The paradoxes of management with particular reference to the conduct of Development Assistance

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Abstract: The paradoxes of management are explored at two levels. The overall challenge of ‘getting things done by other people’ is broken down into the processes of providing direction, control (presented as planning) and motivation, with their associated paradoxes. These are formulated in relation to the management role of deciding as a fractal model of management and the attendant management contributions discussed. Finally, these issues are placed in the specific context of managing Development Assistance (DA).

Keywords: decisions; Development Assistance (DA); dialectical process; fractal model; paradox; planning.

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1 Introduction

I have for a number of years been interested in phenomena that are generally referred to as paradoxes (Kowalski, 1999, 2004). My field of study is the management of international development, where Development is “planned interventions that seek to promote economic and social development of poor and disadvantaged people” (Cooke, 1998, p.35). A significant source of my stimulation has come in the form of, what Ellerman (2002, p.43) has referred to as “the fundamental conundrum of development assistance”, helping others to become autonomous.

It is interesting to note that Ellerman (2005) extends the basis of this paradox to the roles of teachers and managers, and it is evident that it is encountered in all those relationships where one actor is a step removed from those behaviours that interact directly with the physical environment, i.e., do work on it (e.g., teachers, managers, consultants, politicians, evangelists, physicians, psychiatrists and diplomats).
I believe that the paradoxes encountered in management underpin many management challenges and are worthy of study in their own right, and I would like to focus upon them here. However, I will return to their specific manifestations within the management of DA at the end of this discussion.

2 The paradoxes of management

Paradoxes occur at many different levels within the process that we refer to as management. In my view, the key paradox of management is contained in its very definition, as Parker Follet described it, ‘Getting things done by other people’. (Hannagan, 2002). This creates the dilemma of having responsibility for achieving objectives without the possibility of directly doing the job. It is the paradox of having controlling power without the doing power and has been ably described elsewhere (McGregor, 1960).

Of course, the things that managers are attempting to get others to do are not capricious but are goal directed, thus equating management with providing direction. This takes the form of decision-taking, categorised at a number of levels as ‘strategic, administrative, and operating’ (Ansoff, 1987, p.23), and where the prime characterisation of a decision is a commitment to future action (Mintzberg et al., 1976). However, I prefer to see these as the second level of management, subsumed under ‘getting things done by others’, and requiring managers to undertake three core roles – providing direction, control and motivation, all of which activities contain their own, inherent paradoxes.

3 Direction

Providing direction is often seen as the process of Strategic Planning, which, as Dror (1971, p.105) put it, “is an activity by which man in society endeavours to gain mastery over himself and shape his collective future by power of his reason”. Or again, according to Wildavsky

“Planning may be seen as the ability to control the future consequences of present actions ... Its purpose is to make the future different from what it would have been without this intervention.” (Wildavsky, 1973, p.128)

The dangers of having to react to predictions of the future have been emphasised by Putz and Raynor (2005, p.47) when they wrote about the innovation paradox, according to which

“the paradoxical requirements of persistent growth demand that senior management simultaneously cope with the needs of potentially disruptive initiatives ... There are no data about the future.”

Thus, predicting the future in order to select an appropriate objective is inherently difficult. The paradox of management, which relates to setting the future towards which the actions of others are to be directed, is contained within the misperception of relative motion. Although not a specific formulation within Zeno’s paradoxes of motion (Sorensen, 2003, p.49), this issue is founded upon the metaphorical translation of change as motion. Thus an observer (manager) looking forward in time and space establishes a desired future (vision or goal), whose position must be located relative to the observer’s
The paradoxes of management

current situation, in order to be able to proceed towards it. Whilst it may be clear that the desired future itself is in motion, it must be sufficiently motionless to be locatable as a target. However, since the observer is also in motion (present moment changes), this apparent stability of the desired future may be owing to one of two causes. The first case is that of relative motion, i.e., changes in the location of the desired future are offset by similar changes in location of the present state (relative perspective), which would imply that projecting the present into the future is probably a sound strategy. The second is that of a phenomenon, which in visual perception is described as parallax, where the more distant an object is, the more stationary it seems relative to the motion of the observer or to nearer objects (in the present space and time). Future events often unfold in catastrophic ways that come as a complete surprise, because we did not perceive their trajectory. The paradox is that we have no means of knowing whether, in any given situation, we are in case one or case two, and in order to proceed, we need to discriminate accurately.

This is also akin to the processes that Bateson (1979) differentiated as ‘Feedback and Calibration’, which he likened, respectively, to shooting a target with a rifle and shooting a bird in flight with a shotgun. The importance here is that, in the former case, taking time to refine strategies should improve performance via a process of Ready → Aim → Fire that might be recognised as the Design School Approach (Mintzberg et al., 1998). Whereas in the latter case it seems more a matter of Ready → Fire → Aim, or more importantly of Ready → Fire → Adjust, which is reminiscent of Emergent Strategies and the Learning Approach to strategy formation (Mintzberg et al., 1998) where any amount of deliberation beyond the most cursory scene setting is an inappropriate delay in gaining the experience that will make adjustment possible.

Nevertheless, managers are expected to provide a direction that will mobilise the troops or as Wildavsky (1973, p.128) put it: “To change the future, one must be able to get people to act differently than they otherwise would”. But providing the direction is not the management job done, for as Smith (1973, p.197) recognised: “There is an implicit assumption in most policy studies that once a policy has been formulated the policy will be implemented”, which must be resisted.

But management is seen as more science than art. As Handy (1994, p.12) noted, “Manage always did mean ‘coping with’, until we purloined the word to mean planning and control”. Somehow, in the search for greater professionalism (Rittel and Webber, 1973), management has become harder and this hardness seems to come in the form of control.

4 Control (and planning)

The provision of control is seen as that quintessential management role that delivers the performance of others in the achievement of objectives. Control is often equated with having a plan, as Mintzberg (1994, p.213) put it, “to have it on paper is to have it under control”. Planning is seen as the complimentary procedure that supports and enables control. According to Ackoff (1970, p.1) “Planning is the design of a desired future and effective ways of bringing it about”, and Koontz (1958, p.48) labelled it as “The conscious determination of courses of action designed to accomplish purposes.
Planning is, then, deciding”. Or, as Mintzberg (1994, p.9) saw it, “Planning has been used as a virtual synonym for decision making”.

The planning process results in the establishment of a plan, which usually sets out the objectives, the actions to be taken, the resources required or available, the indicators by which success will be assessed and the attendant risks (Davidoff and Reiner, 1973; Faludi, 1973). Resources are then mobilised and actions initiated.

However, the formulation of a plan carries within it a number of paradoxes. The first of which is the tension between the stability of a fixed programme and the need to retain flexibility. As Adler and Borys express it

“Such … situations create an organization design dilemma because the routine parts cannot be managed in a mechanistic, coercive, and bureaucratic way at the same time and for the same employees as the nonroutine parts are managed in an organic and empowering way.” (Adler and Borys, 1996, p.79)

A manager has to show commitment without being committed. They have to be able to adapt to unfolding situations that may or may not conform to what was predicted. But, as Mintzberg (1994, p.184) remarked, “Flexible planning remains just another oxymoron” and “Planning by its very nature generally opts for stability over adaptability”. And yet

“It is a talented manager that can display such skill. But inevitably, by settling on one course of action, choice precludes following alternative routes. To choose is to close doors as well as to go through them. As Steiner (1979, p.46) recognised, “Plans are commitments ... and thus they limit choice. They tend to reduce initiative in a range of alternatives beyond the plans”. And Mintzberg (1994, p.175) warned “Planning is fundamentally a conservative process”. “The plans themselves ... especially when clearly articulated, tend to breed resistance to change”. However, with Chamberlain (1968), we must hope that “planned order is not the antithesis of individual freedom but is necessary to it ... the issue is not plan or individualism but how much of each”.

A second paradox of planning is contained in the dichotomy of the process into Analysis and Synthesis. Each of these processes is associated with very different skills and is often given to different kinds of staff to lead and for the separation of the planners from the doers. Devons (quoted in Wildavsky, 1971, p.102) drew attention to a paradox generated by such separation when he said

“Yet another paradox [of the planner is] to have substantial power and be certain that [one’s] advice would normally be taken, yet ... to be absolved from responsibility.”

However, as Mintzberg (1994, p.13) recognised, “Rationality of this formal kind is, of course, rooted in analysis, not synthesis”. And this accounts for the downplaying of the importance of creative actions within the planning process. Analysis is, by its nature, substantially backward looking and synthesis looks forward, but this emphasis on analysis has the tendency to project the past into the future and to provide conservative options.
Freire (1971) drew attention to the process of human development (both personal and collective) as one of dialogue, beginning with the need to analyse or name the world. In a similar vein, Chambers (1997) emphasised the different realities that can exist and challenged the priority given to the perceptions of the powerful. More recently, Bashkar has explained critical reality as an acceptance that any possible understanding of the world is based upon a combination of what we know and the generative absence of what remains to be known, thus:

“The rational kernel of dialectic is as a learning or developmental process driven by absence. For instance, in science we have a theory which is incomplete in some way, this incompleteness, betokening absence will generate contradictions, inconsistencies, anomalies which will pile up to a point at which they will become unbearable. Then we will have the moment of transcendence to a greater totality and that transcendence to a greater totality will remedy the initial generative absence; and in that remedying of the absence will restore consistency within the theoretical field.” (Bashkar, 2002, p.38)

Since planning is about analysis of the situation and formulation of a response, the analysis, undertaken by whomsoever, must inevitably be incomplete (generative absence). It is in this latter aspect that we find the true position of the plan. A plan can be no more than an attempt to describe reality, and it will always be lacking some aspect of full understanding. Therefore, planning should be a dialectical process that moves from one degree of understanding to another by the incorporation of fresh aspects encountered from experience and drawn from what is inevitably only another incomplete part of the generative absence.

In the past, professional planners have served the policy makers by providing the expert advice and analysis upon which proposed plans were based. More recently, they have come to recognise that other stakeholders have much ‘expertise’ to contribute about the generative absence by way of indigenous knowledge and important client perspectives. As a result, the role of the planning professionals has shifted towards facilitation of a whole process of participation from which the planning choices and plan emerge. This role requires of the professional planners an entire set of new skills beyond their existing technical know-how (Dagron, 2005).

The plan can be seen as an agreed set of actions that have been chosen in order to achieve specified objectives, within an overall context. The choice of objectives and actions are the result of a decision that has been taken by a person or persons charged with the responsibility and authority to do so (decision-taking). There are only three ways to take a decision; the first way is for a single person to decide by a process of weighing each of the options in relation to all the known issues (a rational decision), or which takes into consideration interests outside of the immediate options (a political or a corrupt or an irrational (sometimes intuitive) decision). The second is for a group of people to go through a similar process and then to cast their vote for the option that they have chosen (intuitively, rationally, politically or corruptly), with the decision going with the majority of votes cast. The third is to place the decision in the hand of chance and through coin tossing, augury, lot drawing or random number generation to discover the choice.

Decision-making, on the other hand, can be a vastly more complicated business. In essence, it is a process of identifying the possible options and is made up of a sequence and variety of mechanisms for gaining the information and perspectives that will lead to
the formulation of a proposed plan or alternative plans about which the designated authority will take a decision. There are clear benefits to be obtained from making this a widely consultative process, and the breadth and depth of the gathering of facts and opinions is determined by the predilection of the decision taker(s) to obtain a wide view and the time, resources and skill that they have at their disposal for the consultation.

Clearly, systems in which the decision takers consider themselves to be authorities in the matter of fact and opinion or in the art of synthesis acknowledge little distinction between the processes of decision-taking and decision-making. More sensitive decision takers recognise the value of collapsing the hierarchy during the exploratory, decision-making process so that the decision that is eventually arrived at can be seen to be transparent and rational, rather than corrupt or nakedly political. Where decision-making is a very impoverished process, it is not hard to conclude that the decisions taken are likely to be at best political or at worst irrational or corrupt.

It is at this point that the power of the decision implementers comes to the fore, for no matter how powerful the decision-takers consider themselves to be, it is only when the decision has actually been put into effect that the power of the decision comes into being (Assagioli, 1999). Thus, the essential question at this point is whether the decision shall be executed, and it is here that resistance or reluctance on the part of the implementers can thwart the intentions of the decision-takers.

Mintzberg (1994, p.42) suggested

“Deep commitment ... is a necessary prerequisite to the successful pursuit of difficult courses of action and [it] seems to grow out of a sense of ownership of a project, not deeply constrained by the specifics of formal plans.”

However, in order to implement the plan, the doers need to understand it; to be motivated towards the goal (its purpose and its method) and have no higher priorities; to be capable of carrying out the necessary actions and to have sufficient resources. The fullest involvement of the implementers in the decision-making process can pay dividends in reducing the amount of coercive force that has to be expended in order to get things done, and vice versa.

5 Motivation

This third aspect of the management role is linked to the previous two by essentially involving the provision of clarity of direction, indicators for tracking success, and confidence to proceed. Once more, the planning and the management processes seem to overlap and go hand in hand. Mintzberg (1994, p.15) highlighted the relationship and the importance of clarity when he said “[Planning] must be seen, not as decision making, not as strategy making, and certainly not as management, but simply as the effort to formalize parts of them”.

This aspect of placing the plan in a more public domain has often been propounded as the main reason for planning. Zan (1987, p.193) saw “The common characteristic [of various planning systems] is the process of rendering things explicit”. And Sawyer (1983, p.5) emphasised “the need to bring the management process ... out of the individual minds of one or a few leaders and into a forum amongst a ... group”. However, this is also a source of paradox, where the emphasis is shifted from direction and control coming out of a plan and towards the importance of the planning process
The paradoxes of management

itself. As Steiner and Kunin (1983, p.15) averred “Plans are sometimes useless but the planning process is always indispensable”. And Wildavsky was even more critical in saying:

“Since he can only create the future he desires on paper, [man] transfers his loyalties to the plan. Since the end is never in sight he sanctifies the journey; the process of planning becomes holy.” (Wildavsky, 1973, p.152)

These perspectives, and others, have led to the emphasis on participation that now pervades the accounts of management practice. This is presented as a process of discourse that holds all the elements identified by Foucault (1981), and draws upon aspects of power in regard to who is authorised to speak (rarefaction), what can be spoken about (power/knowledge) and who speaks the truth (experts) that involves a variety of parties – naming their world. These three mechanisms whereby the influence of power is brought to bear are:

Table 1  Practices of exclusion in the discourse of planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Who can speak – who gains access to voicing their perceptions?</th>
<th>This means that limitations placed upon who can take part (Rarefaction) and how various groups are to be represented are set both overtly, by the use of invitations, permissions and recognitions, and covertly, by the restricted availability of information and by the resource implications of taking part (attendance and/or opportunity costs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is to be spoken about – how is the agenda set? What is not to be considered?</td>
<td>It means that both the opportunity to influence the process through which the subject matter to be considered is decided and the opportunity to influence what subject matter will be considered may be restricted before discussions take place (Power/Knowledge), and thereby place some issues beyond the scope of particular discourse (Lukes, 1974)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whose opinions count most as the ‘truth’?</td>
<td>It also means that when discussions take place, the opinions of some individuals, institutions or organisations are considered to be more ‘truthful’ than others, e.g., experts vs. primary stakeholders, or that, for some groups, their own perceptions must give way to the hegemony of those more powerful (Gramsci, 1971)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Thus, to paraphrase Lasswell (Morgan and Welton, 1986), in reference to Foucault, in attempting to discover the generative absence in any plan, it is important to ask Who can ask about What, by What means, with What language and to What effect? The implementers are frequently left out of the planning process, as Worthy commented:

“workers are seen as means rather than ends, doers rather than planners or initiators; to be manipulated – by persuasion if possible, by coercion if necessary – in other interests and for needs other than their own.” (Worthy, 1959, p.78)

Even when they are engaged, they may simply be passive information providers, or as Mintzberg (1994, p.166) noted: “While participation may be fostered in gathering inputs to the process, it tends to be precluded in determination of the final result”. However, the implementers have to make sense of the plan and they do so in relation to their existing perspective. So it is more efficient and effective for them to participate in planning rather than simply to receive the plan. For, we must remember, as Craig and Porter recognised:
“They do not fully disengage from their own dreams and ideals, but bring them along on the project journey, and try to realise them within the confined space of the project.” (Craig and Porter 1997, p.235)

The final aspect of motivation is that of giving confidence in the plan. Weick (1990, p.4) recounts a story of lost soldiers who escape their predicament by using a map that is subsequently shown to be of another region entirely. He goes on to say

“If you’re lost any old map will do. For people who study maps, as well as for those who claim to use them, a map provides a reference point, an anchor and a place to start from, a beginning, which often becomes secondary once an activity gets underway.”

This reveals another paradox, which links back to that of the manager needing to commit without being committed and to the paradox of relative motion, namely that the value in a plan may not be in the accuracy and detail, nor in the level of participation in the process of analysis and synthesis of the plan, but in the belief that there is sufficient collective understanding of both current position and future prospects to set forth, which stems from belief that the plan is accurate and clear and has been widely shared (Dalton, 1988).

6 Frameworks as models of the planning processes

If we are to understand management behaviour in undertaking such a responsibility fraught with paradoxes, then there is an underlying need to pull together all of these issues and generate a model of the range of behaviour that constitutes the management role. As Hall (1976, p.13) puts it: “The purpose of [a] model is to enable the user to do a better job in handling the enormous complexities of life”. Or as Checkland and Scholes (1999, p.22) describe it, in regard to Soft Systems Methodology, as

“an epistemology which can be used to try to understand and intervene usefully in the rich and surprising flux of every day situations”, also speaking of: “models [that] could be compared with real-world action in a problem situation in order to structure a debate about change.” (Checkland and Scholes, 1999, p.309)

The basic, hierarchical structure of managing together with its paradoxes, discussed above, can be further explored and explained by reference to a fractal structure, as proposed by McWhirter (1999), and which he called the Epistemology Grid. He bases this fractal structure on a three part pattern of How; What; and Why, repeated at two levels (although there are conceivably more). These are presented in respect of the processes of Managing in Table 2.

We can describe fractal level 1 as encompassing Policy (decision-making) that provides strategic direction; Planning (decision-taking) that provides administrative control; and Enactment (decision-implementing) that provides operational motivation. Each of these in turn, at fractal level 2, can be seen as involving Analysis, Option selection, and Implementation in respect of the process at fractal level 1. Unless each of the parts and levels are effectively understood and managed, then the results of any application of knowledge (a decision) will be at best fragmentary, and probably lead to unachieved goals. However, seldom do the protagonists in the entire process have such an overview of what is involved, and many believe that once Option Selection at Policy level has been undertaken, then implementation will inevitable follow. Within each
The paradoxes of management

fractal, at level 2, there is a process of Implementation and, as we have seen above, it is this that is of vital importance in delivering change on the ground.

Table 2 The fractal model of managing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fractal level 1 (Policy)</th>
<th>Fractal level 2 (Implementation)</th>
<th>Attendant manager contributions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>Expertise and collapsing the hierarchy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option selection</td>
<td>Delegation, resourcing, capacity building</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Strategic direction)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Stakeholder participation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Feasibility, transparency and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option selection</td>
<td></td>
<td>Delegation, resourcing, capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Planning) (what?)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Quality circles, reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Administrative control)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Day-to-day management, flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>Team work, division of labour, resource tracking, capacity building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Option selection</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Enactment) (how?)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Decision-implementing)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Operational motivation)</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In relation to the management roles outlined above, we can see that the key management contribution to the overall process (of getting things done by others) is communication. Within the fractal structure presented above, the contributions to direction, control and motivation are summarised in the right hand column of Table 2.

In line with explanations elsewhere (Bateson, 1979; Kowalski, 2004), the paradoxes of management emerge as a result of the confusion of logical types. The fractal model above represents a hierarchical structure of such logical typing that invites confusion by conflation of roles and contamination by trespassing functionaries. The secret of successful management is to know when to collapse the hierarchy for decision-making, when to show and gain commitment (without being committed), when to delegate, when to coach and when to leave the initiative to others.

7 In summary

In striving for these successful behaviours, a number of points need to be borne in mind

- Managers are not doers, so they must not ‘do’ nor ‘force’ – but build intrinsic motivation. Managers’ actions to get things done are not actions on the world, they have to provide direction, control and motivation.
- It is impossible to predict the future, but the simple extrapolation of past experiences into the future is often as good a means of proceeding as any other, and accounts for the largely retrospective element of planning (the making sense of past performance).
- Management is not simply a matter of decision-taking, nor is it planning. Planning is not simply decision-making, nor is it the production of a plan. But Management is a complex process of decision that involves facilitation of decision-making and decision implementation through participation and engagement that lend transparency and ownership to decision-taking.
Planning is as much about the formalisation of ideas as anything else. It is the making, through a process of exchange of views and opinions, of those unconscious processes of intentionality that are held by the various stakeholders to explicit and conscious ones.

Planning is dialectical and can never be exact, but it needs to give that semblance of certainty that is both necessary and sufficient to enable action to be initiated. The value in a plan may not be in the accuracy and detail, nor in the level of participation in the process of analysis and synthesis of the plan, but from the belief that there is sufficient collective understanding of both current position and future prospects to set forth, which stems from belief that the plan is accurate and clear and has been widely shared.

The fractal structure of the management process sets out the hierarchy that generates the confusion of logical types that leads to paradoxes. It also emphasises the role of communication in management and the contributions that managers make in the subprocesses of direction, control and motivation.

With these understandings in place, it is now appropriate to turn our attention back to the process of DA.

8 Managing Development

The importance of management theory-in-use within DA was emphasised by Goldsmith who said

“Hence, the new orthodoxy in international development administration, and in public administration generally, is for bureaucrats to think and act like entrepreneurs with strategic management to guide them.” (Goldsmith, 1996, p.1433)

Development itself, when seen as some form of intentional epigenesis⁴ (Cooke, 1998), would seem to be virtually synonymous with planning. Where, this is the analysis of a situation followed by the formulation of actions to achieve objectives (set at a higher level of planning). Yet, as Goldsmith (1996, p.1433) observed, “Measurement and control (i.e., management) are in some ways the opposite of what is needed”, which is a return to the management paradox of ‘getting things done by others’ and its equivalent in Ellerman’s (2002) ‘helping to self-help’.

Indeed, within Development in general, there is a tendency to overemphasise the plan as the product of the management process rather than to see it as a tool that facilitates the Development process itself. Or to forget, as Searle (1995, p.36) has put it, that “the object is just the continuous possibility of the activity” and, as such, progressively for it to become first reified, then ossified and finally fossilised. Thus, we should not properly speak about Strategy, Plan or Implementation, but speak rather To Strategise, To Plan and To Implement. Likewise we must also see people as Subjects in the process and not as Objects of the process – as Beings rather than as Persons – and Development as an action experienced (an intransitive verb) rather than an action done to others (a transitive verb). Importantly, if Development is Planning, then clearly the converse is also part of the Development of Capacity; that is to say that participating reflectively in the planning
process must be developmental of those capacities and capabilities that contribute to autonomy (Goldsmith, 1996; Ellerman, 2002).

Similarly, we may interpret the development process of the individual human being, or of human beings collectively, as a process of unfolding understanding coupled with actions necessary for achieving a desired state. Thus reflective practice can be seen as a process oscillating between periods of experiential activities and enhanced understanding. The challenges that emerge from Action Research (Wildman, 1995), Participatory Learning and Action (Chambers, 1997), Total Quality Management (Drummond, 1992) and other forms of reflective practice are about the ways in which people can be facilitated to take a more systematic approach to analyse and respond to their own circumstances and their desires and the means they have at their disposal. In other circumstances, this might be considered as psychotherapy (Kowalski, 1999) or as psychosynthesis (Assagioli, 1999) or as process consultation (Schein, 1987, p.34). This demonstrates that in many ways the formulation, implementation and on-going elaboration of the plan is substantially the process of Development itself.

The hierarchical structures for organising the planning process set out in the fractal model help us to envisage what is involved. We can recognise that the fractal level 1 also relates to the respective Development processes of Monitoring (Enactment), Review (Planning) and Evaluation (Policy). We can also note that the process of ‘moving-up’ has taken donor agencies progressively away from Enactment and towards Policy. This means that the more the decision implementers are able to participate in the decision-making process and the more the decision-makers are able to participate during the implementation process, the more likely the technical responses will, in fact, address the need (Porter and Onyach-Olaa, 1999).

However, the power that resides in the process of making and implementing plans and the tendency to reify them has the potential to deny autonomy and thus to be inimical to both the process of Development itself and the key principle of partnership (Ellerman 2002). Yet, it is difficult to envisage any development process that could proceed successfully without the need to plan. Therefore, we should immediately establish a workable understanding of the planning process and encourage and empower the protagonists to adopt appropriate roles and behaviour that support it as a continuous activity, rather than a periodic one, in order to build partnerships that are themselves growing and unfolding within the overall, organic process of development. However, donor demands for local plans, with which their own actions can mesh, often result in them being created without the necessary decision-making processes having been undertaken (Hanley, 2001).

Al-Bazzaz and Grinyer (1981, p.165) noted a tendency for formalised planning to be forced upon subsidiaries and suggested that “higher organizations impose a level of formality on this lower level which they are not prepared to operate themselves”. And Ellerman observed

“aid is only autonomy respecting when it does not do what is conventionally taken as a major purpose of program aid – to tip the balance in favour of reforms and good policies.” (Ellerman, 2005, p.211)

As Walton recognised,
“[Plans] are a substitute for, rather than a complement to commitment. Instead of providing committed employees with access to accumulated organizational learning and best practice templates, coercive procedures are designed to force reluctant compliance and to extract recalcitrant effort.” (Walton, 1985, p.138)

Therefore, the conditionality of requiring the production of plans of action is counterproductive, because it undermines the major advantage of planning, i.e., when undertaken well, it is in itself developmental (see Ellerman’s emphasis on learning), and replaces it with both the appreciation that management is essentially controlling (McGregor’s X) and a distaste for the tools of participatory management and planning.

Another difficulty that donors face – and indeed civil servants in Governments too – is the need to balance contribution with attribution. If you are operating at the Policy level of the fractal model, then the linkages between your decisions and actions and a change in the situation on the ground is filtered through the other layers of the fractal structure, and the changes that interest you, and those to whom you are accountable, are necessarily much delayed in relation to the changes at the implementation phase of the enactment fractal – which is where most of the inputs are consumed. But the donor agencies are impatient for attribution.

The end result is the paradoxical behaviour of moving up within the fractal structure, yet meddling below, where the desire to make things happen causes the protagonists to involve themselves at an inappropriate point in the Development process, denying autonomy to other partners and placing them in double binds (Kowalski, 2004). There is a need, in partnerships, to understand the interests, resources and roles of all the partners and how they themselves can contaminate the levels below by seeking to force change to happen where they have no ability to deliver and sustain. This is also compounded by a failure to concentrate upon implementation at that level in the structure where they do have some control.

The proper relationship is one of subsidiarity, where the various stakeholders are empowered to implement those parts of the process for which they are responsible, and where involvement from different levels across the fractal structure is restricted to participation in the process of Analysis or in contributing to monitoring, review or evaluation. In all of this, there is also the requirement that the various stakeholders have the capacity to do so.

The messages for those who have management roles within Development are to remember that flexibility in the dialectical implementation of the plan is paramount, we must behave in such a way as to discourage the creation of local managers who do not understand the paradox of management, the plan is a tool for communication in order to provide the confidence to act, and Advisors are like planners, who must confront the paradox of power without responsibility. Finally, and most importantly, we must recognise that plans, as conditionalities, rob the doers of intrinsic motivation. A plan is commitment to action; therefore commitment to action is sufficient evidence of worthiness in itself. If we demand a plan, we risk forcing reluctant compliance and recalcitrant effort, so we need to encourage partners to see a plan as an enabling formalisation.
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References


The paradoxes of management


Notes

1Quoted in Hannagan (2002, p.5).

2The collision of birds with motor vehicles is often ascribed to parallax – the bird simply does not perceive that the car is moving.

3The basic concept of fractals is that they contain a large degree of self similarity. This means that they contain little copies of themselves repeated at each subsequent level buried deep within the original.

4Epigenesis here follows Bateson’s definition (Bateson 1979), namely Becoming (from the Greek word genesis) by building upon (from the Greek word epi) what already exists.

5Gajanayake and Gajanayake (1993) refer to empowerment as implying enabling people to understand the reality of their situation, reflect on the factors shaping that situation and take steps to effect changes to improve it.

6Described as “… a set of activities on the part of the consultant that helps the client to perceive, understand and act upon the process events that occur in the client’s environment”.