Development Assistance Is Public Management

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Introduction

A 2010 Academy of Management Public and Nonprofit panel debated the relevancy of public management theory by addressing the disciplines from which we import insight. Less clear was our theoretical export market. This research suggests a market desperate for public management theory and ripe for organizational research – international development assistance.

In Haiti, Afghanistan, Iraq, Kosovo and Bosnia, international practitioners design public administrations, craft public policy and advise public managers. They recognize the need for nuanced reforms that suit host country realities. And they agree on the outcome variables that indicate success: a responsible and sustainable private sector; a representative, equitable and transparent government; and a vibrant and engaged civil society. But despite massive assistance efforts, what explains limited agricultural market reforms in Bosnia, failed decentralization efforts in Serbia, deteriorating competitiveness in Kosovo, or civil society constraints in Croatia, for example?

Dependency, modernization, globalization, and world systems theories in political science and economic outlets dominate international development thinking by making sense of nation-state relationships through rational actor thinking. However, they discount governmental politics and organizational process models (Allison and Zelikow, 1999) – dimensions that seem to determine success in these settings. Based on interviews with international development practitioners in the Balkans from 1999-2009, the main opportunities and obstacles to perceptions of success in these settings appear at the implementation level (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973).

My data load on three factors. First, coordination issues within the international community, transfer concerns between international and host country players, and politics between host country stakeholders dominate discussions of failure. Second, recruiting, hiring, training and maintaining quality personnel (expats and/or locals) that understand both the task at hand and the host-country context present extraordinary obstacles to success. And third, players report the need for flexibility in implementation; freeing contractors up from bureaucratic arrangements, avoiding micro management, allowing change on
the ground without constant home country approval, and recognizing the need to alter plans over time – issues indicative of broader cross-sectoral issues between public agencies, NGOs and private sector contractors. Organizational process and public management models appear well suited to frame such concerns.

**International Development Assistance: CHEs, Disasters & Nation Building**

Subfields have emerged over time specifically addressing different types of international interventions. Complex Humanitarian Emergencies (CHEs), for example, encompass famine and feeding programs or mass refugee migrations, where the cause, natural or human, seems largely irrelevant (e.g. Ethiopia). Disaster work focuses more heavily on the management of the response to floods, earthquakes, tsunamis (e.g. Japan, Haiti). This recovery work resembles post-conflict studies that focus on rebuilding after war and unrest (e.g. El Salvador). Transition assistance programs became highly visible during the democratic reforms that spread through Central and Eastern Europe where the focus was transitioning from centrally planned states and economies to free market democracies (e.g. Poland). Development work refers to income generation and poverty reduction, though also applied more universally to human rights, protections, participation and other human development foci (e.g. Honduras). Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding are similar terms, typically referring to UN and NATO activities (e.g. East Timor) as well as bilateral interventions. Finally, nation building refers broadly to the actual creation of a nation-state, typically after or in parallel with one or more of the above (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq). International protectorate governments mark an even more dominant and rather unique international presence (e.g. Bosnia, Kosovo).

Context and tasks matter, so differences in research streams based on the distinctions above are appropriate. Networks focused on emergency recovery, search and rescue, for example, differ sharply from networks required for effective privatization of state-owned enterprises. The players, their relationship with the host country, the timeframe and the outcomes differ dramatically.

However, for this manuscript, these related streams are joined together under the more inclusive heading of “international development assistance.” The term stresses that the players involved in any of these actions are based outside the country in question, and are providing assistance. The ‘development’ term is open for interpretation and takes on various meanings with significant normative distinctions as discussed below.

It is useful to bring all of these variations of international development assistance together simply to build the library of cases necessary to begin to theorize across settings. Certainly “cookie-cutter” or “pre-fabricated” approaches to development are generally inappropriate – every country is unique.
However, Bosnia is like Haiti in many respects. We can learn and borrow best practices. We need not let the contextual differences overshadow the functional similarities.

Commonalities exist across all of these types of international interventions. First, they all deal with some level of institutional void or incapacity in the focal country. The ability of the host country to respond is either impaired (by the immediate aftermath of the situation, e.g. Japan) or non-existent entirely (e.g. Haiti). Second, the response is typically cross-sectoral in nature, involving public, nonprofit and private sector organizations as policy directors, donors, implementers, consultants and contractors. Third, the interactions are international, at minimum between the host and the country providing the assistance, but more commonly multinational as providers from more than one country are typically involved. Fourth, such efforts require interorganizational relationships (IORs) or networks of actors that must cooperate, coordinate or collaborate to sufficiently address the problems that are much too large for any one organization to handle. As such, international development assistance refers to cross-sectoral, interorganizational responses to problems that are unable to be addressed by a country, and therefore require external intervention.

Given the complexity of the problems involved, and the highly interdependent nature of likely solutions, interorganizational relationships between players within the international community, within the local or host country, or between the two, prove critical to success. In addition, hundreds of organizations channeling billions of dollars tackle overlapping tasks with conflicting organizational mandates and divided if not obstructionist local players. Reforms and solutions are often controversial, local and international leadership unclear, time perspectives (urgent vs long-term) and philosophical orientations differ by organization and nationality, and the flow from high level policy to ground-level implementation rarely proceeds as smoothly as planned.

More cases from varied settings that touch upon these variables from multiple perspectives will help development scholars generate more general models. And those general models should be a target export market for public management theory.

**Development Administration, Development Management & New Development Management**

Managing the structure, strategy and process of international development assistance is the source of a substantial theoretical discussion within the literature regarding the specific and distinct nature of development administration and management. The main debates revolve around the appropriate lens to use when examining the complexities presented above.

Fred Riggs and the Comparative Administration Group which eventually morphed into the Section on International and Comparative Administration of the American Society for Public Administration might represent the theoretical founder of the field. Riggs (1970) suggested the original
group’s concern “with the comparative study of public administration was seriously qualified by an overriding interest in the administrative problems of the ‘developing’ countries.” (p.3) At the same time, organizational and public administration scholars were increasingly focused on internal and external institutional forces at play in such settings. The now iconic TVA studies exemplified such concerns and are cited by Riggs (1970 p.4), “for the TVA the problems of external or “development administration” as it termed them, were those that involved relations with the public and the physical environment. They were the problems inherent in the implementation of a many-sided development program. Just as one might refer to ‘agricultural administration as the conduct of an agricultural program, or to ‘public health administration’ as the implementation of public health policies, so ‘development administration’ came to be viewed as the administration of development programs.”

Development administration also emerged as an alternative to two dominant subfields of public administration; international public administration and comparative public administration (Heady, 1998). International public administration refers to the study of international institutions for example, early on, the League of Nations, but now, the IMF, WB, NATO and the UN. These international organizations are critical to international development. Comparative public administration refers to the study of administration across different countries. Each of these two subfields adds a key dimension to our understanding of international development.

Development administration, therefore, referred to both 1) the administration of development programs for states in need and 2) the development of administrations within states in need. However, both definitions referred to or implied state-centric approaches to development on behalf of both provider and recipient. Coupled with the new public management trends of empowerment, values-based change, participation and interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral approaches to development, the development administration orthodoxy fell out of favor to the term ‘development management.’ (McCourt and Gulrajani, 2010)

It is not clear what exactly development management addresses. It seems the lay interpretation of development management refers to the study of the work done by USAID, GTZ, UNDP, even the WB, IMF & WFP. Furthermore these organizations typically operate in countries with weak governance structures and one or more poorly performing (normative definitions here) or poorly delineated sectors. In other words the study of these institutions’ work, which happens to take place in ‘development’ settings, seems the focus of development management. Classic PAD, coupled with comparative administration for insight form other cases (and the ability to adapt to suit local context) and international administration (to learn a bit about these institutions that implement such programs), with a public management perspective to understand the actual implementation might define development management’s subject arena.
However, Alan Thomas, in overtly asking, “what is development management?” (1996) and “what makes good development management? (1999),” may have spawned the creation of the increasingly distinct field I call “New Development Management.” This New Development Management emerged for Thomas as he “was looking for a counter to ‘the idea that management principles are universal, so that whatever the context, management can be taught using the same learning materials.’ Arguing that ‘the nature of the task determines the appropriate version of management,’ I found that the answer to my question depended on what view I took of development. If development is viewed as a long-term historical change process, then development management may be taken to mean the management of any type of task in the context of development. If, however, development is seen in terms of deliberate efforts at progress, then development management would be characterized as, ‘the management of deliberate efforts at progress on the part of one of a number of agencies, the management of intervention in the process of social change in the context of conflicts of goals, values and interests.’” (Thomas 1999 p.9 quoting Thomas 1996 p. 106)

Derick and Jennifer Brinkerhoff redirected this values based New Development Management, securing the meaning of the term as fourfold: 1) as a set of values, in accordance with Thomas (but as only perhaps ¼ of a deeper understanding of the concept); but perhaps more pragmatically, 2) as a process 3) as a toolkit and 4) as advancing institutional agendas (Brinkerhoff and Coston, 1999; Brinkerhoff, 2004; Brinkerhoff, 2008; Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff, 2010). Their work may represent a convergence on the subject by bridging the public administration subfields of international administration, comparative administration and development administration in to the now commonly used and accepted subfield of ‘development management.’ Indeed, their work marked perhaps the central orienting piece in a recent Public Administration and Development special issue on “The Future of Development Management” (McCourt and Gulrajani, 2010).

Failed States and Weak Governance

Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2002) suggest the key lessons learned from governance reform efforts in failed states. First, such reform efforts must be seen as “long-term, multi-faceted endeavors requiring commitment, country ownership, skill building and technical assistance.” (p.513). Second, the public sectors ability to operate improves with citizen participation. Third, existing state mechanisms can hinder the process by obstructing reforms with corruption, incompetence, or politics.

In an effort to bridge the gaps of comparative public administration, Welch and Wong (1998) for the SICA Silver Jubilee discussed the gaps in theory between western and nonwestern administrations. This comparative work in the context of development management process useful as development managers often transfer (preach, espouse, force) western administrative practices and processes on those
receiving assistance. Cooke (2003, 2004) and Hirschmann (2000) further expose the connections between development management and the problems of third world, weak and failed governments. The colonial-like powers of the international community over the weak, fragile and needy third world presents a dependent relationship that proves hard to break and ultimately undermines sustainability, independence and, in a word, development. Leonard (2010) tries to identify where pockets of success emerge, even within weak governments, to determine how best to influence civil service reform. But the picture that is cast of development management in these cases is one of manipulating local government into following international directives whether covertly or overtly.

Cross-Sectoral & International Crisis IORs

In addition to their theoretical work helping to define the subfield of development management, the Brinkerhoffs also occupy a central role in the development of research targeting cross-sectoral partnerships in development settings. Brinkerhoff (2002) set forth a defining framework for governmental-nonprofit partnerships. The dimensions pit mutuality (high, low) against organizational identity (high low) to produce four types of cross-sectoral interorganizational exchanges including 1) partnership, 2) contracting, 3) extension and 4) co-optation and gradual absorption. Brinkerhoff and Brinkerhoff (2004) suggest four reasons to partner: “to enhance efficiency and effectiveness through a reliance on comparative advantages and rational division of labor; to provide the multi-actor, integrated solutions required by the scope and nature of the problems being addressed; to move from a no-win solution among multiple actors to a compromise and potential win-win situation and to open decision-making processes to promote a broader operationalization of the public good” (p.255).

Holcombe et al. (2004) uses the conceptual lenses of ownership, partnership and capacity building, as bridge to further understand development management in terms of project based activities. Development management’s distinctiveness lies in the ultimate goal of local ownership, the necessary partnerships, local and international, required to do so, and the institutional and individual capacity building required. Lister (2004) examines relationships between northern and southern NGOs to identify critically the tensions present in such partnerships, but of relevance here, the accountability and dependence perceived by each partner.

This interorganizational focus seems highly relevant to this work as practitioners constantly stressed the difficulty of coordinating across sectors where organizational boundaries and tasks blurred. Emergency management research is helpful in this respect. Kapucu (2006) specifically targeted cross-sectoral partnerships in a study of 9/11 responders in New York City highlighting the difficulty of coordinated action across multiple jurisdictions under conditions of urgent stress, high demand and tight time constraints. Moynihan (2008) examines organizational learning in the containment of an outbreak of
exotic Newcastle disease in California and how players in partnerships that unfolded during that crisis had to actually learn about the structure of their relationship, how to adapt it, individual and organizational roles in that structure, and how to deal with unexpected consequences throughout ‘on the fly.’ Martin (2004) detailed the negotiation of social order required among partners in Bosnia after the war, where the priorities, power and influence of various international organizations constantly had to be examined as task issues emerged and players constantly demanded to know, who was in charge of what? Comfort (2007) writing about Hurricane Katrina illustrated the collapse of the emergency management model and the need for the system to readjust responding to ever-changing physical, engineered and social environments. Roberts (2010) presents the case of civil-military partnerships and how they differ across four key settings: peacekeeping, disaster relief, CHEs and stabilization/reconstruction, in order to better understand how players coordinate, concluding that communities of practice offer the most hope for coordination. Denning (2006) in an article designed for IT professionals stressed the need for communications experts to design network conversation spaces in the “hastily formed networks” that emerge around humanitarian aid and disaster relief, suggesting the ability to form such networks relies on their ability to communicate with each other.

All of this research points to the necessity of interorganizational, cross-sectoral and often international partnerships to tackle extremely difficult, large and complex problems. And all also report the difficulty for organizations and individuals within them to do this effectively. This lies at the heart of the conceptual model below for international development assistance.
Conceptual Model: International Development Assistance is Public Management

My view of international development assistance, based on the literature above and my own experience suggests three main distinctions that must be kept distinct conceptually, yet are intricately intertwined in practice.

International Development Assistance

First there is activity within the international community focused around international development. There are intergovernmental relationships and federalism within one countries international development assistance operations. For the US, for example, in Bosnia, the Embassy (State Department), Defense (CIMIC), USAID, Treasury, Commerce, and Public Affairs, all had interests. Some initiatives would cross lines, or have positive or negative spillover effects, or simply be interpreted as such. These activities and relationships must be addressed to fully understand overseas development assistance. It is a “complex little ecosystem” as one of my participants suggested to me. And of course, there is not always agreement, a point of constant frustration for many “It’s like standing on the back of a dozen wild stallions” suggested one Embassy personnel, another suggested, “OPA says this, AID says that, it’s like, where are the Americans today?” And this is just within the US contingent of the international community. There are also interactions between all other bilateral and multilateral players. Finally we must also include the implementing organizations, typically NGOs, university and other research organizations and private sector contractors. All of these relationships must be included in our discussions of development management.
Second, there is activity within the host country within which operations are taking place – the theater of operations – the target of all of the efforts above. Often as exemplified by the need for international assistance, there are various levels or pillars of weakness, if not failure or actual obstructionist players within the host country. Developing competence, efficiency and effectiveness within the host players, across all sectors, government, civil society and private sector, is the ultimate objective – self-sustainability. Not limited by a state-centric approach, development management focuses on local capacity building to empower and take ownership of problems and solutions. This is cross-sectoral, working on civil society reforms, market development, and public sector reform – so all three sectors must be involved (and in some cases one or more of these sectors may need to be created, or at least the main institutions might need drastic transition or redirection). This is development management as well.

Third, there is the “transfer,” the exchange between international player and local recipient. The arrow does tend to point causally from international to host, though feedbacks exist. Money, skill, technology, and assistance flow from the international community to the local host recipient. How that transfer takes place, who it involves, what tone it takes, conditions applied, techniques used, sustainability encouraged, etc, is development management as well, and perhaps most critically. This is the giving and receiving of aid.

As such, my conceptual model of international development assistance has three primary components.

1) Issues, dynamics, opportunities and obstacles within the international community (the managing of development programs);

2) issues, dynamics, opportunities and obstacles within the host country (who are managing their own development, and being managed to improve their capacity); and

3) the actual transfer, the management of the intersection, the learning, the flow from assistance provider to assistance recipient.
I find that much of the confusion and need for distinction between development administration and development management can be traced back to our basic understanding of this dynamic.

Administrators (econ dev officer) in administrations (USAID) administer (implement) administrative reform (governmental support for market reform) to administrators (deputy minister of agriculture) within other (host country) administrations (ministry of Ag).

Development Management or international development assistance can refer to any of the connections between any two occurrences of the word ‘administration’ in the sentence above. Absent an overarching theory, we talk past each other in different disciplines by simplifying, ignoring or overstressing one or another of these links.

Methods: Meta-Coding Obstacles to Development Management

This paper stems from 5 main research trips primarily based in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1999-2005. I also interviewed professionals and conducted site visits and consulting work in Macedonia, Croatia and Kosovo during that time. I then spent a year as a Fulbright scholar in Belgrade Serbia 2008-2009 and travelled extensively throughout the former Yugoslavia.

In all, I interviewed 182 senior executives, diplomats, mid- and upper-level managers, staff and consultants from over 30 national, international and multinational organizations. Interview length ranged from 20 minutes to over 4 hours; with some individuals interviewed several times. Several individuals were interviewed annually, providing an excellent perspective regarding change over time. In other situations, personnel changed, thus permitting interviews of different individuals serving the same role in the same organization at different times.

Over fifty hours of interviews were tape recorded, transcribed and coded. The rest were reproduced using detailed notes as soon after the interview as possible. In addition, many informal interviews also took place over dinners, lunches and other social events. These informal conversations served to bolster subsequent lines of questioning (and were recorded through journaling). I also attended many conferences and task force meetings across the sectors, in various countries. As such, my interviews span the past decade, cross the sectors, and tap development insights from field to ambassador levels.

Previous manuscripts from this research targeted NGO coordination (Martin & Miller, 2003); privatization of state-owned enterprises (Martin, 2004), agricultural market development (Martin & Fahey, 2009) and media reform (Martin, 2010). In nearly all of the interviews for each of these efforts, respondents were asked about obstacles to their work; or more broadly, obstacles to “development” within the given setting.
For this manuscript, I collected all of the initial code lists from all of these research efforts. The initial codes covered 12 pages, 2 columns, single spaced – nearly 1200 individual codes, with much overlap, looking, for example, like this, on a variety of different topics.

After initial removal of specific task or context codes, I was left with several pages of codes specifically related to “obstacles.” This list was further filtered down, by eliminating overlaps, to 64 codes each representing a type of “obstacle” to development, which were then grouped, conceptually into categories. Based on those 64 codes, 3 major categories emerged, after many iterations; one related to cooperation and coordination (36 code categories; 3 subcodes), one based on skills, knowledge and ability (16 categories 4 subcodes) and one based on flexibility (12; 3 subcodes). That was then refined down to the final list of factors (codes and subcodes) discussed in the results section below. Those codes were then applied to a subset of 30 interviews drawn from Serbian development efforts in 2009 and representative quotes were then selected to explain each of the categories.
Results: Implementation Requires Cooperation, Skill & Flexibility

Below I frame specific excerpts within the final coding structure to flesh out detail and reveal obstacles to effective development management in the words of practitioners in the field. I literally string together representative statements to develop each section capturing respondents’ phrasing.

International Community Dynamics

Coordination. Perhaps one of the leading issues regarding coordination mechanisms is the motivation to engage – and the motivation often seemed relatively minor. Instead of trying to find synergies, many of these network meetings were designed simply to avoid overlap. Comments such as “our biggest concern is that US government money is not duplicated, that is the most important” and “the problem is not really to cover all the angles, rather it is much more important not to duplicate, to avoid overlap” suggest a rather minimal view of the potential for synergies.

Another suggested, “there are various coordination mechanisms, meetings, and we exchange reports occasionally” but admitted, “I think we could … be more deliberate in setting up working groups that might strategically look at what are some of the issues, either futuristic or presently that we need to be dealing with and then reconvene in working groups.”

Personalities and turnover present obstacles; “International advisory groups seem good in the fact that there is more coordination, but there is always the issue of personality types. Sometimes I just wish people would throw all that aside and just remember why they are there. What’s the issue on the table, not where are you from, who are you?” Another suggested, “We have those working groups, but the problem is they pop up for a month, then they disappear and folks say was it because they finished their topic or … the guy moved on, … how will you support them?”

But ultimately, “Coordination is synonymous with control and if these organizations agree that they will undertake a certain amount of coordination or an individual or agency will coordinate then they seem to think that they are giving up control of their program to this coordinator which is a very basic problem. The coordination element for it to work the way it should, should not be a control element at all, but that is the way everyone views it.”

Some suggest specific partners are not cooperative, “AID is the worst, sorry to say, AID just doesn’t sit down to discuss what they are doing, they do their own thing and if you are lucky it fits in to what everyone else if doing.” Other organizations simply cannot or will not share sensitive information. “If money and details get to the press, it would become a pissing match, a Croat would say, ‘why is the US supporting that station and not me, because they think I am a nationalist?’ … it would become such a mess, so a lot of organizations just don’t like to say who they support.”
Some connections are obvious, for example, in biodiesel, “We coordinate with AID’s “Compete” office, very well. They can co-sponsor meetings, we distribute their information flyers,” though minor. More often, professionals suggested, “It just sort of sorted itself out here.” A rather unfortunate situation. Others were aware of changes over time.

“We are cooperating a lot more the smaller we get. I’ve been noticing that in the last 5 months, as we draw down everybody else draws down, and there is so much more cooperation now. For instance with this property legislation implementation, they devised this focal point system because as organizations we couldn’t cover the whole country and monitor the property legislation implementation. So you actually had places where OHR is completely not involved, or OSCE is involved or we’re not. So we have to rely on each other. In that way there is an amount of courtesy that’s being extended. When you are expanding you are much more aggressive, and now that people are going down a little bit, there is less of that aggressiveness, I think that has helped a lot.”

But by far the biggest complaint was “the fact that we do not have a coherent plan for all the international community to follow. That is a major problem.”

Cooperation across nations - Much is said of national differences. “It is hard to try to link nationality and ideology. I think it is based on the different experiences and skills that the various actors bring to the table, although I will say it is always interesting watching the Americans and the Germans sit at the same table together.” Another suggested, “The American style is often very pushing, very effective, but the EU style is different. When Americans go to meetings and see nothing happening, they think it is a waste of time. I think it is the school you learned, different management styles, different approaches to solve problems.” Another commented, “I don’t know if it’s just the American focus on achieving objectives, it’s really how we are oriented, you roll up your sleeves and you go to it and get dirty and make it happen. For Europeans I think it is more about process a little bit.”

“And there are differences within Europe as well too, whether southern or northern, if you need to develop some strategy or plan, I would choose probably a northern European, but if you want implementation, I would go with the Italians, they know how to improvise, how to get something done. The Germans you know, we are like, ‘well, ok this doesn’t work like we expected,’ and they stop. It is not according to the plan. The Italians, you know, they get it done.”

“Another divide is the timeframe. The US has a very short time frame. We want to get in and out. Europe is willing to let it go on a bit longer, take it slow. It’s gonna be 20 years before Bosnia is close to the EU, but eventually it will be, so they are fine with a slow and steady course.” Furthermore, “Cooperation is often hampered by different funding cycles, various political agendas, it is complex.”

There are some ideological differences, for example, in media, “Europeans see it is a very heavy handed state system, because you can’t really trust the private sector and the Americans want it private sector because you really can’t trust government.” But those seemed less of a problem in general.
Local Context

_Infrastucture, laws, politics_ - “A huge obstacle is overlapping mandates between, say the ministry of agriculture and the ministry of health over food safety. So for slaughterhouses, there are two sets of inspectors, sanitary and veterinary, which means excessive costs, actually two times the costs. So we helped draft a law to improve this situation. But there is no political will to give away a portion of revenue or oversight, so the law was accepted, but not voted on yet, not passed, and it will just sit there.”

Legal reform, especially regarding land was the most important concern. “If the currency were to drop low enough to be attractive, Serbia could benefit a bit. But the real needs are land ownership – a private property law and restitution. Privatization has stalled and investors are weary of the uncertainty.” Another commented, “Land ownership and property laws related to cooperatives, no one deals with that seriously, need a law on restitution getting land back to original owners, I mean, it is owned by everyone, but no one.”

In addition, “80% of the farms in Serbia are 3-5 hectares, but the other 20% is large farms, very well organized, so size of land is a problem, and links in the markets are important – all sectors lack good producer associations.” Producer associations and other lobbyists would help identify opportunities and industry obstacles. For example, “In the livestock sector, in beef, Serbia has a quota with the EU to sell 20,000 tons of beef per year, but because livestock numbers are down, they only deliver 4-5,000 tons a year. So there is a huge opportunity. But they can’t take advantage of this, credit is the critical issue.” Credit could be addressed by an organized industry, as could movement on intellectual property rights, for example. “In organics, they need to push legislation to protect intellectual property, for example, you cannot buy good varieties of seedlings, because the IP is not guaranteed, so they don’t sell here.”

“There are laws hindering investment, they have the guillotine, to open up Serbia for business, to make it more business friendly. But, “Your success can’t depend on changing laws, either it will take 10 years or be very frustrating.” “At the same time huge investments are necessary – like corridor 10” referring to the general lack of roadways connected Serbia to other European markets.

*Obstruction and Corruption* - Because of the deep ethnic divisions in societies, “It is sometimes ticklish to get different entities to work together.” But that is typically not the biggest issue. “Corruption is a huge impediment to investment, for investors, if you don’t know the playing field, or pay on the side, you can’t get in, and the oligarchs will.” And more often, simple obstruction of reform efforts hinders progress. Consider this example:

“Let me give you a good example, agencies in a canton needed to receive proof of ownership of land before they could offer the right to privatization. Well, in many instances records are poor or they were destroyed, so land is often in dispute – that is not anyone trying to be difficult, it’s just in most places we have poor or no records. We proposed a softer target or mark of ownership –
which is to say if people are using the land, or if there are no disputes, for example, and that is easy to see because they have to register a dispute somewhere else, so that is easy to check, so if no disputes, or people have been using the land for the same purpose for a long period of time, perhaps ownership could be assumed in some cases and the process could continue. Well the people in charge of monitoring that, and technically they are absolutely correct, claimed to want to do it correctly from the start and insisted that they could not just allow this softer mark of ownership. Well they have also been blocking the privatization process innumerable times in the past, they were always trying to block it, so this was just another means to obstruct privatization, though they are right.”

Transfer from International to Local – the giving of aid.

Capacity building – what is done? It is instructive to see how international organizations provide assistance, and what they do. For example, AID conducts, “a lot of training projects; and we bring in experts and buyers.” Since “Serbia hasn’t kept up with the development of technology outside, we help with that.” Or, for example, “HASSUP is a big issue, quality standards” Another extension office suggested, “We do seminars about bovine disease and insemination and bring in consultants from the states, so just no preconceived ideas, just to observe and present ideas or changes on how to improve production through, fighting disease, and feeding changes and artificial insemination and housing for animals.”

Some spoke of serendipitous opportunities emerging out of traditional obstacles, “Integrated pest management, we put on seminars, but there is this lack of money to buy pesticides and fertilizer, and some land has not been treated for many years, so the financial crisis may help develop this market for organic.”

But otherwise, respondents reported rather typical programs with limited innovative approaches, “We give packaging advice to producers.” “We make handouts and flyers, how to get subsidies, how to have our clients plug into benefits.” “We take a lot of companies to fairs, international fairs, to expose them to the possibilities.” “We brought six firms to London, for an international food and drinks fair, we brought companies to market products, but they also see how others market their products.”

Advising and having an impact – More often, assistance operated a bit behind the scenes, “Not lobbying but advising, so we loan people to the ministry.” “There are some draft laws we help with, warehouse receipts, for example, passed and sent to parliament, and it is making its way, but now we stand back, we can clarify and assist in explaining. But not advocating so much, or lobbying.”

Another group suggested, “We helped create a system of warehouse receipts; we comment on draft laws, and bylaws, we do a lot of legwork on behalf of the government, much of which is outside our actual scope of work, but we need to do it to actually implement what is in our work plan, and it makes us good partners, it was natural, to make collaborations, to increase access.”
Identifying opportunities in the market seemed another key obstacle international groups addressed, “With the SAA and WTO, we will have huge opening up of markets, zero tariffs, and on meat, we now have 30% duties and some fruits and vegetables have seasonal duties, VAT during season assed additional 20%, in some cases it is enough protection, but now we will lose that protection. No one is preparing for that.”

**Targeting Recipients** – Assistance agencies targeted recipients who could provide the most widespread benefits. For example, “It is much easier to have an impact with an association to reach a larger amount of farmers, and we can help market what they all produce.” In addition, Associations themselves are good vehicles for members to argue for changes.”

Scaling up means, however, that, “AID didn’t want to work at the farm level, “Because, “Individual farms are so small, they don’t have a big impact, so we prefer sector approaches.” And of course, “We don’t work with the poorest of the poor, we work with big commercial farms.”

More important mistakes, however, involve, “people making policy but they are not talking to the people who have to actually implement, and you really had to have them there.” Coupled with the fact that, “they were trying to implement without realizing what the capability is at the local level for that, and a gap between what they think is the knowledge level of the Bosnians, and their own knowledge.”

**Prove your value to locals** - Others commented on the fact that is was, “Hard to break traditional thinking, but if you demonstrate it, ‘let me do one row’, then do the business calculations, you can give them the idea, lead them to water.” Or, for example, “At the slaughterhouse level, to make better use of the animals, the US way of cutting meat is different. You need to demonstrate this, prove it is better.”

**Development Personnel**

**Skills** – “Another thing is getting the right type of people. Your programs are only as good as the people you have implementing them, and before we could get people easier because this was a hot spot, and now it’s not.” Across the board, participants suggested they, “needed more people with Balkan experience.”

Some specifically targeted NGOs, “My biggest criticism of NGOs is the skill set is far too weak, most of these organizations if you put them through the corporate mill, they would just be shut down.” While others commented on locals’ skill sets, those who were working for the international community, who are paid much less. “Yea, the nationals get much less, so hard to attract quality people, and that is the struggle with NGOs, it is hard to attract quality people … you end up getting really young people with no experience, really old people, retired, or people who don’t know what they are doing and you really wouldn’t want to hire them.”
Previous experience – Borrowing experiences from elsewhere seemed both an opportunity and an obstacle. Certainly, “You can’t help to think, I remember this from Afghanistan, or wherever.” However, comments more often resembled this, “You know you have one advisor from Poland, and one from the ‘Stans, from Bulgaria or Hungary and they say, ‘well let’s do this, it worked there, so we do, and these were not necessarily what we needed here.”

Turnover – Short term assignments, secondee and consultants created an additional burden to the system. “Emir a local has now been on the project for 4 years, and in this time he has seen 5 OHR econ people come and go… each has a slightly different angle and it is just restarting the process in a sense when each person comes through.” As such, “There is a lack of knowledge and a turnover of staff and a lot of staff that come in aren’t necessarily qualified to deal with this situation as you’ve noticed … this is a very complicated situation.” Another suggested, “You have people who come in brand new, they think they are trained, because they have been in Poland or whatever, and when you have to work with people like that.”

Flexibility

Value of Flexibility – Flexibility was mentioned often, as a very positive feature. “We don’t have the resources, but we have a flexible mandate, while AID has the resources and the political connections.” One commented, “Flexibility is important provided the management is visionary.” Another suggested, “I am a great believer in flexibility, this is difficult and complex work, you don’t start off on day one. You don’t know what works, you need to be opportunity driven in addition to program driven.”

Flexibility largely seemed a matter of interpersonal trust between organizations, and especially between contractor and agent, “I like him as a mission director. I think, as long as we don’t fail, he will like us” and “The ambassador trusts us, and that is important.” Which lead one contractor to say, “This is a business, my shop, my team, my way.”

Also commenting on the same mission director, someone suggested, “This AID director is a little bit different. He likes new ideas, may AID directors are very much organizationally bound, low risk takers, and there is something to be said for that, but his guiding principle was clear, biggest bang for the buck, we need to move fast if we discover an area to focus on.”

Flexibility to change contracts – The need for flexibility was stressed as a way to bridge contract requirements with ground level reality. For example, “I have one project poster, and it has when all the projects were signed and the original duration and shows extensions. Well all the projects, all of them, were extended. None were able to finish on time, but some needed an additional 4 or 8 weeks, well some needed more than double their original time!” Others commented, “We decided not to focus on health care, for example, too much time, too little value.” Or, “We requested aid approve a modification, we
took money out of a grant program and put into, special programs, a line item.” Another commented, “You need to have an outlet; what do you do when you are asked to do a component of a project that is completely irrelevant? In this case, the economy was just not mature enough yet to support such work.”

The main problem with inflexible contracts is, “We identified 10 sectors, they were not all the same as the original contract, but we needed that flexibility. We needed the ability to drop those with entrenched people, those who have been working with donors for 8 years.” In addition, “There is sometimes some resistance to losing control, but if there is little doubt about success and you take great care to justify, and with a generally flexible disposition, it can work fine.”

**Benefits of flexibility** – Several contractors, AID employees and outsiders mentioned a particular project that represented to them, the epitome of flexibility and mission director trust, the Competitiveness program in Serbia. The director suggested, “We have a lot of flexibility in our project. We basically run under a commitment of a 25:1 return on investment. So we have a lot of freedom to run with what makes sense if it will provide a return. We committed to 25:1, but I need 100% control to move pieces around. Two areas that we moved into that were not identified previously are a little untraditional: Renewable energy especially biomass, and film and production. That flexibility is unusual.”

Unusual, but lauded, “I mean, 200,000 USD will generate 15 million. The costs in Serbia are substantially lower than say, Prague. So we realized we had this window to be cost competitive, pre-EU, compared with say, the Czech Republic and Romania. Film commission promoting the country as a destination, and this can overlap with tourism, and convention tourism, which can be 5 million in business.” Another commented on the same activity, “Regarding flexibility, we sent Serbian production representatives to Cannes. Imagine that invoice, sending a group to Cannes! There is this ‘producer’s network’ and we used our connections to get Serbian films into this ‘invite only’ event. But they came back with 10 million in deals, closed deals!” Even the country Mission Director commented, “The Cannes trip, that is like thinking about the donor community as venture capitalists, if there is return on the investment, I am happy, and we can be that flexible. We can move that quickly.”
Conclusion: Rational Goals, Governmental Politics & Organizational Processes

It is not surprising that interviews with practitioners working in the field stressed the organizational process perspective more than the rational goal or governmental politics. For them, these obstacles created impediments to their work on a daily basis and those obstacles that did impede them tended not to originate from Brussels or D.C.. My assertion is that these implementation level obstacles do not require a specific sub-discipline of public administration to address or necessarily ‘new’ models. All of these topics have been thoroughly addressed in mainstream public administration and management arenas. Development settings simply present a unique context for public management – and a ripe export market for public management theory.

Public management discusses coordination structures and types, mechanisms for coordinated activity across wildly disparate players. Public management recognizes that value of local participation, ownership and embeddedness by encouraging public support through hearings, elections, and referendums. Street level bureaucrats know the importance of ground level support and interaction. We know about the importance of skill sets, empowerment and autonomy and the need for flexibility in contracting. Finally, we know a bit about the international architecture and the design of effective administrative solutions to international problems. From comparative administrative frameworks, we know how various countries package those concerns together for harmony. And from international administration, we learn the unique situation international organizations operate in.

That International Development Assistance (IDA) requires coordination, skilled implementers and flexible contracting is not a new finding. However, by reframing IDA into the 3 step model of “international community,” “transfer,” and “local community” we simplify the entire process into its distinct units. Taken separately, a public management lens on each seems appropriate.

Efforts to cast Development Management in a more values based light and push it forward with new models and conceptual lenses miss the value of returning to the discipline’s roots. International Development Assistance is public management\(^3\) (“cubed”). It is the study of the international community that administers aid exposes one classic public management topic. It is also the development of administrative structures in developing countries, and the effective transfer or giving of aid.

Public management and organizational theory has much to say about these opportunities and obstacles for success. By understanding rational actor models as contextual, while interpreting governmental politics and detailing organizational processes, public management scholarship is well suited to meet the demands of an export market eager to learn our lessons, appreciative of our approach, and respectful of our theoretical traditions.
Bibliography


