

# Navigation by Judgment: Why and When Top Down Management of Foreign Aid Doesn't Work

## Description

Honig, Dan. 2018. [Navigation by Judgment: Why and When Top Down Management of Foreign Aid Doesn't Work](#). Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

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## Contents

Preface

Acknowledgments

Part I: The What, Why, and When of Navigation by Judgment

Chapter 1. Introduction – The Management of Foreign Aid

Chapter 2. When to Let Go: The Costs and Benefits of Navigation by Judgment

Chapter 3. Agents – Who Does the Judging?

Chapter 4. Authorizing Environments & the Perils of Legitimacy Seeking

Part II: How Does Navigation by Judgment Fare in Practice?

Chapter 5. How to Know What Works Better, When: Data, Methods, and Empirical Operationalization

Chapter 6. Journey Without Maps – Environmental Unpredictability and Navigation Strategy

Chapter 7. Tailoring Management to Suit the Task – Project Verifiability and Navigation Strategy

Part III: Implications

Chapter 8. Delegation and Control Revisited

Chapter 9. Conclusion – Implications for the Aid Industry & Beyond

Appendices

Appendix I: Data Collection

Appendix II: Additional Econometric Analysis

Bibliography

**YouTube presentation** by the author: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=bdjeoBFY9Ss>

**Snippet from video:** Errors arising from too much or too little control can be seen or unseen. When control is too little, errors are more likely to be seen. People do things they should not have done. When control is too much, errors are likely to be unseen, people don't do things they should have done. Given this asymmetry, and other things being equal, there is a bias towards too much control

Book review: By Duncan Green in his [2018 From Poverty to Power blog](#)

## Publishers blurb:

Foreign aid organizations collectively spend hundreds of billions of dollars annually, with mixed results. Part of the problem in these endeavors lies in their execution. When should foreign aid organizations empower actors on the front lines of delivery to guide aid interventions, and when should distant headquarters lead?

In *Navigation by Judgment*, Dan Honig argues that high-quality implementation of foreign aid programs often requires contextual information that cannot be seen by those in distant headquarters. Tight controls and a focus on reaching pre-set measurable targets often prevent front-line workers from using skill, local knowledge, and creativity to solve problems in ways that maximize the impact of foreign aid. Drawing on a novel database of over 14,000 discrete development projects across nine aid agencies and eight paired case studies of development projects, Honig concludes that aid agencies will often benefit from giving field agents the authority to use their own judgments to guide aid delivery. This “navigation by judgment” is particularly valuable when environments are unpredictable and when accomplishing an aid program’s goals is hard to accurately measure.

Highlighting a crucial obstacle for effective global aid, *Navigation by Judgment* shows that the management of aid projects matters for aid effectiveness

### **Category**

1. Books

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