2002 "Technical Knowledge and Development. Observing Aid Projects and Processes", Routledge

Eleven Scientific Journals Published Book Reviews

A <u>director of Latin America department</u> in governmental development agency,

cites as a key result: "...*the technical content of the knowledge was not the source of confrontation*" (Entwicklungsethnologie 11/2: 210)

asserts his organization would have moved beyond the TA examples analyzed, agrees to the concepts suggested to describe TA implementation and to their relevance for Project Cycle Management.

B <u>prominent evaluation consultant</u> from Sweden, sees a key insight in:

"what the foreigners called "the project" remained insufficiently defined for the local actors; it did not correspond to a precise activity. Consequently foreign and local actors moved on different stages..... Chapter 6 takes us from latent processes to event management. This is a brave and necessary chapter; however, at times the analysis goes further than the empirical data allows. The methodological focus has been on the actors on the projects, and this is the "forte" of the book. However, in event management we move to the mindsets and activities as well as the organizational culture, of the international agencies." (Impact Assessment and Project Appraisal 19/4: 329-330)

claims that operational methods have changed but managerialism prevails and thus methods move further away from learning about practice as indicated in the analysis.

C <u>management consultant</u>, M & E specialist in the U.S., writes:

"This atomized, person-to-person dimension surely is part of every project, but how much in the way of applicable management lessons do we learn from a narrative of this kind ? How far should commonplace sets of human interactions be taken to inform a theory of technology transfer ?" (Knowledge, Technology & Policy 14/3: 141-143)

affirms M & E state-of-the-art to have improved since the TA examples used, thus the results are not pertinent to current TA reforms.

D <u>manager</u> in the U.S. federal government Department of Energy, concludes:

"One general condition will be obvious: developers and developees always co-author project implementation..... The book is limited in application because it looks only at two case studies, hardly meeting the criteria for global application." (Project Management Journal 33/2: 59)

mistakes idiosyncrasy to be determined by the social context, instead of being the original product of the participants' efforts to collaborate.

E <u>head of organizational behaviour</u> unit Amsterdam university, Netherlands:

> „The text is not always accessible, but what is most regrettable is that the theoretical and empirical analysis of the developmental practice limits itself to the field of intercultural communication. The knowledge that has been developed in the field of organizational culture and identity processes in recent years is completely ignored." (International Business Review, 12/1: 127-31)

the main result he sees, ethnocentric behaviour in development agencies, should be foregrounded so to reflect the informal organizational aspects.

F <u>political economist</u> at a French university:

> "Les agences de développement enfermées dans leur cocon institutionnel et politique (bureaucratiques et sous l'influence des choix en politique extérieure des Etats des pays dont ils sont originaires) sont largement inefficaces en matière de transfert et de transmission de technologies et de savoir-faire." (Innovations: Cahiers d'économie de l'innovation, no. 15: 208)

sees macro-political blockages, nothing can be done in practice to overcome the inconsistencies of development agencies' interests.

G <u>economist</u> at a leading UK development policy research institute:

> "Rather he concludes that the structure of aid management itself ultimately undermined the development impact of the two projects. To put the explanation perhaps rather too simply, the foreign "developers" were required to conform to the role of prime source of knowledge and authority that underpinned their contractual privileges. At the same time, while conforming superficially to the role this implied for them, the local "developees" tacitly resisted such structural subordination to protect their autonomy and identity" (Public Administration and Development, 22/4: 365)

recognizes blockages due to institutional imperatives and claims that only project ownership renegotiation can change aid relations.

H <u>political scientist</u> in technology studies at a U.S. university:

> "Grammig suggests that the cultural distance is enacted through a multitude of micro and macro conflicts that are brought into the project by the various actors: assumptions about motives (assistance vs. dependency), various types of language games (strategic, dramaturgical, and illocutionary), cultural meanings of specific types of actions (quality control vs. colonialist control), ideologies (lazy natives vs. colonialist foreigners), personal identities, and the need to enact them (expert, artisan, and Mexican). To the extent that these quotations cannot be made sense of outside of his interpretations, the text feels closed off and uninviting.... the role of the technical elements is that (1) technical knowledge serves as a basis to begin overcoming the cultural divide (in that everyone agrees that the technology is

sound), (2) the ideology of "neutral" science creates new tensions by obscuring the cultural divisions that would be obvious in a nontechnical project…. Even if we do not share Grammig's sanguine outlook or desire to fix such failures, approaching TA projects from this perspective certainly moves us to a more nuanced level of analysis. Unfortunately, because of the difficult writing style, I can only recommend this book to specialists in development studies and students."

acknowledges the latent processes and claims that their definition remains incomplete. The analysis opens TA practice to technology research but this achievement is limited as the use of the results is unclear, primarily because of the presentation and style of writing.

I <u>influential ethnographer</u> for sub-Saharan Africa in French research institute:

"Ces processus bien qu'implicites orientent pourtant les comportements des acteurs. C'est seulement en en prenant conscience qu'il est possible pour les acteurs de dépasser cette situation. En conclusion Grammig souhaite proposer des outils fondés sur un apprentissage réciproque qui permettent selon lui de lever ces contradictions. Dans les deux projets étudiés ce qui a fait le plus défaut aux différents acteurs impliqués c'est la capacité d'être à l'écoute des attentes et des désirs de l'autre et de voir comment les satisfaire".

insists on the interdependence of opinions and behaviour between foreigners and locals as he is alert to the cultural anchorage of individual behaviour. The only reviewer who links the latent processes to the faculties of the actors, and who acknowledges the attempt to provide tools enabling practitioners to reflect on their own understanding on the micro-level.

Which parts of the analysis are salient for practitioners ?

The object "development practice" is presented in *Technical Knowledge and Development* from different angles and is received in diverse audiences (and journals). Each reviewer points to assumptions about social and cultural mechanisms in aid practice and to recent changes in development organizations. Reviewers stress different angles and mechanisms but contradictory judgements appear also. One contradiction between **(** and **)**, and one between **B** and **(** show the salience of the analysis for practitioners as follows.

A to D declining experience with practice, A has 20 years hands-on project management experience, D acts more in the planning stage.

These reviewers acknowledge the empirical accuracy, the insights into the perspectives of participants. The description overcomes the idiosyncrasy at the micro-level and renders the internal dynamics evident to a reader who has not been there. This allows to point to policy lessons. What the reviewers see as the key policy lesson, however, varies considerably. A, with most responsibility and experience, underlines that management problems are caused by claims on the quality of the knowledge contents of projects. B sees the same lesson but in the form of behaviour and opinion of participants. C and D's interpretation of the behavioural, emotional and cognitive basis of practices lead them to neglect the lessons for learning A and B found. C and D, with more experience of project cycles in the U.S. administration, assume that social variables can be anticipated and thus wish to define categories and guidelines to take "culture into account". C sees the variables as 'commonplace' and D assumes them to be specific to the social context (despite the co-authoring), and so obviously between C and D these categories are not the same (while the book points to professional socialisation of experts in respective organizations).

The practice focus necessarily allows for such different readings of the book, but the presentation should be sufficiently clear to hierarchise the policy lessons. A reader should be able to conclude even without 20 years of experience, that the demonstration - why the technical content was not the source of confrontation - can be used to influence the participants' interactions in other cases, and not conclude that one needs recipes for each 'culture unit'. On the other hand, the legacy of aid failure shapes the opinions of these reviewers as well. A is alert to the obstacles he is facing to revise Project Cycle Management (the 1990's approach built on the 1970's Logframe approach), whereas C proclaims improved M & E, and these views are related to respective interpretations of the aid legacy.

These reviewers from development agencies interpret first of all how the book treats the gap between development policy and development practice. This gap is the fundamental property structuring the whole field. Even for a straightforward property of this gap, the potential to overcome it with evaluations, opinions diverge.

For B

> "The impact of one critical evaluation is naturally less, than a combination of hundreds from several bilateral and multilateral agencies. It is like comparing the effect of a sniper to that of an armoured division, if I am allowed a military comparison. The mass of

evaluation findings quoted here is devastating...... Present management thinking leads the agencies further and further away from being learning systems."

Whereas for (

> "Unfortunately, this result is based almost entirely on the reading of two rather dated secondary assessments of international development evaluations. Major, multiyear, multi-author studies (by World Bank staff and others) have been published since; these offer qualifications to an endorsement of evaluation as a management function for technical assistance, but most have recognized it as indispensable as a learning and organizational resource. Finally, Grammig makes the mistake of confusing cost-benefit analysis, featuring widely recognized technical and management deficiencies, with the whole diverse body of approaches available to project evaluation."

Both are regular and reputed producers of evaluations. Their comments on the analysis of evaluation studies are in opposition. This contrast does not reflect the insufficient presentation of the latent processes in the book text, but rather reflects management optimism in the US compared to Sweden (USAID vs. SIDA).

Which parts of the analysis are salient for researchers ?

Outside commentators, whose judgment reflects much skill in closing in on the contradictions, have little operational experience to approve the suggested origin of project failure / success.

[to] decreasing predetermination, from practitioners as a predictable caste, via practitioners as reluctant agents of geopolitics, to practitioners as sole producers of their conditions.

Specialists with little experience in project implementation find it difficult to judge the unlike nature of the objects between development discourse, as it is used in planning and policy, and practice. Therefore, they interpret the book's results only partially and often in a manner reflecting their scientific discipline. For the economist (, it is the individual self-interest, which defines and limits the project participant. He can not plausibly assume that it would not be tacit resistance, but limits of honest effort to understand and

explain, which inhibits both foreigners and local project participants. In development agencies, the coupling between individual skill and organizational incentive is very weak, and what remains outside of institutional imperatives is more important. Contrary to G's review, the book describes the structure of aid management but insists on the voids and insufficiencies of aid management as the cause of practices. This argument remains transparent, or invisible, to outside commentators. Perhaps, this is an inevitable defect, even a literately very talented author cannot bridge, or overcome, the distance between discourse and practice.

The differences E-I are unavoidable, no account of development practice, as one of the most complex social phenomena, could combine social science paradigms and produce an interdisciplinary account. E is the most biased reviewer, referring to the internal debates of his discipline. F sees the discourse - practice distance as the result of the institution, where G detects conflicts of individual interest. This reflects F's focus on the extent to which individual behaviour has repercussions beyond his/her horizon. Influential sociologists, like Bourdieu or Giddens, emphasize this aspect of the human condition, and this shapes the discipline. H stresses the insights from science and technology studies (STS), that practitioners have much leeway in using technology to pursue social motives and thus H claims TA outcomes' micro functions. STS typically uncovers additional choices for individuals which political economy tends to deny. I's review is closest to the argument in the book because ethnography captures the hybrid nature of the interactions between locals and foreigners, as if practice would be a whole belief system, a cultural set or world-view, in which the project lives. Therefore, I underlines the book's hypothesis, that practitioners can alter the dynamics of project implementation. F would reject the suggestion of C, that M & E methods could make a difference or have already done so. G, H and I would accept that possibility.

These different reviews A-D and E-I, also reflect the over-ambition of the book, on the one hand addressing the practitioner audience, presenting tools and concepts to shape a specific project, while at the same time, arguing for new management approaches and more applied anthropology on the institutional level. Perhaps one can achieve both only by combining ethnography of practice and institutional ethnographies of agencies. The over-ambition would have been to reconstruct the gap only from the practice side, which seems a curious

explanation, but finally this also indicates the extent of the problematique engaged. Differences in development thinking between OECD countries aggravate this as all reviewers have first hand experience of unlike aid debates.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the book's rendering of the inside perspective of development projects, the reviewers draw different lessons. Practitioners differ on the ability of development organizations to account for the complexity of practice. Degrees of managerial optimism explain this, U.S. practitioners work mostly with U.S.-AID, where managerial ambition prevails. While the Swedish reviewer B sees agency habits continuing to hinder learning. With less intuition than the practitioner reviewers, the researchers differ on the nature of the results. They agree that success / failure of development projects is an interactionist outcome (foreigners and locals mutually create it in their interaction), but differ in judging the scope of such interaction. In other words, researchers assume individual project participants to be more or less able to know what they are doing. In sum, the disagreements between practitioner reviewers reflect internal agency ideologies, and the disagreements between researchers' social theory. Practitioners react to prescriptions and researchers to diagnosis, that is obvious but more importantly, both differ on the scope of the individual. A and B question whether individuals can 'withstand' agency ideology, C and D assume just that. E and F presume outcomes to be inherent to organizations, H and I link outcomes to individual participants.

Some more specific differences are also worth mentioning. Ethnocentrism is fundamental for the gap between policy and practice, in this E is correct, but A's conclusion about changing conflicts in projects shows that practitioners perceive well what H's theory predicts (while C is too optimistic). E's organizational culture assumption is not correct as B stresses, these are just not those E expects. C directly contradicts B and I regarding evaluation and the social sciences' input into development practice. Also among the academics, the

French reviewers are more distant from a more empirical position of the economist **G**. National policy styles and managerialism can explain that the book's empirical evidence creates these views.

Even the more empiricist researcher **G** is less optimistic than the least managerial practitioner **A**, there is no overlap. **G** is categorical in calling for a renegotiation of ownership, thus denying that managerial improvements can be significant. That there is no overlap between researchers and practitioners shows the complexity of practice. The focus on the idiosyncrasy of the case studies was thus both necessary and counterproductive for the reception of the book. However, the policy implications should have been spelled out better so that one can not simply label the prescription "outdated" (Victorian) to refuse it. To close, learning by practitioners needs to follow **H**'s openings but also **B**'s and **I**'s intuition for behaviour in order to use the openings.

Additional Book Reviews:

Planning Theory & Practice, 2004, 5/4: 522-523,

Journal des Economistes et Etudes Humaines, 2001, XI/4: 739-749.

For a detailed presentation of research on practices see:
Schatzki T.R., Knorr Cetina K., von Savigny E., 2001, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, London: Routledge.

The Oxford Handbook of Public Policy
Ch. 28 Social and Cultural Factors: Constraining and Enabling
Davis B. Bobrow,   Page 578

People come to any particular policy situation with a stock of notions about the degree and nature of relevant variety based on their prior actual or virtual experiences (including socialization, accepted history, academic learning). Thus Grammig (2002, 56) reports that a development assistance project was for experts of different nationalities "an empty shell that each participant filled with his own meaning". What is learned about whom usually results from prior judgements about the importance of a culture or subculture and sufficient curiosity to enquire about it. We are more likely to have elaborated profiles of others we have dealt with before and previously treated as important, and less likely to have such about those rarely encountered or thought lacking in wealth, coercive power, status or rectitude. Of course, players in policy systems and policy issues are a heterogeneous lot in terms of who they have encountered and treated as important. In sum, which and how many differences get recognized (or denied) are political and cultural matters.

Handbook of globalization, governance and public administration
Ch. 36 International Development Management: Definitions, Debates and Dilemmas, Jennifer and Derick Brinkerhoff,   Page 832

Development management as values is expressed in two ways. First, development management acknowledges that managing is infused with politics; successful management takes account of this fact and therefore is both contextual and strategic (see, for example, Lindenberg and Crosby, 1981; White, 1987; Brinkerhoff and Crosby, 2002). Part of this acknowledgement extends to the recognition that managers, whether the local managers in a particular country or the external providers of technical or managerial assistance, are "carriers" of values, and hence are inherently political whether they recognize it or not (see Grammig, 2002). However, providers of international technical assistance often don a mantle of neutrality, assumed as a function of their scientific and professional expertise. However, knowledge and expertise cannot be separated from the values context in which they are developed and applied.

Cultivating Development. An Ethnography of Aid Policy and Practice
David Mosse
Page 12

Development organizations are in the habit of dealing with criticism and the questioning of their claims and actions (e.g. through reviews and evaluations). However, they are less tolerant of research that falls outside design frameworks, that does not appear to be practical relevance, is wasteful of time or adds complexity and makes the task of management harder (see discussion in Mosse 1998a). It is this that makes it virtually impossible to sustain long-term participant observation in the absence of making a practical contribution (whether as an engineer, a medic or anthropologist), being a member of the community and having a certain status (cf. Grammig 2002, Harper 2002). In any case, I for one would not have wanted the role of passive observer.

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An aid project is a 'globalising technology' (in its way like the media or migration) whose art of persuasion works through projecting the lives of its remote tribal beneficiaries onto metropolitan imaginations (Appadurai 1997, Luthra 2003). Over-ambition holds together internal diversity, and helps conceal the self-evident fact that 'no country in the world has ever developed itself through projects (Edwards 1989: 119 in Grammig 2002).

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Over many years, we developed a closer and more informal working relationship with project staff than most consultancy teams; and the trust we gained gave us unusual access to the internal workings of the project. But the knowledge that we consultants developed was still based on a view from afar. Grammig (2002) suggests that (foreign) expertise necessarily implies cultural distance and ignorance of the local in order to establish a privileged 'universal' point of view. Certainly consultants had a fragmented experience of the project, disengaged from the day-to-day routines and the pressing demands of relationship building.

Reagency of the Internet, or, How I Became a Guest for Science

Wesley Shrum   Page 730

Two key dimensions of the transience of the Guest are length of stay (one of the first things asked about any visitor) and revisitation (never known until the fact). This is one point of entry for ethnographers who have studied technical assistance projects and an important contrast with the Guest bringing programs or projects. The actions of the latter are to review facilities, to inquire about interests (the answer is almost always 'yes, we are interested'), to assemble a team for a proposal. Once a project is funded, it may or may not involve the emplacement of expatriates on site, interacting with a team of locals and generating all of the complexities of sustained intercultural interaction. Thomas Grammig's outstanding description of technical assistance projects in Chad and Mexico reveals the astonishing complexity of relationships within and between groups (Grammig, 2002). Interpretations that rely exclusively on notions of who is foreign and who is local are undermined by ethnic, gender, and class divisions, among many others. As identities remain in place, they differentiate and develop individualities – over time, they can become people, even friends. The pure Guest is a transient, an action generator, an identity without other purpose than reagency.

Other Citations

How relevant is wellbeing to international development policy and practice?   WeD Conference,   James Copestake
Page 12:

The Primacy of the Personal

We hope our dentist will be pleasant and respectful, but if it came to a trade-off most of us would nevertheless opt for the most skilful with the drill, even if his or her chair-side manners left much to be desired. Development practice differs to the extent that interpersonal behaviour can have a more direct effect on the core goal of diffusing power in society. More fundamentally, the

inequality of access to and control over resources that is inherent in many aid relationships creates particular strains on personal relationships. Carr et al (1998) observe this effect closely in the labelling and othering associated with technical assistance for training, while Grammig (2002) alludes to the same issue in his observation that even where counterparts enjoy mutual professional respect and friendship their relationship is still mediated by differing political interests and identities that are built in to unequal power over allocation and disbursement of funds. While there is no avoiding the inequality of control over global resources within which development is embedded, the effect of this can at least be reduced by questioning the functional separation of who decides when development initiatives start and finish from who is responsible for their implementation in between.

Copestake derives functional remedies for the empirical demonstration.

Citation Analysis

The Oxford Handbook on Public Policy stresses the generic public policy problem that any project is always and for all an empty shell. Whereas Brinkerhoff's development management piece still maintains that it must not be so and individuals are at fault if it is, using metaphorically "to don a mantle".

David Mosse's book is a real turning point in the social sciences on development, opening new avenues for policy and research. He stresses neither the fundamental point of the Oxford Handbook nor the judgmental point by Brinkerhoff. Instead he refers to two specific conditions over-ambition and the need for cultural distance, and leaves their inevitability likely, perhaps he wants to stress that these conditions need to be establish again in each case. Shrum would support this since he stresses that the foreign/local opposition isn't even enough in the case of Internet use.

Brinkerhoff would incite managers to be context sensitive, contrary to Mosse's call to reduce their roles. These two views are mutually exclusive, either it is possible to reduce the "mantle of neutrality" or to modify the underlying ambition. Copestake defines organizational changes, that alter functional roles.