

Unpacking Institutional Change: Implications for P2P Learning

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Observations on institutions from the literature



- Reflect beliefs, rules, norms, values & practices that key social groups agree upon
- Self-enforcing
- “Sticky” equilibrium
- Path dependent
- Slow/resistant to change

Institutional change models

- Lots of change models
 - Mechanistic/structural
 - Historical/evolutionary
 - Life cycles
 - Organizational development/process consultation
 - Political economy/principal-agent/collective action
 - Complex adaptive systems
 - Entrepreneurism
- Models identify dynamics & conditions that make reforms more or less likely—drivers of change

Institutional change drivers: a summary

- Incompatibilities among different institutions and/or institutional levels
- Unresponsiveness to varying needs and demands
- Unresponsiveness to changing circumstances
- Competition due to diverging interests

Inclusive institutions & SDG 16

- Historical perspectives: North et al., Acemoglu & Robinson, Fukuyama
- Path dependence: prior settlements & elite bargains define reform options, create incentives, influence chances of success
- Establish foundations for citizen engagement, accountability, inclusive & sustainable growth
- Challenge of illiberal democracy and closing space for civil society
- Opportunities: inclusive institutional options

People & institutions

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“I want you to find a bold and innovative way to do everything exactly the same way it’s been done for 25 years.”

- Paradox of embedded agency
- Drivers of institutional change create conditions for some actors to become change agents
- Personal characteristics of change agents
 - Champions
 - Leaders/elites
 - Entrepreneurs
 - Diaspora
 - Networks
 - Social capital

Iterative & adaptive change processes

- Current perspectives have long roots in past efforts to promote institutional change
- Problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) is the latest version
- Reformers focus on three action arenas to create space for change:
 - Acceptance
 - Authority
 - Capacity

Challenges & lessons learned

- Key challenges for outsiders supporting internal change agents
 - Identifying shared objectives and commitment
 - Understanding context and incentives (PEA, TWP)
 - Operating within donor administrative structures and procedures
- Lessons
 - Beware of isomorphic mimicry & institutional decoupling
 - Work with distributed networks of reformers
 - Aim for best fit not best practice
 - Practice adaptive management

Implications for peer-to-peer learning

- Aligning external actors with local change agents' interests & aims
- Matching peers
- Commitment & capacity on both sides
- Mutuality, shared power, trust
- Learning structures & processes
- Timeframes & indicators



Wrap up: so what is new?

- More sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of institutional change
- Increased emphasis on enabling & aligning with local change agents, working through local systems
- More conceptual understanding re PEA & TWP, but limited operational grasp of what to do
- Good news: openness to experimentation, such as P2P
- Less than good news: difficult to document and measure, dueling metrics and evidence criteria
- Call to action: documentation and learning through process analysis of cases

Thank you

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Some additional reading on institutional change & public sector reform:

<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pad.1739/epdf>