Notes on Control and "Ownership" Problems

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In accordance with the principle of people owning the fruits of their labor, the doers will have ownership when they are in the driver's seat (indeed, the description as "doers" would not be accurate if they had a passive role). But in the standard view of knowledge-based assistance, the helpers are teachers or trainers taking the active role to transmit "knowledge for development" to the passive but grateful clients. "Development" is seen almost as a technical process like building an airport or dam with the agency having the "technical knowledge" to be transmitted to the clients.

Instead of being externally imposed, transformation can only come from within as a result of activities carried out by an individual—or a larger organization, government, or country. Thus any intervention on the part of the development agency should be autonomy-compatible. While compliant behavior can be elicited from the outside, a country must be "in the driver's seat" in order to undergo a sustainable transformation. Similarly, "ownership" of an outcome comes from the outcome being the fruits of the activities of the individual, organization, or country, not from being a gift or an imposition.

From an old Chinese story we know that instead of giving someone a fish, it is better for them to learn how to fish themselves. This is now an internationally recognized aphorism extolling the virtues of self-reliance and autonomy. Perhaps it is best to first make the point in the modern context of a business enterprise. A company has a specific problem to solve and it does not have the required knowledge. It could take the initiative and expend the time and resources of people in the company to learn how to solve the problem. But that is a time consuming process with an uncertain outcome sometime in the future. Perhaps it is best this time, in view of the time pressures and relatively low costs, to hire outside experts to solve the problem quickly. Yet the consultants are not inclined to work themselves out of future jobs so the consultants will typically not transfer all their relevant knowledge to the company. The next time the problem arises, the same time pressures will opt for the same quick fix. The company will develop a dependency relation on the outside consultants, and the internal capability to learn will atrophy or never develop in the first place. [1] The same generic dynamics of dependency can develop

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[1] See the analysis of "shifting the burden" as the "generic dynamics of addiction" in Senge 1990, 104-113. This might be compared to the process where a country facing a problem calls on an international development agency to come in and make a study on how to address the problem. "[T]hey will be supplied with a great many ideas, suggestions, plans, and ideologies, frequently of foreign origin or based on foreign experience. ...Genuine learning about the problem will sometimes be prevented not only by the local policy-makers' eagerness to jump to a ready-made solution but also by the insistent offer of help and advice on the part of powerful outsiders …. [S]uch practices [will] tend to cut short that 'long confrontation between man and a situation' (Camus) so fruitful for the achievement of genuine progress in problem-solving." [Hirschman 1973, 239-40] The agency staff are more than willing to come in and do another study when the problem next arises.

between bilateral or multilateral aid agencies and developing countries. The dynamics can be even more tempting in this case as the outside development knowledge is offered as a public good at below cost or for free, and the "consultants" might even offer to pay or to finance the "clients" to adopt the "solutions."

On the side of the aid agencies, funding and management pressures push for the quick and easily monitored solution of "giving out fish" (or other tangible deliverables) as opposed to the time-consuming, difficult, and hard-to-monitor process of helping the clients to learn how to "fish for themselves." To impress management, task managers in development agencies often strive to show that *they* created a "fish-distribution system" (all in the name of "capacity-building")–in contrast to showing that the clients had learned how to "fish for themselves." Management holds project managers responsible for development results, so the project managers have to "take charge" in order to "produce" poverty reduction results. "Ownership" by project managers precludes and crowds out client self-ownership. [2]

The instrumental mentality becomes so deep-lying that "empowerment" of the targeted poor is sometimes seen as another "instrument" to "enhance poverty outcomes"—as if autonomy could be handed out like aid and as if "ownership" by the client could be "delivered" by a conditionality on the assistance or by implementing a checklist-driven participatory process. In a variation on the old joke "When the Revolution comes, you will get peaches and cream—and you will love them," the attitude is "When we are finished with this participatory process, you will have the 'right' policies (i.e., our recommended policies)—and you will 'own' them."

This is not a new problem. It is a version of the organizational tendency of schools to hold teachers responsible for the students' learning. For instance, one would hope that the substantive goal of school teachers is to awaken a self-starting learning capacity in the students. However that goal is difficult for a third-party to objectively certify. Hence the measurable proxy goal of passing standard tests is used, and then teachers are pushed by educational administrators to fulfill the 'results-based' requirements by drilling students to pass the standard tests. In this way, the shoe-horning of education into the procrustean bed of results-based contracts—as recommended by the economic theory of agency—would probably do more harm than good to the original substantive goals of education.

> In a way, it is all quite ironic. Parents, politicians, and school administrators all want students to be creative problem-solvers and to learn material at a deep, conceptual level. But in their eagerness to achieve these ends, they pressure teachers to produce. The paradox is that the more they do that, the more controlling the teachers become, which...undermines intrinsic motivation, creativity, and conceptual understanding in the students. ...The same is true for

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[2] The rush to "show results" has many sources. When a new chief comes to the top or a subunit in an organization, then during the early part of his tenure, there is the rush to show that he is "making a difference." In the latter part of his tenure, it is "legacy time" so the failure to get sustainable results from the first half of his tenure must be compensated for by the renewed rush to establish his legacy. Then he is promoted so that he can show the skills for which he was promoted on an even broader scale.

managers and others in one-up positions. The more they feel pressured to get results from their employees (or children, or athletes, or students) the harder they push. Unfortunately, in the process, they typically sabotage their own efforts. [Deci 1995, 158]

Indeed, educational and developmental organizations face very similar pressures. The educational thinker, Robert McClintock, has masterfully described the way in which ancient self-directed study was slowly displaced by teacher-centered instruction in modern times.

> As passionate causes wracked human affairs,...people found it hard to maintain restraint, they ceased to be willing merely to help in the self development of their fellows; they discovered themselves burdened, alas, with paternal responsibility for ensuring that their wards would not falter and miss the mark....Pressures– religious, political, social, economic, humanitarian pressures–began to mount upon the schools, and it soon became a mere matter of time before schools would be held accountable for the people they produced." [McClintock 1982, 60; quoted in Candy 1991, 32]

A similar history could be given for the whole modern "industry" of development agencies; the more the agencies take "responsibility" for developmental outcomes, the less "ownership" on the part of the developing countries. Judith Tendler [1973] develops a particularly powerful version of this thesis that organizational ownership undermines and crowds out client ownership. Without working to generate its own supply of good projects, a development agency would have insufficient "deal flow" to justify its own budgets.

> The initial position of the Bank was that preparation of a project was the responsibility of the borrower; if the Bank became involved, it could not thereafter be sufficiently objective in appraising the project. Though buttressed by logic, this position soon gave way to the pressure of events. "Experience has demonstrated that we do not get enough good projects to appraise unless we are involved intimately in their identification and preparation." [Mason and Asher 1973, 308; quote from: Baum 1970, 6; quoted in Tendler 1975, 87]

The pressure was generated by the low quality as well as small quantity of projects. The development agency is like a company that receives "inputs" (project proposals) of such a poor quality that the company cannot produce its own "product" (funded projects). Hence the company needs to vertically integrate the production of the input into its own operations.

> This taking over of project generation by development assistance institutions is like the backward vertical integration of firms in the private sector. The organization expands "backward" into the task environment and starts to "manufacture" project applications itself. It thereby lessens the high degree of

uncertainty of the environment from which it must get its inputs, assuring itself of a more reliable source of supply. [Tendler 1975, 103]

This *Tendler-McClintock effect* shows how the organizational imperative to "take responsibility" for the "product" crowds out the ownership of the clients and leads to passivity and dependency.

That is, the more that donor organizations are able to impose order on the outside decisionmaking that affects their product, the better they can perform their task. In so doing, however, they bring dependency to those whose decisionmaking has been so ordered. Seen in this light, dependency is the result not necessarily of design but of an organization's attempts to do well. [Tendler 1975, 109]

Yes, "it is all quite ironic." The same logic ramifies through every level of educational and developmental organizations.[3] Those who teach or help must "show results" in order "to do well" so more and more responsibility and ownership is taken over to the detriment of the learners or doers of development. This is tutelage, not active learning; it develops dependency, not autonomy or self-direction.

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[3] See Hyden [1983, 178-9] for a description of these "organizational imperatives of donor agencies" in the African context.