The Art, the (Social) Science and the Politics of Building Capability for Implementation

http://www.hks.harvard.edu/centers/cid/programs/building_state_capability

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Overview

• **The Development Dilemma**
  – Welfare improving, but ‘institutions’ declining
  – Why this matters; why it persists; what to do differently

• **Challenges**
  – Inherently hard to implement ‘complex’ projects
  – Orthodoxy is itself often the problem
  – *The 21*st C development task

• **Opportunities**
  – Building on the shoulders of giants...
  – New emerging spaces for innovative thinking, doing
  – Imperatives of working in/with ‘fragile states’

• **Generating solution-generating implementation systems**
  – Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)
  – Contrasts with orthodoxy
  – PDIA-ing PDIA
From Albert Hirschman  
*(Journeys Towards Progress, 1967)*

- “The term ‘implementation’ understates the complexity of the task of carrying out projects that are affected by a high degree of initial ignorance and uncertainty. Here ‘project implementation’ may often mean in fact a *long voyage of discovery* in the most varied domains, from technology to politics.” (p. 35)
Between leaving and entering

...slowly but surely we have become alienated from our own people and our own environment. This alienation would have been bearable had it not been that in our case the abandonment of our own culture did not at the same time bring access to another civilization. Thus we have sacrificed what was ours but have not gained in its place anything that might be considered its equivalent; **we have lost our world, but we have not entered another**...

We have added much new cultural material, the value of which cannot be discounted; however, **it often fits so ill with our own style or is so far removed from it that we can use it at best as a decoration and not as material to build with.** It is quite understandable why we have been so mistaken in our choice. In the first place, much has to be chosen, and there has been **so little to choose from.**

Ki Hajar Dewantara, 1935 (Indonesian educator)
The Development Dilemma

Human Development Indicators (MDGs)

Vietnam

(Much of) Africa

Haiti

Absolute Improvement

1960s 2010s

Institutional Capability
The Best of Times...

• For the average person, basic indicators of human well-being have never been better
  – most MDGs met in most places
  – higher average levels of education in Bangladesh now than France in 1960
  – relative (if not always absolute) levels of “dollar-a-day” poverty declining almost everywhere
  – Rapid decline of pandemics, crippling diseases (polio), famines, wars, etc
  – Over 20th C, life expectancy almost doubled
Mostly poor to mostly rich (?), 1700 – 2100

Adapted from *The Escape from Hunger and Premature Death, 1700-2100* by Robert Fogel (Cambridge University Press, 2004)
Mostly poor to mostly rich (?), 1700 – 2100

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“Nearly everyone”

% of the world that is ‘poor’ (i.e., hungry, dying prematurely)

“Some”

1700 1800 1900 2000 2100

? ?
But ‘divergence, big time’...
...and ‘low capability’ organizations (QoG data): few successes; *most* countries going *backwards*...

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Classification by levels of Quality of Government in 2008</th>
<th>Classification by pace of change in (normed) Quality of Government, 1998-2008</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High: (above 6.50)</td>
<td><strong>Falling fast:</strong> (below -0.05 annual growth)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>BRN, MLT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium: (above 4.00 but below 6.50)</td>
<td><strong>Falling</strong> below 0 but above -0.05 annual growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>ARG, BGR, BHR, BOL, CRI, GIN, GMB, GUY, HUN, IRN, JAM, LKA, MAR, MNG, MWI, NIC, PAN, PHL, POL, ROM, SUR, SYR, THA, TTO, TUN, ZAF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low: (below 4.00)</td>
<td><strong>Falling</strong> below 0 but above -0.05 annual growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countries</td>
<td>CIV, COG, DOM, GAB, GTM, HTI, KEN, LBY, PNG, PRK, PRY, SLE, SLV, SOM, VEN, ZWE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>44</td>
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</table>
...for many (e.g., Haiti), glacial progress...
... even on ‘simple’ tasks

• The capability of states to implement core responsibilities remains (disturbingly) low
  – ‘Simple’ tasks (logistics)
    • Delivering mail, dispensing drivers licenses
  – ‘Moderate’ tasks
    • Social protection programs (Gupta 2012)
  – ‘Complex’ tasks
    • Land reform, Criminal justice, Regulation
    • Stagnating, declining ‘quality of government’
    • Unfinished historical tasks...
Delivering the mail (literally)—testing the post office in 157 countries

Percent of 10 misaddressed letters coming back to USA within 90 days

- **Lowest 25 countries**
  - Bottom half of countries by years of schooling
    - Lowest quartile: 9.2%
    - Third quartile by income: 30%
    - Second quartile by income: 43%
    - Top quartile by income: 60%

- **Countries**
  - Colombia: 90%
  - Uruguay: 90%
  - Finland: 90%
  - Czech Republic: 100%

Includes not just Somalia and Myanmar but Tanzania, Ghana, Nigeria, Egypt, Russia, Mongolia, Cambodia, Honduras, Fiji, etc.

Ending slavery, colonialism; expanding civil rights, women’s suffrage...

‘The problem we all live with’
Challenges

• Making implementation cool when the prestige and power is in ‘design’ and ‘evaluation’
• All projects are complex, but some are (much) more complex than others
  – Constructing schools is ‘easy’; teaching children is ‘hard’
• 20\textsuperscript{th} C aid architecture largely designed to address ‘technical’ and ‘logistical’ problems, policy reform
  – And for the most part, has contributed to a development process that has been \textit{spectacularly} successful
• But has persistently mistaken form for function
Solomon Islands

• RAMSI: $millions spent on state-of-the-art courthouse, jail, training of judges, police...

• ...vs ‘Justice Delivered Locally’, a decentralized system of island courts responding to everyday justice concerns of everyday people
Explaining the Development Dilemma

• Life getting better, institutions getting worse?
  – Marked decline in violence, famines (Pinker, Sen)
  – Big gains from basic infrastructure (nothing to something)
  – ‘Institutions’ for simple logistics
    • But these can’t do complex, contentious tasks

• Building state capability for implementation as the 21st C development challenge
  – Sustaining existing gains
  – Addressing looming challenges
    • “You ain’t seen nothin’ yet”: It’s only going to get harder
    • Incremental realignment of global power...
  – Global collective action problems only intensifying
    • Ebola, ‘failed states’, terrorism, climate change, etc
What to do?

• But do we (does anyone) know how to build robust, legitimate public institutions?
  – Current approaches not very encouraging
    • see Matt Andrews (2013) *Limits of Institutional Reform*
  – Engaging diversity itself requires a more diverse array of ideas, evidence and strategies
  – Problems unlikely to have known or knowable (ex ante) solution
Pervasive operational problem

• Justice, governance (et al) projects inherently very complex, thus:
  – Very hard to isolate ‘true’ impact
  – Very hard to make claims about likely impact elsewhere
  – Crucial to understand how and for whom (not just whether) impact is achieved
    • Experimentation not experiments
      – ‘Institutions’ as languages, music, religions
    • Getting inside the proverbial ‘black box’
      – Process Evaluations, or ‘Realist Evaluations’, can be most helpful
## Summary of findings
(Barron, Diprose and Woolcock 2011)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Impact</th>
<th>Context Capacity</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
<td><strong>High</strong></td>
<td><strong>Low</strong></td>
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<td>Program Functionality</td>
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<td>Low</td>
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<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Direct</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Forums (places)</td>
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<td>++</td>
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<tr>
<td>Facilitators (people)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indirect</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Relations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>++</td>
<td>+</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+++</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+</td>
<td>0</td>
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*While we noted higher rates of KDP-triggered conflict in high capacity areas, such conflict is much less likely to escalate and/or turn violent. Hence negative impacts are greater in low capacity areas, where program functionality is poor.*
‘Complex’ projects: widening variance over time, space, groups

Net Impact

Positive deviance

Time

\[ t = 0 \]

\[ t = 1 \]
Learning from intra-project variation

Iterative, adaptive learning

Impact

t = 0
t = 1

Time
Which way up?
RCTs vs QICs

Eppstein et al (2012) “Searching the clinical fitness landscape”
*PLoS ONE*: 7(11): e49901
Elements of alternatives...

• Academic literature
  – “Projects as policy experiments” (Rondinelli)
  – “Learning organizations” (Senge)
  – “Good-enough governance” (Grindle)
  – “Just-enough governance” (Fukuyama and Levy)
  – “Deliberation, not blueprints” (Evans)
    • 21st C developmental state
  – “Best fit, not best practice” (Booth)
  – “Second-best institutions” (Rodrik)
  – “Positive deviance” (Pascale et al)
  – “Complex adaptive systems” (Ramalingam, Barder et al)

• Operational initiatives
  – Results Based Management
  – Cash on delivery aid (CODA, GPOBA), et al
Four Principles of PDIA (Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation)

1. Local Solutions for Local Problems
2. Pushing Problem Driven Positive Deviance
3. Try, Learn, Iterate, Adapt
4. Scale Learning through Diffusion

In summary: how PDIA differs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What drives action?</th>
<th>“Big D” (e.g. WB, agencies)</th>
<th>“small d” (e.g. NGOs)</th>
<th>PDIA</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Solutions (&quot;institutional mono-cropping&quot;, “best practice”, AMTTBP)</td>
<td>Solutions (variety of antidotes – e.g. “participation” “community driven”)</td>
<td>Problem Driven—looking to solve particular problems</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Lots of advance planning (implementation of secondary importance)</td>
<td>Boutique, starting very small with no plans for scale</td>
<td>Authorization of positive deviation, purposive crawl of the design space</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Feedback loops? | Monitoring (short, on financing and inputs) and Evaluation (long feedback loop on outputs, maybe outcomes) | Casual, geared to advocacy not learning | MeE: integration of rigorous “experiential” learning into tight feedback loops |

| Scale? | Top-down—the head learns, implementation is just muscle (“political will”) | Small is beautiful... Or, just not logistically possible | Diffusion of feasible practice across organizations and communities of practitioners |
In ‘fragile states’, how might PDIA...

• **Inform theory?**
  – Explain attraction, durability but limits of BAU
  – Distinguish different types of problems, contexts
  – Articulate alternative principles

• **Contribute to general allocation decisions?**
  – Beyond CPIA < 3.2
  – Toward types and trajectories of ‘fragility’
    • On the basis of broad data + specific country cases

• **Be a guide to country-specific policy/practice?**
  – Solomon Islands, Sierra Leone
  – South Sudan
  – Afghanistan
More details at...


