate it at scale. There are only four choices:

1. You: running an *NGO or business* that gets to scale through growth or leverage
2. Lots of NGOs: replicating your model
3. Lots of businesses: replicating your model
4. Governments: delivering your model through programs and policies

That's all you get. Pick the doer that will dominate at a scale of a million and beyond. They've all got pluses and minuses, like this:

You: Having full control over replication means that you can deliver a complex model at high quality. Building and growing a really big organization is a pain in the ass, especially in a dysfunctional funding market.

Lots of NGOs: Plenty of bandwidth there, it shifts a little fundraising off your back, but NGOs are notoriously bad at implementing other NGOs ideas. NGOs that grow really big usually can't maintain disciplined replication of one solution because they have to meet a huge payroll.

Lots of businesses: One-off businesses are rarely enough – it's industries that solve problems. The market has nearly infinite capacity for replication and businesses can

replicate fairly complicated stuff. Obviously, to make use of this doer, a solution needs to come with a profitable business – the more profitable, the more imitators – and that precludes a lot of solutions. For-profits too often leave out the very poor

Government: They have big bandwidth, lots of resources, and a mandate to serve – and they're probably the only way a lot of basic service solutions will scale. They are usually inefficient, maddeningly inconstant, and often corrupt. They have a hard time delivering anything very complicated.

That's it. Pick *one*. A model will only scale if it is designed with the doer in mind. People do attempt to replicate via multiple doers at scale, but one usually dominates over time. Start with your best guess and design toward it. Like everything, the process is iterative: you may change course if becomes clear over time that another doer is better. Got it?

OK, now pick a **payer** at scale. Somebody has to fuel replication. Conveniently, there are only four payers as well:

1. Customers: revenue from product sales
2. Taxes: revenue raised by governments
3. Big Aid: multi- or bilateral revenue from rich governments to poor governments; sometimes delivered straight to the doer
4. Private philanthropy: anyone from the big foundations to the individual small donor

Pick the *one* likely to be the *main* source of funding at a million and beyond. Again there are pluses and minuses. But, this will give you the best chance at designing for scalability.

Customers: Investment gets a business growing, but eventually you need to sell a lot of stuff to a lot of people. To fuel scale, the businesses have to be either high-margin or high volume. Low margin businesses only scale if they supply a big demand.

Taxes: Most poor governments don't collect much in the way of taxes. Much of what they do is ultimately funded by Big Aid. That's tricky to put together and coordinate over time. In poor countries Taxes and Big Aid often come as a package deal.

Big Aid: Big Aid is big, but it's a huge hassle and usually comes a lot of strings attached. Priorities change often.

Private philanthropy: Relatively small. Quirky. Can only drive scale if the model is high-leverage – digital/mobile solutions sometimes provide enough efficiency/leverage. Usually better at earlier stages of growth.

Gather your courage and try to fix on one doer and one payer. That will give you the best initial prospects for scalability.

<p>Jack's doer: government Jack's payer: Taxes/Big Aid</p> <p>By the way, here is Jack's thinking: "We will build an organization big enough to conclusively prove the model's impact and cover a substantial part of Uganda, then we'll leverage the results into policy change and an effective government program. Once we've got effective take-up by government in Uganda, we'll lobby other governments to establish similar programs and provide the technical assistance they need."</p>	<p>Your doer: You only have 4 choices: You, NGOs, Businesses, or Government.</p> <p>Your Payer: You only have 4 choices: Customers, Taxes, Big Aid, Private Philanthropy.</p>
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8. Scalability Audit

Once you've got your doer/payer figured out, there are three big questions that help you assess the fundamental scalability of your model:

1. Is it adaptable enough?
2. Is it simple enough?
3. Is it cheap enough?

Adaptable enough. Scope – are there enough settings where your model could be applied, where it would plausibly work? There is going to be a minimum set of conditions that must obtain for any model: Are there enough settings with those conditions? Is it adaptable enough to work well in those settings? The best models use a systematic process to generate locally appropriate solutions. If your model is rigid, or if it depends on limited set of circumstances or a rare kind of talent, then it's not going to get very far beyond local scale.

Simple enough. Could your doer do it at high quality? Could they plausibly replicate well enough to get the same impact? If your model is complex and requires ninja-level execution, then you're going to be doing it yourself. Governments are pretty hopeless at it, and NGOs are often not much better. Even businesses won't be able to replicate a model that is very complicated.

Cheap enough. Is it cheap enough for your payer to pay it? Everybody has a price point. This is about cost-effectiveness – the cost per unit impact – but it's also about the price that the payer is willing to pay. If you want to scale up your innovative community health worker model, what's the Health Ministry's price point for per capita coverage? If you have a product to sell, will customers pay enough to give you (and your imitators) a decent margin?

To be scalable the answer must be yes to all three. A 30,000' assessment is useful, but getting to real answers might require some serious homework and projections. Like everything else here, the answer to these questions is iterative. Revisit them often and continually tune toward a more emphatic yes!

Finally,

Iterate. Do. Repeat.

Go!