



Faculty Research Working Papers Series

Creating Space for Effective Political Engagement in Development

Matthew Andrews

John F. Kennedy School of Government – Harvard University

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Creating Space for Effective Political Engagement in Development

Matthew Andrews

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Introduction

Most members of the development community, and especially those in multilateral and bilateral organizations, agree that politicians are centrally important to development. Fewer agree, however, on how to ensure effective political engagement in development programs and reforms. It is questionable whether many practitioners or theoreticians even have clear ideas about what effective political engagement looks like. Terms like *political will* and *political commitment* lack clarity and operational import; it is unclear what they are and even more unclear how to foster them. This chapter attempts to shed light on why such a key issue is poorly understood and to suggest ideas for thinking about it.

The discussion reflects observations made in the literature on development interventions and from case studies of public sector reforms that I have conducted in the past five years. The approach centers on weaknesses in an implicit, three-dimensional “theory of doing development” routinely observed:

1. The basis of intervention is a technical policy idea, manifest in a policy paper produced by an external subject expert for implementation. (These products are quite standardized and reflect the generalizability of economic principles and best practices.) Good technical policies will invariably foster development.
2. Effective political engagement is evidenced by receptivity to the technical idea and support of its implementation. Development is fostered where good technical ideas are well received by politicians.
3. Easily identifiable reform champions—in the form of the technical-ideas people and the political heavyweights supporting these ideas—are vital to effective implementation. Development is fostered in the presence of such champions.

Research suggests that these dimensions of how to conduct development are flawed. Similar technical interventions are commonly found implemented with similar political receptivity and similar presence of champions but with vastly different results. When I examine differences between interventions that seem more successful than others (although this is a guarded attribution of value, given the high variation in what constitutes success in development), a different model of development intervention arises. In terms of the three dimensions mentioned above, the new approach looks something like this:

1. The basis of intervention is to create space in which the developing entity can identify, define, and solve its own problems. Reform, change, or growth space is manifest in organizations with acceptance, authority, and ability profiles that allow continuous and creative adjustment to the challenges of development. Reform or change space invariably fosters development.
2. Effective political engagement is evidenced in organizations where politicians (with big and little *p*'s—as discussed below) do what is needed to establish space: fostering

acceptance of a creative and dynamic culture, authority structures that balance rule-based accountability with dynamic creativity, and ability to do what needs to be done for progress to be made. Development is fostered where politicians use their influence and formal and informal interventions to create space for organizational evolution.

3. Change occurs across networks, where multiple people bring multiple talents and abilities to bear. The individual who connects nodes is the key to the network, but this individual is often not the one who has the technical idea, or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and bring people together. Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart.

This new model constitutes a major change in thinking about the way development is done, who should be hired by the development community (particularly multilaterals and bilaterals), what they should do, and even how they should measure developmental progress. One fundamental challenge is the departure from a pro-technical and a-political, a-organizational, a-sociological approach to doing development to one that demands strong political, organizational, and sociological knowledge and skill. In this model technical abilities in economics and similar areas become a calling card for experts in relationships rather than the basis of their product.

Implicit here is the idea that external development experts have many comparative advantages in facilitating development, but their major advantage is in being able to bridge relationships and networks and to “connect” people. This far exceeds the technical comparative advantage they currently emphasize. If development experts were to play this connector role, a second fundamental challenge for their organizations would center on their product definitions and communication modalities. Instead of focusing on technical documents and largely monologic engagements with small groups of experts (in the Ministry of Finance, for instance) the network connector model emphasizes relational engagement and highly dialogic communication within multiple-player networks. An effective expert would be defined in his or her ability to bring players together around key problems, suggest and resource solutions, and ultimately see solutions set in place.

Experience in development confirms that many people already play this role. These people are seen to struggle for reward and support in organizational structures that are still overly technical, however. The “connector” role often is played at the margins of a more technical development intervention, often also characterized by weak political engagement. The purpose of this paper is to contribute to a debate between the connectors and the technocrats, especially regarding the three core dimensions viewed as central to a current and proposed “theory of doing development.”

Dimension 1: Moving from Technicalities to “Change Space” in Development Dialogue

I was recently in an African country that was being advised by a large international agency on social security reform. One person in my delegation laughingly asked a government official whether the advice was centered on adopting a “three pillar social security model”—what he understood as the technical order of the day from organizations like the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and regional development banks. The government official replied that the technocrats were now touting a “five pillar model”—apparently because of its success in a Latin American country. He complained that the international experts produced a proposal with little relevance to his country’s political, organizational, and social setting; “What if a five pillar model really doesn’t make sense here?” he asked.

The government official commented that the technical advice did not help his country in its attempts to address the issues and that the international experts had all but ignored local ideas

and concerns in developing their technical proposal. The bias toward technicalities in the development interaction seriously undermined political and organizational engagement with those who would ultimately lead the intervention.

This emphasis on technical solutions as the basis of development and development communications can be seen in just about any area. In industrial policy the solutions focus on advice about what a trade ministry should look like (often drawing on the “developmental states” and Korean and Japanese experience, for example). Solutions also focus on what kinds of industries to support (advice that reflects experience of the East Asian tigers and other standouts). In public sector reform common reform types are replicated everywhere—MTEF, PRSP, FMIS, performance management, etc. The technical ideas are manifest in documents that emphasize their strong economic analysis and the relevance of the technical solution for the country at hand. But is the emphasis on technicalities as the most effective route to fostering development correct?

Recent work suggests not. In the field of sociology authors routinely question the technical models of what works in development. With regard to industrial policy, for example, Woolsey-Biggart and Guillén (1999) emphasize flaws in economic growth models focused on critical technical factors and interventions (like what kind of industry or product to support). They show how experience in the auto sector in South Korea, Taiwan, Spain, and Argentina differed significantly because of non-economic and non-technical reasons. In each setting the “space” for components and assembly industries was different and reflected different organizational and sociological factors, particularly “institutionalized patterns of authority and organization” (p. 722). These authors use the term “organizing logics” to refer to entrenched patterns of engagement in organizations and societies that “inform action and meaning” and “allow firms and other economic actors to pursue some activities ... more successfully than others” (p. 726).

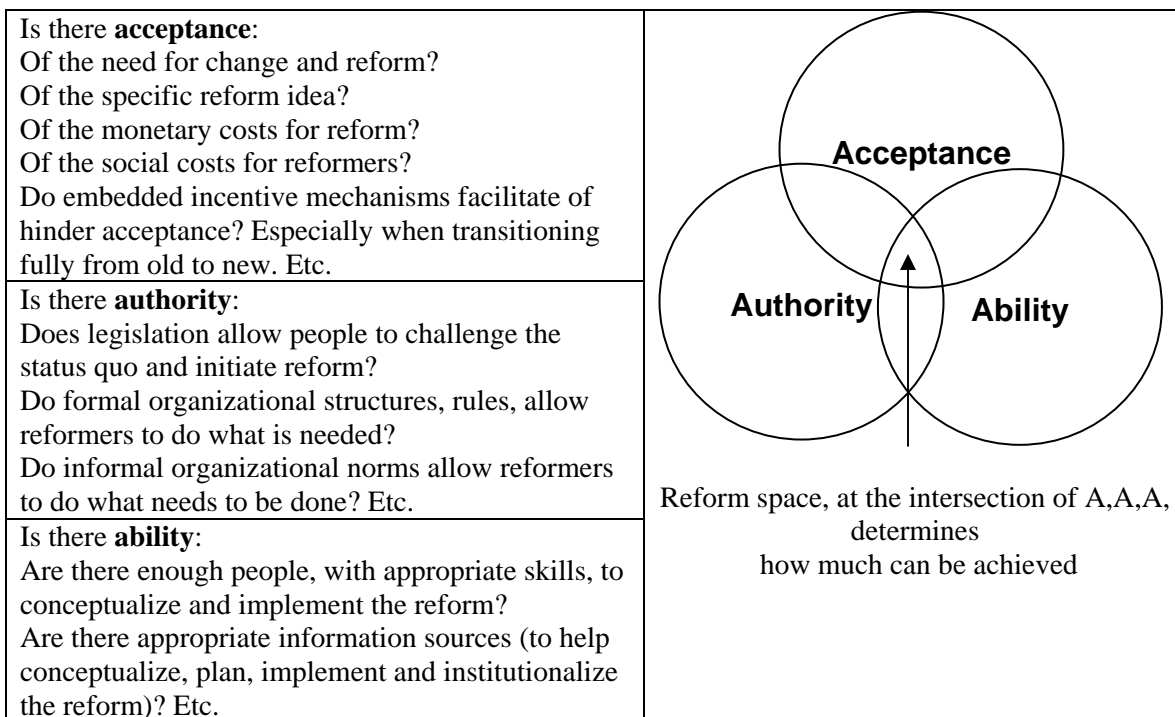
One of the conclusions taken from Woolsey-Biggart and Guillén’s work is that growth policy is less about the technical industrial policy solution and more about the social-organizational space in which the solution arises and is implemented. (As with many institutional theorists, they are pessimistic about developing space where it does not exist, rather emphasizing working within the space that does exist.) This conclusion is in keeping with my reading of recent work by development economists Dani Rodrik and Ricardo Hausmann, who decry the growth literature that argues for hard technical industrial policy intervention by governments in “picking winners”—industries on which to focus, for instance (e.g., the auto industry). They also criticize those calling for no government involvement at all. They suggest an alternative solution focused on government’s role in fostering growth-enhancing decisions by business. In discussing his ideas for effective “institutional arrangements for industrial policy,” Rodrik (2004, p. 16) emphasizes creating governing structures that stimulate coordination, information sharing, and learning, primarily between firms in industries but also at the interface between firms and government. Hausmann and Rodrik (2005, p. 31) call this proposed framework an “open architecture” in which government policy is less about making a technical choice about how growth should be achieved and more about allowing “potential areas of attention [to] evolve” by “creating [a] space” for such (*brackets added*).

I embrace a similar focus on “space” creation as the key to public sector reform (see, e.g., Andrews 2003; Montes and Andrews 2005; Van Landingham, Wellman, and Andrews 2005; Ronsholt and Andrews 2005; Roberts and Andrews 2005; Hill and Andrews 2005). In observing government attempts to solve management problems with standard technical mechanisms I observe that the same mechanisms often have vastly different results in different settings. Medium-term budgeting failed in Ghana in the late 1990s, for example, but was of some success in South Africa at about the same time (Andrews 2003; Roberts and Andrews 2005). Financial management information systems were introduced technically in both Bolivia and Tanzania in the late 1990s but proved more limited in value in the former than the latter (Montes and Andrews

2005; Ronsholt and Andrews 2005). The technical solution also can become the problem itself. Bolivia’s new accounting system, created with little recognition of the informal relational logics in the country, forced many government bodies into holding two sets of books, for example (Montes and Andrews 2005), and Benin found performance incentives to be an unworkable solution to its human resource management problems.¹

In trying to explain these different experiences I started looking at the organizational factors influencing each—something akin to Woolsey-Biggart and Guillén’s organizing logics—and found that those cases in which reform progressed the most seemed to have an organizing logic facilitating change, creativity, open thought, and new ideas much as Rodrik and Hausmann emphasize in their open architecture idea. On the basis of these observations I developed a simple model in which “reform” or “change” space is the crucial ingredient for public sector adjustment. This space does not seem random, but exhibits a real organizational quality that emerges where three factors align—acceptance, authority, and ability (Andrews 2004). Space prohibits a full explanation of these factors. In simple terms, however, acceptance is required from sufficient stakeholders and within the institutionalized incentive structure of the need for change, the specific type of change proposed, and the cost of change. Authority to change must be forthcoming, as reflected in formal mechanisms like laws and procedures and in informal mechanisms like social norms. Ability must be available, in the form of people, technology and information, to conceptualize and implement the change. Figure 1 shows a subset of these and other questions the factors pose and the basic way in which the factors intersect.

Figure 1. Basic ideas in the ‘reform space’ model



The idea behind the model is that reform is facilitated by “space” in the specific organizational, policy, or governance context. The space is determined by the intersection of acceptance, authority, and ability—all focused in a generic sense on the idea that change and improvement are fairly constant in the development setting and thus need to be facilitated by the organization’s structure. Beyond a generic view, one can assess space in regard to specific

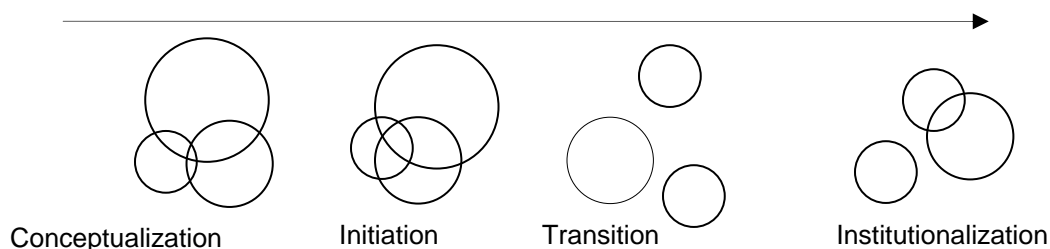
interventions—space for a performance management system, medium-term budget reform, or internal audit adoption. The emphasis is not on these technical ideas, though, but on whether organizing logics in the government in question stimulate acceptance of the change involved, authorize reformers to think of such ideas and then implement them, and facilitate the organization to enable itself at appropriate times and in appropriate ways as required by the change. Having one strong set of factors (political acceptance, for example) will not yield effective reform in the presence of weaknesses in the other factors (authority mechanisms and abilities, for instance).

The reform space allows or constrains the kind and degree of reform an organization can pursue. Bolivia’s information systems reform did not suffer from lack of central ability to implement it (a strong information technology unit existed) but failed primarily because the formalities of an electronic system were not accepted in a public sector structured largely on informal relationships (Montes and Andrews 2005). Tanzania’s information systems reform developed with the required acceptance and authority—from a broad spectrum of politicians and managers supporting the intervention to new laws and organizational protocols facilitating it—and matured slowly as users’ ability to carry it out was developed (ability reflected in staff that can actually use the system, for example, that still remains weak in the decentralized entities affected by the intervention; Ronsholt and Andrews 2005). Medium-term budgeting in Ghana was a failure in 1998 because apparent political acceptance was not matched by ability and was constrained by authorizing parameters in the law (Roberts and Andrews 2005). When reform demands emerged as budgetary and political costs (to build abilities and change laws, for instance), the initial political acceptance waned and reform faltered.

Space influences reform possibilities in different ways at different stages of the change process because reform needs are different at different stages and factor constraints are different. Figure 2 presents a stylized perspective of this that indicates that “factor” constraints may vary in the following stages (with the three circles in each figure reflecting generalized acceptance, authority and ability profiles as per Figure 1):

- Conceptualization (reform need is established; reform ideas are formalized)
- Initiation (reforms are introduced into the setting)
- Transition (new processes, rules, etc., embodied in reforms start to replace old, preexisting processes, rules, etc.)
- Institutionalization (reform processes, rules, etc., are established as formal and social norms).

Figure 2. A stylized presentation of varying reform conditions across reform stages



Conceptualization is separate from initiation because these are distinct stages in all of the reforms I reviewed. Some reforms never get past conceptualization, which is generally purely done on paper and really does not require much space. Acceptance is usually very high at this

stage (denoted by the large top circle) because it is about ideas, and most governments entertain ideas easily. Initiation involves some space and action beyond paper—some engagement over the change of a law or some piloting of a procedure, for example. One often finds much acceptance for reform in both of these stages and limited authority (laws, procedures, etc., still authorize older processes instead of new ones). More space is needed for initiation than for conceptualization, however, especially in terms of ability and authority—the circles must have grown to progress. There are many reasons for this, but—at the simplest—the expanded space is required because more entities are involved (pilot ministries are the most common). Figure 2 shows that, in many stylized cases, the necessary acceptance, authority, and ability does exist through initiation. However, the typical case sees reform space decreasing from here on out—and reform failing to progress as a result (note that the circles do not intersect in the latter stages of reform—suggesting no “space” for change).

There are many stories about why reform space fails to fit transition. The most common is that acceptance for real transition from old to new systems usually proves lower than earlier acceptance for dabbling in new ideas. Many managers will accept reform ideas in concept and when they are being discussed in the arm’s length context of new laws or in “other” pilots (usually those entities that are really accepting of the new idea). Managers are less accepting of the reform when it threatens their entrenched structures and begins to cost money and time. Many authors observe that weaknesses in ability to achieve reform are also emphasized in the transition stage as well—when preparatory training programs are often shown up as ineffective and new skills and abilities are shown to be lacking. In many cases, therefore, although governments work hard to authorize reform through approving legislation and such (causing an expanded authorizing circle in the transition stage), they still find that reforms fail.

In many cases governments respond to this kind of situation by tackling the factor most noticeable in its absence—ability. Attempts to rescue a non-progressing reform by expanding training initiatives are common, and commonly unsuccessful, simply because institutionalization calls for levels of acceptance and authorization that are achieved only when organizational members successfully pass through transition. If managers do not learn that they can exchange one system for another and still manage—maybe even better—they simply will not accept the idea of fully institutionalizing the new system. It is too risky. Similarly the authority needed for full reform institutionalization is different and more complicated than that needed for transition. A law authorized Bolivia to adopt a new accounting system. The fact that informal management systems failed to accommodate the new system meant that it did not fully transition—and could not be institutionalized as the new de facto system. Transition organizations need to pass from one system to another for informal and formal authorizing mechanisms to even begin adapting.

Many development experts try to (metaphorically and practically) “fit” technical interventions into governments. The reform space model suggests that this is the incorrect approach to doing development. Technical ideas are not the key; the space in which technical solutions are conceptualized, initiated, transitioned, and institutionalized is the key. Different space will produce different technical solutions—much like differently shaped holes accommodate differently shaped pegs. Many technical solutions are like square pegs in round holes (which simply do not fit!). One often finds this out only in the transition stage in many cases, however, as this is where the true nature of space becomes evident. Ghana’s 1998 experience, as already described, is a good example, but performance incentives were like this in Benin as well. The International Monetary Fund demanded that Benin’s government develop these incentives because of a lack of performance in the core health and education sectors. The government conceptualized a new performance-based system and initiated it via a proposed law, but the law has been sitting in parliament for over five years—a square peg in a round hole with no space to progress. In the meantime government used the existing space to realize that staff

performance was a real problem and conceptualized, initiated, transitioned, and institutionalized its own staff-contracting model as a solution in both sectors. Although heavily criticized by many, this solution seems to have emerged from the space that existed and is having some positive impacts (more teachers in the classroom, for instance).

The basic message is that technical interventions of whatever sort in the development arena are truly less important than the context in which they emerge and are instituted. The basis of intervention should be to create space in which the developing entity can identify, define, and solve its own problems. Reform, change, or growth space is manifest in organizations with acceptance, authority, and ability profiles that allow continuous and creative adjustment to the challenges of development. Reform or change space invariably fosters development.²

Dimension 2: It's Not What Politicians Say—It's How They Build Space

The idea that reform space matters more than technical ideas has major implications for political engagement. In the prevailing technical model guiding development interventions political engagement (especially by external specialists) centers on a technical policy paper or proposal. Do the politicians like it? Do they indicate their acceptance of it? When it comes to a loan or project, will they sign off on it?

These questions are asked in largely static, monologic engagements that focus on documents and evidence. Technicians dominate proceedings. They conclude agreements where governments commit to do X but that generally say very little about the organizing logics for getting X done. Often this political engagement carries the reform or idea through conceptualization and initiation, where there is a limited threat to the status quo or demand on the organizing logics. Many reforms, industrial policy ideas, and other initiatives, however, fail to get beyond this point. Why?

The second dimension of a revised approach to doing development suggests an answer: It's not what politicians say about technical ideas that matter, but how they build the space for ideas to develop and become reality. In particular, how do they foster organizing logics that allow space for learning and change? Especially when one gets to transition phases in which established logics really do inform action and meaning and allow actors to pursue some activities more successfully than others (Woolsey-Biggart and Guillén 1999, p. 726). In most cases I have reviewed reform failed to transition from idea to practice precisely because political engagement did not focus on organizational space issues—technical ideas had no organizational footing. In the few cases where it did, reform progressed well, and examples emerge that show ways in which political engagement made the difference (Andrews and Turkewitz 2005; Ronsholt and Andrews 2005; Hill and Andrews 2005; Andrews 2003):

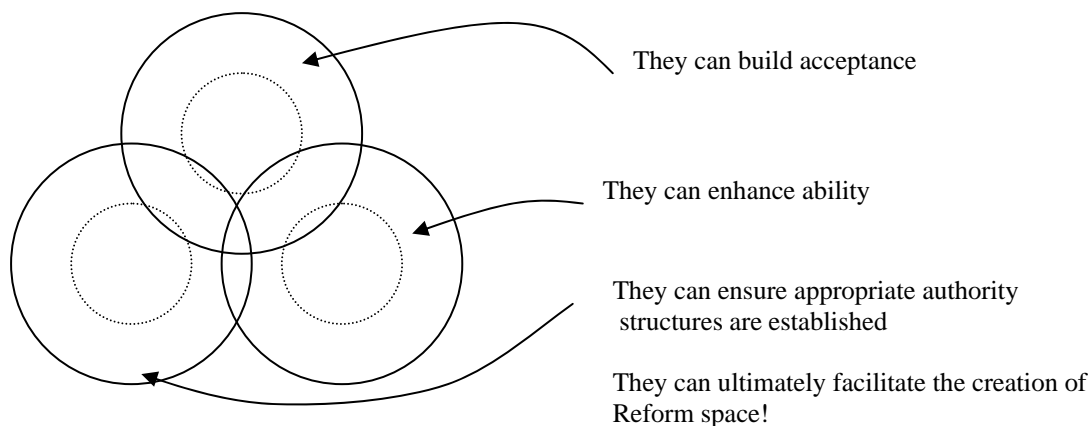
- Tanzania's top political leadership was outspoken about the problems it was addressing when the government embarked on its financial management reforms in the late 1990s. They were open about the costs and time frame of the initiative. This showed mature acceptance of the need for change, its costs, and duration. Subsequent actions by political leaders to change laws that limited reform, to create new agencies needed to drive reform, and to fund new positions required by reform all contributed to expanded acceptance, authority, ability, and space. Tanzania's reforms are an interesting blend of better practice and Tanzanian flavor because of the space created.
- The government of the state of Virginia in the United States orchestrated a performance management reform through its Department of Planning and Budget. The department took its time discussing problems in the state with the agencies affected and worked with each agency to develop specific approaches to these problems. This fostered acceptance for the reform, which was further entrenched in steps the department took to foster

central access to new abilities required by the change. The department also worked with other partners in the financial management process—accountants, auditors, etc.—to ensure common use of new budget, reporting, and monitoring frameworks. This minimized duplication and again showed budget users that reform was not just about more work but actually about new processes that would help everyone. These steps also fostered a coherent authorizing environment where agencies knew that budget, accounting, and auditing authorities would be looking for the same things in the future. Multiple laws were changed over a 10-year period to further entrench the authorizing environment and to ensure reform institutionalization.

- South Africa adopted a tough deficit reduction strategy in the late 1990s, partly implemented through its medium-term expenditure framework. The national treasury fostered acceptance of the reform by pointing to the developmental constraint posed by the country’s deficits as well as a time-specific vision of government without such constraint. Getting departments to buy into the vision was vital to gaining acceptance for what was a tough reform. The treasury also engaged with departments directly to help promote abilities needed to move to a more focused, medium-term budget.

Building on these examples, Figure 3 displays the idea of effective political engagement in reform and how limited acceptance, authority, and ability profiles can be augmented through effective political engagement. The smaller dotted circles in the figure show a limited political engagement situation—there is no reform space. The bigger circles reflect an effective political engagement situation, where acceptance, authority, and ability are all expanded, and a reform space exists that can accommodate change.

Figure 3. What politicians can do to facilitate reform space



In the simple model and in all of cases described above the idea is simply that political leaders have leverage over some organizational constructs (laws, budget structures, and volumes, etc.) and can thus influence organizing logics. The idea of the political leader is interpreted broadly here—to include presidents (Tanzania), government officials and bureaucrats (Virginia and South Africa), and in other cases private businesspeople and civil society leaders. Given the breadth of backgrounds from which leaders arise, the ideas promoted can travel beyond public sector reform into areas like industrial development, health care, and education. In all, political engagement that focuses on expanding space for change is vital to development.

The model prompts one to consider political engagement in a more action-oriented manner than is promoted by most discussions of political influence on development and reform.

The emphasis is not on conducting a binary analysis in which one identifies whether political will exists or not, for instance. The emphasis is on assessing the nature of political engagement. No matter who they are, the issue is what they are doing. Figure 3 emphasizes the way political engagement can enhance space. My research also suggests political engagement could be central in identifying space as it already exists. In all governments enclaves are found that facilitate more reform than others, and often political leadership is responsible for creating and protecting dynamic enclaves. These enclaves frequently become the basis of ambitious demonstrations of what can be done through public policy and can be best identified through engagement with political leadership.

To conclude this discussion of the second dimension, political engagement can be seen as needing broad definition and an action orientation. Effective political engagement is evidenced in organizations where politicians (with big and little *p*'s, as alluded to above and discussed below) do what is needed to establish space—fostering acceptance of a creative and dynamic culture, authority structures that balance rule-based accountability with dynamic creativity, and ability to do what needs to be done to progress. Development is fostered where politicians use their influence and formal and informal interventions to create space for organizational evolution.

Dimension 3: Individual Champions Matter Less than Networks

There are many constituencies to consider in all governance situations, characterized by formal and informal processes of election and influence. “Political leaders” can thus arise in many domains—political representatives chosen to leadership positions in a government’s executive, representatives in the legislature, even judges in the judiciary, leading civil servants in the bureaucracy, and civil society luminaries. Some of these people are politicians with a capital *p* (by title) and others with a small *p* (without title). As already stated, political engagement requires engaging with the relevant parties at the relevant times.

One reason that a broad approach to identifying political leaders is promoted here is that evidence suggests leadership is more common in a multi-leader context than in a single-leader context. This finding departs from standard thinking about political influence. Instead of political leaders coming in the isolated form of individual champions, effective political engagement is often characterized by the presence of political leadership groups supportive of reform—coalitions or networks of individuals spanning boundaries of organizations influenced by or potentially influencing reform.

The coalitions or networks look different in different places, and even across different stages in specific reform cases. They tend to involve a mixture of strong and weak tie relationships between politicians with both big and small *p*'s (e.g., ministers, mayors, and legislators, on the one hand, and career bureaucrats, civil society leaders, etc., on the other).³ Often the person identified by many as the reform champion (who headlines the reform in a political sense) is not always the most important agent in the network. Evidence from case studies shows that this role is played by someone described as a connector, broker, or resource linker in the network literature. This person sits at the center of relationships and basically manages constituencies whose engagement is necessary for effective reform (see fig. 4):

- Although Tanzania’s president was the face of reform, it was up to individuals in the leading sectors to set up influential networks that actually established the reform and implemented it. It seems that the connector changed over time in some of the networks, played at some moments by key staff members in donor agencies who happened to relate well to stakeholders in multiple agencies. At other times consultants working on the reform also seem to have played this role. As the reform matured, Public Expenditure Review groups were set up to formalize network engagements.

- South Africa’s minister of finance was the face of its medium-term budgeting reform. The reform actually emerged from the active networks developed within the national treasury and the elaborate set of forums treasury officials created with sectoral, provincial, and local stakeholders to facilitate change. Treasury officials at various levels of the administration played key roles in these structures, enthusing, enabling, and connecting stakeholders to promote reform.

Figure 4. Effective political engagement in networks, not freestanding individuals

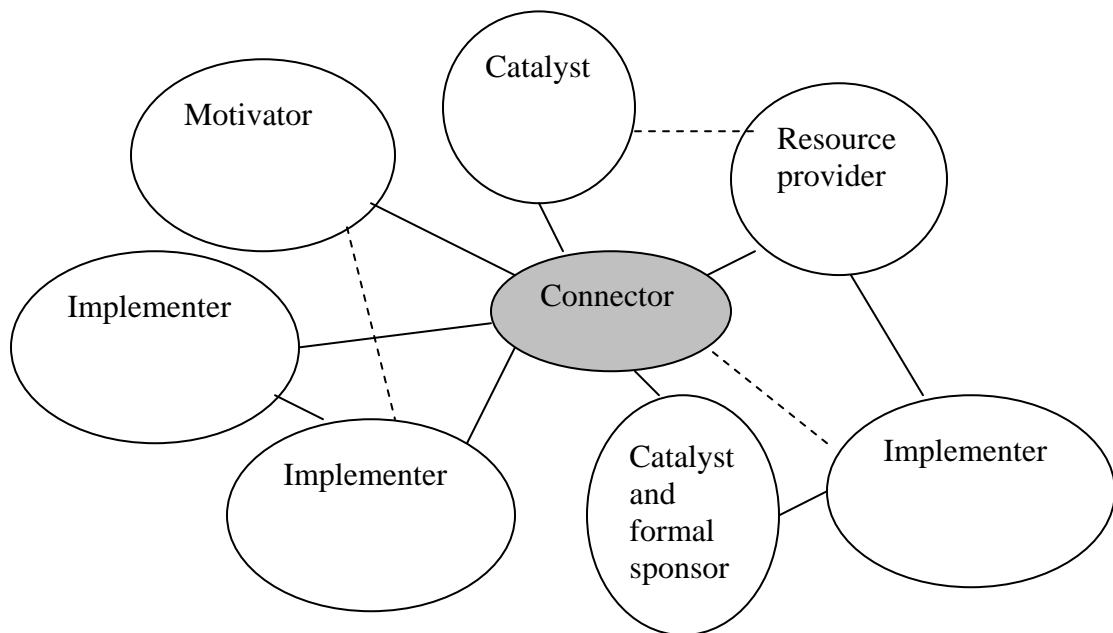


Figure 4 is a stylized presentation of what some reform networks look like, with a connector at its heart bringing different role players together—through a variety of strong and weak ties (denoted in solid and dotted lines). It should be noted that the connector is often not the “formal face of the reform” and may not even be a primary beneficiary. This person may not even be the one who identified the reform need, conceptualized the idea, or provided the resources—but is the one who brings all those people together. This is a truly political role, requiring someone with excellent relational skills and an ability to span organizational boundaries and convince other key leaders to do so as well. I teach that a model for this is Thomas Magnum, the private investigator in the 1980s TV series *Magnum PI*. Although a silly metaphor of effective boundary-spanning leadership, the character exhibited the following attributes that are vital to connectors:

- He was well known, liked, and trusted, and enjoyed high levels of social capital in his community. He also obviously interacted well with people
- He was easily found—occupying the same social settings that many would normally frequent. He was unpretentious and never traded on the basis of qualification; indeed, he seemed to engage well with people of all types, spanning boundaries.
- He was open to questions about the status quo and attracted people with problems and needs. He was a very skilled communicator who was generally involved in multiple conversations at the same time.

- He had a close group of contacts who in turn had access to broad networks. By drawing on these contacts he bridged boundaries groups set up between themselves. He was seldom the one with the resources, ideas, contacts, etc., to resolve an issue. Resolutions emerged through the connections he enabled.

Many individuals play this role in development. There are also many development engagements that lack connectors, however. This is a problem because change occurs across networks, where multiple people bring multiple talents and abilities to bear. The individual who connects nodes is the key to the network but is often not the one who has the technical idea or who is called the reform champion. His or her skill lies in the ability to bridge relational boundaries and bring people together. Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart.

Implications for Development and Development Communication

If one accepts the discussion so far it should be obvious that a new approach is required to the way development is considered. This is pertinent especially for strategies adopted to engage politicians in development. An initial change lies in realizing that politicians themselves need space to act—and maybe this is something external actors can assist with. Standard approaches exist for doing this that include providing quick wins in reforms, couching reforms in politically relevant terms, providing outside incentives to the political system (donors with funds, for instance), and applying outside pressure in the form of potential sanction. Case evidence suggests that these kinds of manipulation do not always yield acceptance—especially not sustainable acceptance and often not real action—in political leaders. Too many reform “champions” have the appropriate rhetoric in early stages of reform, influenced in the direction of reform by the kinds of devices listed, only to show no real action (in the ways suggested as necessary to promote real reform space). Ghana is the main example of this, where political acceptance was evident in rhetoric in 1998, designed to appease international donors, but lacked any substance beyond this.

Building sustainable and action-oriented reform acceptance in political leaders also requires paying attention to limitations of authority and ability that politicians may be sensitive to themselves. For example, if a politician feels he or she lacks the capacity to fully drive a reform once it begins, he or she may be reluctant to support the reform. It’s not that will is lacking, just confidence in the ability to impose such will. Promoting effective political engagement requires identifying where this may be a problem and providing some kind of solution—administrative (providing new people), technical (training), or perhaps relational (introducing the politician to someone who can help he with the capacity constraint or provide needed resources).

Another example is politicians who accept the need and substance of reform but do not feel that they have the authority to act. Case evidence suggests that political leaders seldom act unilaterally, and politics (with both big and little *p*) is generally about working in groups and across constituencies to exert influence. It seems that individual politicians identify the limits to their own authority from these constituency groups and take positions only when they sense enough authority to do so.¹ This kind of behavior seems a valid explanation of why effective leadership appears to be more about networks of political leaders than individual “champions.” This is not to say that champions do not exist, but that they seldom if ever exist outside of an established network of political leaders that give them credibility, assign them authority, and empower their decisions in sponsoring and leading reform.

¹ Examples of greater leadership do exist, where politicians step outside of authorizing structures and encourage re-definition of such, but such expressions of leadership are less frequent than one might expect.

One of the primary ways that development experts can help establish effective political engagement is by fostering the networks that empower individual political leaders. Instead of being the technical expert who solves the reform problem, external development experts (working with multilaterals and bilaterals in particular) may be the ideal “connectors” in reform networks. This comparative advantage arises primarily because development experts are boundary spanners: they can access political leaders across organizations who often fail to engage with each other because of rigid formal boundaries (especially prevalent in many developing countries). Capacity to communicate is central to this kind of role, as is the related need to establish trust through communication. This kind of communication capacity is certainly in supply in the development community but remains a “second order” talent in comparison to good old-fashioned technical and analytical ability. Improved results in development require an about-face; communicative connectors are the most important resource in this domain and should be recognized as such.

Conclusion

This chapter suggests a new “theory of doing development” based on the following ideas:

1. Reform or change space invariably fosters development. Development interventions should thus focus on creating space rather than effecting technical adjustments.
2. Development is fostered where politicians use their influence and formal and informal interventions to create space for organizational evolution. Development interventions should foster active and broad political engagement.
3. Development is fostered in the presence of robust networks with skilled connectors acting at their heart. Development interventions should thus stimulate networks, and development experts should either see themselves as the connector or should support the person playing this role.

I first observed the importance of this kind of approach in research on managed competition in U.S. cities. Indianapolis had pursued this quasi-privatization approach in core service areas ranging from airport management to street cleaning with significant positive results. Similar service improvements were evident in San Diego, where academic articles had cited managed competition as a contributing reform. In fact, San Diego had prepared for managed competitions, but legislation limited the city from actually going down this route. Yet the process of preparation yielded service improvements that mirrored those in cities with full expression of the technical reform, including Indianapolis.

I worked with a colleague to try and explain the apparent paradox of a reform failure being credited with achieving its overarching goal of efficiency and effectiveness. The explanation suggests (in Andrews and Moynihan 2002) that “in both cases, implementing components of the overall managed competition reform fundamentally altered the preexisting governance process over service delivery. In preparing for managed competition, San Diego adjusted governmental capacity, raised managerial flexibility, and fostered incentives to measurably improve the performance of services. This leads us to conclude that reforms do not have to work according to their original terms of reference to ultimately succeed in achieving their overarching goal: Creating competitive incentives is more important than creating actual competition” (p. 282).

The final sentence could have been rewritten in the words of Woolsey-Biggart and Guillén: Creating space, with appropriate organizing logics, is more important than adopting a specific critical intervention. Or Rodrik and Hausmann could have been quoted, and it might have been said that San Diego fostered an open architecture that allowed its departments space to discover, learn, and change. Or we could have discussed how San Diego created reform space by

instilling an acceptance for needed change, authority for departments to be more performance oriented, and ability to adjust production technologies.

Whichever the chosen rhetoric or model, the idea is the same and is echoed in other cases I have reviewed since San Diego: creating organizational space will foster change. This idea is crucial to the entire logic and approach argued here, for a move away from narrow, technically defined models of development. If this idea is accepted, it allows different thinking about political engagement as something shown in actions to expand space. It also requires thought about the space of political engagement itself—as a broad network of relationships rather than a narrow set of champions. With such thoughts the development community may be able to clarify terms like political will and political commitment, stimulate these on the ground, and enhance development outcomes.

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¹ These are some of the observations made in a paper, "Civil Service Reform in Benin: Planned Failure and Opportunistic Progress," by Martin Bratt, Jules Flynn, and Oana Cheta, in mimeo form at the Harvard Kennedy School.

² Previous work (Andrews 2007) spoke of a "space for ambition" in government, which is one way this idea could be conceptualized. The importance of ambition, risk, learning and failure as key ingredients to development success are explicit in this model. It is assumed that having space allows risk and failure, for instance, as these are key for learning. Benin's contracting has not been a resounding success in all facets, for example, but has allowed learning, and if properly expanded this learning could be the basis of greater success.

³ The strong and weak tie was introduced by Mark Granovetter in 1973. The idea is simply that some relationships are stronger than others. Evidence indicates that strong ties can be useful for some things and weak ties for others. Weak tie relationships can be more creative than strong tie relationships, for instance, whereas strong ties could be more useful in situations in which an individual is looking for dependable financial assistance.