Aristotle and Plato at it again? Philosophical divergence within international aid project design and monitoring & evaluation

Description

Tweet

Available from the AID-IT website

Abstract: â??International aid projects are broadly concerned with fostering change. Frequently, the â??theory of changeâ?? within an aid project is communicated using Logical Framework Analysis, or the â??logframeâ??. The logframe may be viewed from at least two philosophical perspectives- functionalist and interpretist. Functionalism is found to be useful for problem analysis and project design since it enables a deconstruction of the goal into functional components. Interpretivism is found to assist project monitoring and evaluation since it draws attention to the role of human actors within the social change process, thereby clarifying the social research plan. A bilateral aid program in the Philippines is described to illustrate the practical differences arising from the divergent philosophies.â?•

Editorâ??s comments: This paper argues for the use of more actor-oriented versions of the Logical Framework to make it easier to identify who should monitor and evaluate what in a development project. There is a substantial overlap in the arguments presented here and those I have presented in my paper on this website on the need for a Social Framework (â??a Logical Framework re-designed as if people and their relationships matteredâ?•).

Quotes I like:

> â??*In practice, a functionalist [i.e. traditional] logframe matrix tends to abstract the human actorsâ??tending to focus on the functions or roles of the implementation team in fostering various elements of the overall planned change. This frequently results in objectives that read like project â??milestonesâ?? of the implementation team, rather than descriptions of social change involving a series of actors. As a result, developing a M&E strategy from a functionalist logframe frequently requires a degree of deciphering.*â??
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> *â?¦Moreover, the replacement of a grammar of abstracted states and passive subjects, with one of direct and explicit assignment of actors, adds clarity for operational management, as well as monitoring and evaluation.*
>
> *â?¦There is also an issue of transparency of language, in a field where (almost by definition) many project stakeholders view English as a foreign language, are ill at ease with an abstracted form of the language, and view the project as centrally concerned with functioning people as distinct from establishing states of function.*

My reservations:

1. The vertical time dimension of the Logical Framework overlaps with, but is not identical with the, social distance dimension that Crawford et al (and myself) have overlaid onto the traditional Logical Framework. Information, such as a rumour, can pass along a chain of actors. But all these actors co-

exist at the same moment of time, and in many cases influence will be happening in both directions, up and down the chain of actors.

2. An â??if-and-thenâ?• logic can also be expressed in a social framework. For example, **If** I talk to Paul Crawford about these points I have made, **and** AusAID is not distracting him with other demands, **then** he might build them into his next draft of this interesting paper. The **and** part of the conditional logic can refer to other actors who expected actions (or inactions) are important, and these can be appropriately described in the Assumptions column.

Crawford et alâ??s paper gives an interesting example taken from the Philippines-Australia Community Assistance Program (PACAP). The project design is first described using a traditional Logical Framework and then using a more social version of the same framework. The latter is so much easier to understand. What would be fascinating to know more about is why their client (a bilateral donor) rejected the latter version but accepted the former.

Tags

1. Logical Framework

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