Merck for Mothers:
Equipping leaders to improve maternal health outcomes
Client profile

Today’s Merck is a global health care leader working to help the world be well. Merck is known as MSD outside the United States and Canada. Through its prescription medicines, vaccines, biologic therapies and animal health products, Merck works with customers and operates in more than 140 countries to deliver innovative health solutions. Merck also demonstrates its commitment to increasing access to health care through far-reaching policies, programs and partnerships. In 2014 it employed approximately 70,000 people and posted revenues of $42.2 billion.

Opportunity

Merck for Mothers, known as MSD for Mothers outside the United States and Canada, is a 10-year, $500 million initiative to reduce maternal mortality worldwide. This focused program applies Merck’s scientific and business expertise—as well as its financial resources and experience in taking on tough global healthcare challenges.

Merck for Mothers is providing transformational solutions to improve the quality of care, from admission to discharge, and access to family planning for women giving birth at healthcare facilities. Merck for Mothers is in its third year and has so far contributed to improve access to quality maternal healthcare and family planning services for an estimated 4.7 million women in 30 countries around the world.

Of particular focus for development organizations and the maternal health community, is the high-risk area of Tanzania. Every hour in Tanzania, one woman dies from problems linked to pregnancy or childbirth. According to the World Health Organization, most maternal and neonatal deaths occur within the immediate period around giving birth and most of these deaths may be avoided by effective, timely and quality maternal and neonatal health service delivery at the health facility level. Improvements in health facilities’ capacity to deliver quality maternal and neonatal health services depends on having skilled professionals and an environment that includes the appropriate infrastructure and supplies, organization culture and strong leadership awareness and support. Strong leadership hinges on managers possessing sound clinical and management capabilities. While clinicians in leadership positions typically possess clinical skills, they often receive no formal management training. This can cause a gap in the management skills required for effective obstetric care delivery.

Solution

Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP) collaborates with organizations working in the international development sector by delivering innovative solutions that truly aim at changing the way people work and live. Using leading practices from Accenture Strategy Talent & Organization, the ADP team developed a comprehensive management assessment tool to evaluate 17 management capabilities across operations, people and individual management areas. The assessment followed a “360 degree” evaluation approach that incorporated feedback from target individuals, the medical officer in charge of the facility and the medical officer in charge of the maternity ward, as well as their supervisors, direct reports, and customers (their patients). The team also developed a Rapid Assessment Tool: a comprehensive self-assessment tool including a 10-20 minute survey and a user guide for both individuals and facilities to quickly and easily understand management capability strengths and opportunities.

The assessment, conducted in collaboration with Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS), a local, private healthcare provider, identified a number of management capability gaps. Based on these findings and the capabilities of the consolidated team, including Merck for Mothers, Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), Aga Khan Health Services (AKHS), the Tanzania Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, and Accenture Development Partnerships, “Data-Driven Decision Making” was selected as the focus of the pilot intervention.

The team then developed a recommended intervention outline that consisted of tool and process components, a competency building curriculum, and change adoption activities that would improve the ability of clinicians in leadership positions to make decisions based on sound data. The team also defined in detail the intervention components, target participants, target region and a high-level deployment approach.

The ADP team conducted research, hosted a global health and management subject matter expert (SME) panel, and completed a landscape assessment. This was used as input for a co-authored white paper highlighting the importance of management in maternal and neonatal health and insights into conducting management capability assessments and designing and deploying interventions and measurement programs. The report was created for use by the larger global health community, especially those interested in management capability building, to further a deeper appreciation for, and understanding of, the healthcare management landscape.
A valuable component of Accenture Strategy's contribution was its leadership and guidance over the consolidated team in managing the complex program and stakeholder groups. At the outset of the program, the ADP team formalized a team charter, including guiding principles, governance, objectives, and outcomes as well as securing buy-in from all stakeholders. In light of the diverse stakeholder group and inherited organizational priorities, the ADP team led various initiatives including chairing meetings, collaborating with individual members to gather input and build buy-in, and refreshing the consolidated team charter. The establishment and successful management of the consolidated team was a key contributing factor to the project's success.

Results

In line with the consolidated team’s guiding principles focused on scalability, the ADP team created a comprehensive standardized, automated and objective management capability assessment tool and a streamlined Rapid Assessment Tool that could be used by the consolidated team and/or other groups to expand this project throughout Tanzania or in other geographies. The assessment tool provides a comprehensive self-evaluation of management capabilities across many areas within a facility and can be used as a diagnostic tool to identify areas for potential interventions. Moreover, it represents the Accenture Strategy knowledge, assets, and content regarding capability evaluation and building approaches.

The ADP team outlined an intervention to improve management capabilities that is both reusable and scalable. By focusing on sustainability during the development of the intervention (including components, audience and delivery approach), a solution was created that can be applied to other healthcare programs seeking to build management capabilities.

The consolidated team members represent various organizations within the private, public, and civil sectors seeking to work together to improve maternal health outcomes. One of its key objectives was to represent the value that the private sector can deliver in the maternal health space, and particularly, in developing countries. By establishing a successful model for collaboration, the team demonstrated the potential benefits of bringing these different collaborators together. Leveraging Accenture Strategy’s knowledge in management and capability development, the ADP team demonstrated that it is feasible and realistic to complete a management capability assessment in a low resource setting and that significant capability gaps do exist among clinicians in leadership positions. The consolidated team helped to bring this gap to the attention of Tanzania’s Ministry of Health & Social Work.
About Accenture

Accenture is a leading global professional services company, providing a broad range of services and solutions in strategy, consulting, digital, technology and operations. Combining unmatched experience and specialized skills across more than 40 industries and all business functions—underpinned by the world’s largest delivery network—Accenture works at the intersection of business and technology to help clients improve their performance and create sustainable value for their stakeholders. With more than 358,000 people serving clients in more than 120 countries, Accenture drives innovation to improve the way the world works and lives. Visit us at www.accenture.com.

About Accenture Strategy

Accenture Strategy operates at the intersection of business and technology. We bring together our capabilities in business, technology, operations and function strategy to help our clients envision and execute industry-specific strategies that support enterprise wide transformation. Our focus on issues related to digital disruption, competitiveness, global operating models, talent and leadership help drive both efficiencies and growth. For more information, follow @AccentureStrat or visit www.accenture.com/strategy.

Accenture Development Partnerships

Accenture Development Partnerships (ADP) is a global practice employing an innovative business model to provide international development organizations with access to world class business and technology consulting services to deliver social impact and innovation.