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| **ID** | 24 |
| **Lead Author** | Pete Masters |
| **Title** | Research proposal: How an incubator approach to innovation can deliver for MSF in the field |
| **Problem Outline** | Within MSF, multiple conversations are occurring around the subject of innovation. Here, we are interested in two strands (that could be said to be inextricably linked):  - The desire to better manage field-focused innovation (I.e. individual projects that tackle field challenges).  - The desire to implement intelligent, transformative change (I.e. the way we innovate as an organisation and the kind of culture we promote).  MSF’s innovative work is currently ad hoc, frequently isolated and often relies on project teams and individuals to take initiative, with little provision of 'safe space' (a combination of time, resources, physical space and support) with which to focus on an idea or challenge. Innovators looking to develop solutions to field challenges find themselves pressured to develop quick and 'successful' solutions, meaning that poor quality solutions are sometimes implemented and failures go undocumented, meaning no lessons are learned or shared (failing does not become failing forward). Within a culture where a fear of failure pervades, innovative projects are viewed as high risk and this leads to a lack of innovation or investment in innovative processes and systems.   MSF innovation can also occur in multiple vacuums. Communication and collaboration can be poor within a single section, between sections, between OCs and with supporters and stakeholders external to MSF. Externally, MSF has an excellent reputation within many relevant networks, from academic institutions to corporates to tech communities to volunteers to other NGOs. However, very little is done to harness the goodwill, skills, expertise and time that these potential collaborators can offer to support MSF's humanitarian mission. |
| **Problem Solution** | We propose a piece of research which would explore the viability of an MSF innovation incubator. The incubator concept addresses the stage of development where ideas from the field can be explored, developed and made robust. This fits within MSF’s current ambitions for innovation and addresses an area where we currently fall short. The initial research, managed by the Manson Unit but carried out by independent experts, is proposed to investigate the following essential facets of the incubator concept:   * Field engagement * Idea generation and management * Networks and partnerships * Resources (human, financial and tech) * Systems (project management, evaluation,knowledge management, communication, access, volunteer management) * Physical space * Culture * Communication and diffusion of ideas / solutions / learnings   An incubator allows innovators to explore ideas / solutions in a safe space, and provides support in the form of expertise, facilities and networks. Fundamental to the concept is professional project management, including evaluation, documentation and the communication of learnings from successes and failures. The research will investigate an incubator not as a one stop shop for the whole innovation process, but as an enabler for a specific stage of this process where individuals or groups develop field-focused ideas to concept stage, then test, evaluate and iterate. Implementation and / or scale up of projects would not come under the remit of the incubator.   We see the proposed piece of research as fundamental to the development of this concept and as having huge value to those within the movement considering similar or related initiatives. The process of defining an MSF incubator must embody the values that we would seek to embed within it. The research will build on information already gathered as part of the TIC process and further canvas a wide variety of people (and existing literature) from within the MSF movement (field and HQ) and externally. This includes NGOs, academia, design, entrepreneurs, incubators, accelerators, tech hubs and labs, and volunteer communities. It would also investigate similar initiatives across NGO and other sectors. |
| **Criteria for Success** | The final report to come out of this research will have to provide evidence of sufficient potential benefit for MSF and be robust, ambitious and innovative enough to warrant a proposal to launch the pilot phase of an incubator. The report will also need to be sufficiently detailed and comprehensive to not only advise on the viability of such an initiative, but also to make recommendations on how such an initiative could deliver the greatest value for MSF’s field teams.   An incubator and the work that takes place within needs to break ideas, solutions and learnings out of their current silos. Associated partnerships and collaborations need to bring benefits to MSF and increase the understanding of the challenges we face, along with the level of engagement we have with supporters and stakeholders. The grassroots nature of the incubator must bring field staff closer to the people, systems and resources that can contribute to solving field problems, as well as appropriate processes and technologies that are already available or in development. The research must address all the above and ask / answer many other cultural and pragmatic questions to be considered a success.  However, if the research suggests that an incubator would not have sufficient potential benefit for MSF to warrant a second proposal for a pilot, the learnings the organisation can take from such a piece of research will be still be of huge value (assuming the ambition and quality is high enough). The report and the work that goes into it will feed into strategy and planning for other initiatives, such as the Sweden Innovation Unit, the TIC, the innovation portal and the Sapling Nursery itself. |
| **Patients/Programmes Benefits** | We see two major sources of likely benefit and these address the 'problems' outlined. Firstly, the incubator will provide the missing 'safe space' to work on field-focused challenges and ideas, driven by medical / humanitarian needs identified by MSF staff / beneficiaries. The support and resources that would be offered to those wishing to explore / develop solutions would mean more professional, effective and informative innovative projects. This doesn't necessarily mean a rise in 'success rate' of said projects, but a tangible increase in their value, whether successful or not. At the heart of this concept is the desire to better serve MSF's beneficiaries by improving the tools and processes available to our field teams.   The second benefit is that the research will support transformational change within the innovation culture of MSF and beyond. There is currently no comprehensive research being done into how this stage of the innovation process could deliver the most value for MSF, despite the fact that incubator-style concepts are being discussed within the TIC and individual OCs. This will fill that knowledge gap internally, enrich knowledge within the sector and provide external partners with a deeper understanding of how they can best engage with MSF and other NGOs |
| **Cost** | Total: EUR 47,600  4 month project request  **HR:**  MSF Project Owner (8 days) 2k  Consultant writer/ research lead:   * Report writing (12 weeks)14.1k * Dissemination / communication (4 weeks) 4.7k   Specialist consultants:   * Estate & property (2 weeks) 2.4k * Hackspace/ lab (2 weeks) 2.4k * Incubator (2 weeks) 2.4k * Networks and communities (2 weeks) 2.4k * Academia (2 weeks) 2.4k * Design (2 weeks) 2.4k * Entrepreneurship (2 weeks) 2.4k   **Other expenses:**  Design and production 5k  Travel expenses 5k |
| **Timeline** | Total: 16 weeks  Week 1-4 investigation within MSF  Week 5-8 specialist consultation Week 9-12 Report writing and production  Week 12-16 dissemination and communication   Research lead to be recruited on a consultancy basis with relevant SPA and agreement on confidentiality / ownership. Research lead to report to project owner on a fortnightly basis.   Project owner to document and report progress and financials on a monthly basis. One day per fortnight for project owner oversight and reporting.  Specialists to be identified by research lead in collaboration with the Manson Unit/Sweden Innovation Unit.  Access to all research to be made available following publication of the report. |
| **Collaborations** | MSF-UK – Manson Unit (MU) - Pete Masters MSF-Sweden Innovation Unit (SIU) - Marpe Tanaka / David Veldeman British Red Cross (BRC) - Andrew Braye |