DELLIVERING IMPACT IN 100 DAYS

How governments can adopt a ‘Rapid Results Approach’ to advance initiatives execution

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A. GENERAL OVERVIEW

The economic transition of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region from oil-based to more diversified and productive economies, has led to the development of long-term visions and strategies in each country, measured using ambitious national targets. Two elements of the realization of the GCC countries’ visions are to undertake challenging adjustments within government and private sector bodies and to launch strategic and operational initiatives in various public institutions and in collaboration with the private sector.

Many GCC countries lag behind their global peers when it comes to government productivity and efficiency in delivering results, a factor that affects progress and development in these countries and challenges the realization of their strategic visions. Government institutions have adopted various plans to resolve the challenges of low productivity, yet they remain highly dependent on foreign labor, technology-based infrastructure, and leadership from the private sector. While the results of adopting such plans have been tangible, the change process remains lengthy.

Inspired by similar concepts in the private sector, some GCC countries have adopted a proven ‘Rapid Results Approach’ as a vehicle to promote change in their government institutions, called Government Initiatives Accelerators (GIAs).

A Government Initiatives Accelerator (GIA) is a platform established at the national level or within a government institution to fast track the execution of strategic and operational initiatives, and to generate accurate and tangible results. The design and the operating model of such Accelerators are distinctive: they are structured around clear phases of advanced project management, allowing them to deliver effective results much faster than the norm. The success of Accelerators depends strongly on factors such as creativity and innovation in the business environment, open and results-oriented mindset of the team, and great commitment and support from senior management.

B. PRODUCTIVITY CHALLENGE IN GCC COUNTRIES

GCC countries continue to adjust to relatively low productivity and performance levels, especially in the public sector, despite overstaffed entities and the adoption of high-end technology.

The GCC labor market relies significantly on imported labor. This workforce is needed to develop the required infrastructure and to populate various services-based industries. The public sector has therefore become a more attractive option, as it offers fair wages, greater benefits, shorter working hours and better job security for GCC citizens. Due to the smaller size of local populations and extensive resource-based economies, this has become an affordable proposition.

This situation has had a strong impact on GCC countries, slowing down government sector progress and affecting the quality of provided services. In addition, the low productivity in the public sector contributes little to the GCC economies at the macro-economic level. Governments therefore are required to look for new options to boost productivity, independent from individuals employed in the public sector and technology. Governments need to look into new mechanisms to drive execution, notably the ‘Rapid Results Approach’.
C. THE CONCEPT OF GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES ACCELERATORS (GIAs)

In order to overcome the barriers of low productivity and bureaucratic challenges in GCC governments, several countries and public institutions have created innovative platforms to fast track operations and achieve results. Such platforms are known as Incubators and Accelerators. Incubators are generally supporting ideation and initial stage commercialization. Accelerators on the other hand support institutions in order to drive faster execution of internal projects and delivery of accurate outcomes. Typically, an organization internal projects are directly linked to achieving its strategic objectives, which in turn are derived from national objectives. As such, GIAs contribute substantially to the realization of national objectives.

The United Arab Emirates and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia have pioneered the establishment and activation of Accelerators in the GCC region. These initial platforms focused on specific industries to accelerate the realization of governmental projects and the generation of results.

An Accelerator is a catalyst platform that increases the momentum and trajectory of specific projects and missions in a short period of time. Initiatives Accelerators in the context of GCC governments, aim to enhance productivity, competitiveness and diversification of the knowledge base among public sector practices. GIAs fast track the design and implementation of governmental projects, policies, regulations, and so on. They nurture the core managerial and leadership skills of participating members and instill a culture of entrepreneurship and innovation in the government space. Because their success hinges on contributions from and synergies between various stakeholders, GIAs play a major role in encouraging and facilitating integration across government entities themselves and with the private sector.

Whatever the length of the cycle, Accelerators follow a specific flow of operations along four distinct phases (see Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Government Initiatives Accelerator (GIA) Model](image-url)

- **Selection**
  - Identify cycle theme and selection framework
  - Collect and assess proposals for initiatives
  - Select and announce initiatives for acceleration

- **Scoping & Planning**
  - Develop and detail accelerated action plan, including activity steps, responsibilities, key milestones, resources, etc.
  - Define clear and achievable KPIs and targets
  - Define accelerator supporting services and stakeholders

- **Acceleration – Project Management**
  - Execute key activities and coordinate necessary support
  - Closely monitor progress and adapt according to results
  - Identify activity progress and output performance gap and take necessary measures/actions
  - Deliver on interim deadlines and KPIs
  - Provide acceleration services to support the execution of activities and decision-making
  - Intervene to resolve or escalate problems

- **Scale-up & Sign-off**
  - Shape strategies and plans to sustain results and process replication
  - Conclude and transition to daily operations
  - Present and communicate results and lessons learned
Depending on the maturity of operations and the organization readiness and capacity, several simultaneous or successive acceleration cycles can occur per year. Each cycle is characterized by a specific focus, usually inspired by common critical challenges that are faced at institutional, sectoral or national level. Focusing on a specific area during one cycle optimizes the synergy of operations and helps the Accelerator leverage expertise and support from a well-selected group of stakeholders.

The work at the Initiatives Accelerator is divided between two teams:

- The **Accelerator Team** comprises a full-time team to lead the acceleration cycles, direct the various phases, and manage both the operational and administrative work of the Accelerator.

- The **Initiative Owners Team** includes members from within the institution or from its ecosystem. They work closely together during the acceleration cycle on resolving critical challenges through an innovative and focused approach. These team members resume their normal work and position at the end of the Accelerator cycle.

What differentiates the work of Initiatives Accelerators from business-as-usual or typical execution plans, are the acceleration services provided by the Accelerator team to participating initiative owners. These services are characterized by their swiftness, accuracy and added value. They are secured by renowned industry and sector experts as well as other stakeholders directly involved in the process (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2: Sample Acceleration and Facilitation Services of Government Initiatives Accelerators (GIAs)**

| Access to Resources | • Innovative office space, technology tools, equipment and connectivity – a positive workplace supporting the generation of quality output  
|                     | • Secured financial budgets and human resources for the execution of initiatives  |
| Facilitation        | • Workshops focused on business and managerial skills building  
|                     | • Facilitation of team meetings and brainstorming sessions to discuss potential solutions, ideas, scale-up strategies, etc.  |
| Knowledge Sharing   | • Access to research providers and intellectual capital  
|                     | • Opportunities for knowledge sharing between teams regarding success stories and experiences from similar topics and initiatives  |
| Link to Experts     | • Linking with local and international professionals and topic experts, to support the implementation of projects  
|                     | • On-demand mentorship and coaching sessions with team members in specific areas  |
| Networking          | • Opportunities to connect with key stakeholders and decision-makers  
|                     | • Advocacy and furthering the interests and agendas of accelerated initiatives  |
| Other Services      | • Setting up organizational structure and operations  
|                     | • Marketing assistance  
|                     | • Financial management  
|                     | • Linking to partnerships  | • Access to investors and venture capital  
|                     | • Training programs  
|                     | • Regulatory support and management  
|                     | • Etc.  |

Source: PACS
D. TEN GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING AND RUNNING SUCCESSFUL GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES ACCELERATORS (GIAs)

There are several guiding principles for establishing and operating an effective GIA. Key among these is commitment from senior management, a factor that influences the authority level of the Accelerator, structures its processes and defines the ease of access to resources and information. Failure to secure commitment from senior management can create conflicts between individuals, departments and organizations, restrain acceleration models and slow down the entire process.

We highlight ten guiding principles for establishing and running a successful GIA, based on PACS’ project experience:

1. The role and operating model of the Initiatives Accelerator are clear, and operations are properly monitored. GIAs accelerate initiatives, projects or missions of a government institution within a 100-day period, through structured project management and acceleration services. The progress of accelerated initiatives is closely monitored. Initial achievements are timely and continuously reported to senior management and the Accelerator steering committee to ensure continuous strategic alignment.

2. Execution through an accelerated initiative is distinct from execution through regular business operations. Failure to separate the initiative operations and plans from its ownership function can create conflicts in the execution process, including the possibility of diversion from originally agreed targets. A successful separation, in contrast, will help improve the overall control and ownership of the initiative.

3. The Accelerator has a dedicated support platform. Enough human and financial resources are dedicated to handle the operational and administrative functions of the Accelerator. These resources have the appropriate level of authority to communicate with internal and external stakeholders. In addition, the Accelerator team is well inducted and trained.

4. The Accelerator has direct access to senior management and benefits from its full support. The highest authorities of the institution support the Accelerator concept and its operations. Information and support requests raised by the Accelerator are managed on priority basis, e.g. direct access to Accelerator steering committee and decision makers.

5. The Accelerator has strong relations with various stakeholders, experts and key influencers. The Accelerator services encourage and leverage connections and collaborations with various internal and external stakeholders of the organization. The aim is to facilitate vital activities for the progress of initiatives, such as information management, expertise and knowledge sharing, networking and promotion.

6. Accelerator cycles each have a specific strategic focus. During each cycle, the Accelerator tackles a specific topic that is of strategic priority for the institution, sector or country. Focusing on one topic allows the Accelerator to further direct its services and leverage a greater scale of service support.

7. The Accelerator nurtures team capabilities across core business and managerial competencies. Throughout the acceleration cycle, the development of the team enrolled in the Accelerator is scheduled on a frequent basis. Development topics are pre-identified based on the individual needs of participating team members, e.g. project management, relationship development, decision making, etc.
8. The infrastructure setup and environment of the Accelerator is friendly and conducive to work. The environment of the Initiatives Accelerators offers all the required tools and equipment that facilitate work execution and motivate team members.

9. The Accelerator carefully manages its marketing and communication activities to build greater interest and engagement. The continual marketing and communication activities of the Accelerator, for example on social media, websites, institutional platforms, panels, conferences, etc. raise awareness about the concept and increase the interest of internal and external stakeholders.

10. The Accelerator has a dedicated budget and spending authority for higher operational flexibility. An operational budget dedicated to the Accelerator supports its operational flexibility, especially when the Accelerator is free to spend the budget within the context of initiatives execution, under the supervision of a steering committee.

E. PACS EXPERIENCE: A FIRST OF ITS KIND INITIATIVES ACCELERATOR IN SAUDI ARABIA

PACS has designed and operated a unique and first of its kind GIA in Saudi Arabia, launching it within the ecosystem of a major institution in the Public Sector. PACS followed a structured approach in designing the Accelerator operating model, combining it with the simultaneous activation of a pilot cycle. This practice has strengthened the building blocks of the Accelerator operating model. It has also delivered practical tools and guidelines for managing the acceleration phases and delivering related services.

Today, we have completed a successful pilot cycle together with our client and we are currently preparing to launch the second acceleration cycle. The pilot focused on managing three key initiatives to deliver concrete results in 100 days, when typically such initiatives would have taken 6–18 months to develop and implement through the normal track.

The Initiatives Accelerator model can be replicated and rolled out successfully in several different contexts, independent of the nature of the industry or institution.

PACS focused on three pillars for the successful development and orchestration of the Initiatives Accelerator, tackling design, people and operations:

- **Designing the Initiatives Accelerator**: From the suggestion of the platform name to the design of its phases and key activities, PACS worked together with the client team on all details of the establishment of the Accelerator. Extensive research and benchmarks were conducted to deduce key lessons from ‘Rapid Results Approach’ and Initiatives Accelerators models.
• **Developing the skills of initiative owners and nurturing a capable Accelerator team:** PACS paid close attention to the building of capability for the Accelerator. We designed and delivered a condensed development program for initiative owners throughout the acceleration cycle, covering key managerial and leadership skills that proved to be essential. A knowledge transfer calendar and individual coaching sessions were scheduled with the Accelerator team at the beginning of the cycle to secure proper onboarding and induction, and to assure independent management of the Accelerator function at the end of the 100 days.

• **Piloting the Accelerator cycle:** PACS developed a clear implementation roadmap for the Accelerator, differentiating between the activities required to its setup and management, and those required to execute the accelerated initiatives and deliver tangible outcomes. With our pilot GIA, we helped our client run the operations of the Accelerator together with the assigned Accelerator team, becoming involved in: designing and planning initiatives, close monitoring and follow-up, coordinating support and facilitation services, and reporting results. In addition, PACS managed the presence of the Accelerator on social media, spreading awareness about its model and added value, and generating interest among concerned stakeholders and future potential participants.

Through focused and collaborative effort together with our GIA client and the quick achievement of results, the impact of the Accelerator was tangible at several levels, benefiting the participating individuals, the institution, the sector, and the nation at large (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Impact of Government Initiatives Accelerators (GIAs)**

- Uplifted core managerial and leadership among participants
- Increased engagement of participating team and stakeholders, and commitment to execution of government initiatives
- Improved outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness
- Contribution to economic growth and community development
- Instilled change culture and agile management practices
- Timely delivery of strategically important projects
- Resolution of critical challenges and overcoming of obstacles
- Realization of desired performance targets

*Source: PACS*
CONCLUSION

GIAs have proved to be a successful tool in advancing public sector projects and generating tangible and high quality results, thus supporting the realization of national objectives and the strategic vision.

In addition, GIAs create an excellent learning and development opportunity for enrolled members. They help to develop results-oriented mindsets, innovative project-management skills, problem-solving abilities and relationship-building opportunities.

The Accelerator is a platform that can be replicated at different levels in government and public institutions. PACS has extensive experience in setting up and operating industry and topic-specific GIAs, including tailoring the acceleration approach, setting-up the environment, recruiting and training the Accelerator team, and managing the acceleration phases.

For further information about GIAs please contact us at info@pacsmena.com
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Dr. Christiane is a Partner and Managing Director at PACS, the leader of the Education practice and a member of the Public Sector practice in the Middle East. She has 15 years of experience in management consulting, higher education management and industry experience in Europe and the Middle East, working with government and private sector clients in Germany, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

Christiane works with clients on developing national and institutional strategies, reviewing organizational structures and business models, and implementing change programs across the organization. Christiane also leads the training, recruitment and culture efforts within PACS, and acts as an advisor to higher education projects and education technology startups in the region and in Europe.

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Sally is a Project Manager at PACS with extensive experience in strategy, transformation, operations and human capital. She has 8 years of experience in management consulting, working with a wide variety of clients from the public and private sectors in Lebanon, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, and has developed a deep understanding of the Middle Eastern perspective in these fields.

Since she joined PACS, she has led setup and efficiency enhancement projects across a variety of industry sectors and topics, through concept detailing and implementation. In addition to her work in consulting, Sally is a certified Life and Career Coach and works closely with clients on management and leadership coaching.
PACS is a boutique strategy and management consulting firm covering the MENA region with offices in Dubai, Riyadh and Beirut.

With an entrepreneurial mindset at the heart of the firm, we build on our consulting offerings by helping our clients to deliver lasting impact to their businesses. We focus on multiple sectors, such as education, financial services, energy, as well as public sector, family businesses and SMEs, business incubation and more.

We leverage our methodologies and our tools, as well as our deep experience leading projects in the MENA region to deliver outcome with the highest quality standard. This gives us a competitive edge in achieving sought-after impact and implementable recommendations.

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