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THE IB MODEL IN PROJECT REVIEW AND MATURITY TESTING

by

J. A. RIGNEY

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THE IB MODEL IN PROJECT REVIEW AND MATURITY TESTING

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J. A. Rigney²

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I. Introduction

The purpose of project review is to provide information for administrative decision and action. Decisions must be made throughout the life of the project whether to continue the investment of technical assistance resources, whether to alter the course of the project or the mix of inputs in light of changing conditions, and ultimately whether the project has matured to a point that it can be terminated without prejudicing the continued performance of the institution that is involved.

If this purpose of project review and evaluation is accepted, who should do it? Can the host government acquire the type of information needed by AID at the same time they are satisfying their own administrative requirements? Can the host institution collect all the information needed by the technical assistance team, or can a combined team of evaluators obtain the objective and accurate information needed by each agency? Such questions appear rhetorical or at best obvious in their implications. The administrative decisions regarding reallocation of project resources that must be made by the host government or the host institution are quite different from those that must be made by agencies providing technical assistance. The decisions regarding host personnel advancements and assignments involve different parameters than those

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² Dean for International Programs, North Carolina State University, Raleigh, N. C.

affecting the activities of foreigners. Similarly, the administrative decisions about a technical assistance project that must be taken by the Dean in a contracting university or by the administrator of a Regional Bureau in AID require insights and data that are not likely to be available through host national channels. Therefore, it is not likely that one group can completely satisfy the needs of the other group in making project reviews.

The next question then is whether the respective project reviews can be coordinated to reduce the repetitious and annoying number of disruptions that plague institution administrators and project managers. Is there a common body of data that could serve all needs, with a minimum of overlap and disruption? The history of project reviews to date indicates that most of them have been designed to satisfy largely the administrative requirements of the assisting agency. AID has exerted a great deal of effort in recent years to make evaluation a more useful exercise. However, very few actual evaluations have been designed to be immediately helpful to host administrators or project management in revising strategy and refining approaches.

The process of project review involves repeated reassessment of project goals and inquiry into the relevance of the indigenous institution to the real needs of society. The CIC-AID research project³ reported that in the field of agriculture alone there were 28 projects out of a total of 68 that were less than 5 years old (in 1966) and that the project planning in many of them was inadequate. This illustrates the

³ "Building Institutions to Serve Agriculture" a Summary Report of the CIC-AID Rural Development Research Project. CIC, Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana 1968.

need to have a continuing reassessment of the original goals and objectives in addition to an evaluation of the progress they are making.

The presence or disappearance of other institutions in the same area, the changing political environment, and many other considerations require a continual reassessment of the relevance of the institution being assisted. The growth and maturity of the institution radically affects the real technical assistance needs. The level of commitment of institutional support by society is subject to all kinds of social influence, and these changes are as important to efficient planning and implementation as the internal changes in an institution. Therefore, the process of evaluation should be regarded as a continuing guide to improved strategy in addition to being a tool for fiscal control.

The most important data required for project review are those indicators of the stage of development of each of the important elements in institution building. The data must provide answers to such questions as: How well is the IB project doing? Is it on track with respect to rate of development and quality of accomplishment? Are the present activities directly influencing IB or should they be radically altered? Much of the information that is needed is difficult to acquire by direct objective measurement. Many of the needed indicators are consciously disguised or withheld because of embarrassment or fear of reprisal.

Finally, the assessment of project progress and institutional maturity involves a judgment as to whether the individual elements of the institution building process have reached a stage where different forms of technical assistance inputs will be more efficient or, alternatively, a stage where

those elements of the institution can progress satisfactorily without further technical assistance inputs. Should the technical assistance contract be renegotiated to reflect changes in the nature of the inputs? Can the entire project be closed in another few years? These questions continue to plague institution builders in spite of considerable effort by many agencies to develop better evaluation procedures.

Does the IB model offer any help in improving the evaluation process? This paper will examine some past experiences in reviewing institution building projects and in deciding on their stage of maturity. It will then explore the possibilities of using the IB model as a guide to more useful project reviews. Finally, it will attempt to operationalize the IB model concepts for project evaluation purposes.

II Project evaluation experience

A glance through project annual reports or evaluation team documents reveals a striking similarity in the categories of items measured; although the relative importance and the precision with which they are assessed may vary widely. Primary focus has generally been on the physical facilities available to the institution, the organizational structure they have been persuaded to adopt, the number of personnel trained and the size of the budget. Finally, the program content is evaluated by determining whether published statements of the institution reflect the original intent of the project managers. Is this not enough?

Experience over the past 15 years strongly suggests that something is missing in such reviews. For example, the CIG-AID study attempted to find reporting systems in use by University contractors that had

proven of great value in making the type of administrative judgments referred to above. It was not possible to extract from the 68 projects examined a reporting system or even segments of systems that had great utility in the year-by-year administration of the project. The CIC-AID research project also examined a number of cases where project maturity evaluations had resulted in a decision to terminate the project on the grounds that the institution had arrived at a sufficient level of maturity to accomplish the purposes for which the project was initiated. The findings were summarized as follows.⁴

"First, even though progress has been made in some aspects of institutional development, none of the institutions had achieved the kind of overall maturity that was essential for them to sustain a dynamic, self-generative level of performance. It was questionable whether they would be able to make meaningful contributions to the economic, social and political growth of the country in which they were located.

"Second, the criteria used to determine institutional maturity were clearly inadequate. The decisions to terminate projects were made on the basis of achievement in physical characteristics such as numbers of buildings, faculty and students, but they did not take into account the spirit, tradition and institutional role which had been established.

"Third, each of the institutions experienced a traumatic interlude after the assistance contract was terminated that was characterized by periods of retrogression and loss of competence rather than continued growth.

"Fourth, there was much evidence that neither the U. S. nor the host country would realize the potentially significant dividends from the investments of money, manpower and professional skills which was spent in the institution building program unless additional inputs could be made in key areas where little growth had occurred.

"Fifth, there were many valid reasons which suggested that it was not in the best interest of the U. S. to terminate the contracts at a time when many aspects of the institution were still in the early stages of maturity. In most cases, this left a residue of bitterness and disappointment rather than the desired attitudes of appreciation and confident internal initiative "

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Roskelley, R. W. and J. A. Rigney. Measuring Institutional Maturity in the Development of Indigenous Agricultural Universities. N. C. Ag. Expt. Sta. Tech. Bul. 189, 1968

The CIC-AID study attempted to identify some of the elements that were not evaluated in assessing project maturity but which might provide important clues to the institution's ability to proceed without further external assistance. It was assumed that if these factors were identified early enough in the life of the project they would also provide helpful clues as to ways of altering the mix of technical assistance inputs so as to increase the efficiency of the institution building process. The institutions under study were primarily agricultural universities, but the findings seem to be rather generally applicable to other types of institutions.

Most of the missing information pertained to subtle qualities that are difficult to measure but which in fact represent what one "feels" about an institution after an intimate 2-day visit. They reflect attitudes, personal commitment to new approaches, or diversity in adherence to a new institutional role and goals. They are the indicators of the degree of adoption of new doctrine, of the existence of new leadership style, or the effectiveness of linkages that have been formed. In short, they spell the difference in a traditional institution and a highly innovative one. For example, under the normal evaluation procedures an agricultural university with a high proportion of its Ph D 's from U. S. Land Grant Universities appears on paper very similar to one where its faculty background is divided between U. S., European and Russian institutional philosophies, yet the capacity of these two institutions for innovative action is markedly different. An institution with highly skilled leadership, but which is completely authoritarian in style needs to be distinguished from one which solicits imaginative inputs from all quarters and finds ways to reward the contributors. Institutions

which have been imposed upon the other public agencies and which threaten their very existence can look very good on paper, but their post-project capacity for survival may be very low. These examples illustrate some of the subtleties that need to be evaluated in assessing progress in institution building. This is not to decry the variables which have been measured heretofore. They are useful and important and must continue to form a part of the evaluation process; but they are not enough.

Measurement of project progress implies measurement of change from one status or condition to another. Selznik's claim that "to institutionalize is to infuse with value beyond the technical requirements of the task at hand" suggests that these additional values need to be identified, planned for and tested. One of the difficulties in past evaluations has been the vagueness with which the original state is described and the new goals are defined. Simple goals calling for a certain number of people to be trained to the Master's level, with certain physical resources at their disposal and a given institutional program put into operation do not adequately describe the goals toward which progress is to be measured. It has been common for the more subtle qualities to be aggregated under such phrases as instilling "modern methods of Public Administration" or the formation of a "Land Grant type institution." Failure to articulate these goals in considerable detail early in the project has been as much a burden to the evaluators as to the project implementers. It is not enough to measure change, but change in a specified direction is an important missing link.

III. Use of IB Model in evaluation

Esman's paper displayed the IB model and its rationale and the papers

by Baldwin and Thomas commented on its operational value in project planning and in the strategies of implementation. The question here is whether it can be helpful in the identification and measurement of the more subtle but very important qualities of an institution referred to above

A brief review of certain questions that need to be answered in each of the major categories of the IB model will illustrate our claim that this model can be very useful as an outline of important features to be evaluated. No attempt is made here to ask all of the relevant questions for any specific project, but rather the intent is to stimulate the imaginative use of the IB model in the formulation of evaluation procedures.

A Leadership

1. How fragile or how well entrenched is the leadership? politically? technically?
2. How deep is the leadership structure - one man, or several?
3. How intimate and influential is leadership among the real power structure?
4. How bold and imaginative is the leadership in stimulating and rewarding performance?
5. How committed is the leadership to the innovative goals of the institution?
6. How skillful is leadership in linking the institution to other public and private agencies so as to enhance its usefulness and its success?
7. If the leadership pattern is not developing at a satisfactory rate, what change in strategy is indicated for the project?

These questions are likely to be embarrassing or dangerous to ask, the answers will be subjective, and they will probably be highly protective of project implementers. Yet it is worth considerable effort to know the answers even if they must be inferred from quite indirect approaches.

B. Doctrine

1. Is the perceived new institutional role in society realistic? i.e., is it consistent with real country needs? Is it being accepted?
2. Is the new institutional doctrine well articulated by project leaders?
3. What proportion of the administration and professional staff understand and actively subscribe to the new doctrine?
4. What are the social and political conflicts generated internally and externally by the new doctrine? How well are these tensions being resolved?
5. What official and public acclaim is generated for the new doctrine?

The importance of such questions about doctrine is illustrated by the recent attempts to include curricula in animal science in the seven new Indian Agricultural Universities. The national association of veterinarians in India carried on such an effective campaign to protect their traditional prerogatives that graduates from the new programs could scarcely find employment either in government or in private industry. This mitigated against wholehearted adoption of the doctrine by staff members within the institution, and it certainly colors the immediate future of this part of the projects.

C. Program

1. How completely has the institution developed the content of its new program?
2. How relevant is the program to country's needs and stage of development?
3. How widely is the new program understood by the staff? How strongly are they committed to it?
4. What is the congruence between new program and new doctrine, i.e., Is new wine being put in old wineskins?
5. What is the quantity and quality of results produced?

It is a frequent occurrence to have a new curriculum established, new labs and library well equipped and a new brochure released proclaiming the advent of a new era, but the teacher still regards his old lecture notes as the sole source of information required to pass the examinations. Can such an attitude be documented in an evaluation procedure? Would it alter the IB tactics being employed?

Internal Organization

1. Are there serious deficiencies in the organizational structure, or are most of the difficulties traceable to personal weaknesses and conflicts which no amount of reorganization will cure?

2. Has the institution been over-organized to the point of having "all chiefs and no indians?"

3. Does the organization facilitate the guidance and leadership functions of management as well as the usual control functions?

4. Does the organization evoke incentive rewards for good service and a sense of cohesion and loyalty among the staff?

5. Does the organization strike an appropriate balance between a sufficient "centralization of authority to provide leverage for change," and a sufficient decentralization to encourage middle management ideas, decision-making and responsibility?

If organizational structure has the primary purpose of enhancing the productivity of individual staff members, then project review must address itself to the efficiency with which this is occurring.

Resources

1. What are the prospects for continued and increased financial support from indigenous sources? Are they commensurate with the

requirements being built into the new institution? Or must the institution's future depend on continued external support in the foreseeable future?

2. What is the capacity of the staff to bring their full technical training to bear on the institution's output? Are they over-trained for the resources available? Too specialized for the tasks at hand?

3. What provisions are developed for upgrading the capability of existing staff and for continuing to supply new staff?

4. What arrangements are available to bring new technologies into the institution as fast as it develops around the world?

5. What provision for maximizing the use of library facilities, sophisticated equipment and lab facilities?

It is one thing to make available an initial set of physical facilities, modern technologies and trained people - it is quite another matter to keep these functioning and renewed in an exotic or hostile environment.

Linkages

1. What public services are being offered to other governmental agencies that will encourage their support of the new institution?

2. What is the status of conflict and competition or cooperation and mutual support with other public agencies?

3. How effective are the publicity programs in attracting public acceptance and support?

4. What is the relation of the project per se to linkage building?

5. How effectively is the product or the influence of the new institution being accepted by the public?

Institutional survival, growth and productivity depends on the degree to which adequate linkages are forged with society. This is crucial for the necessary inputs of raw materials such as people, data or social responsibilities. It is necessary for the support of continued institutional operation, and it is a specific requirement for the consumption of the product, be it trained personnel or a public service. Assessment of the extent to which linkages are being formed is equally important in evaluating institution building strategies and in determining institutional maturity.

IV. Operationalizing IB Model Concepts

Little effort has been directed toward putting the IB model into a full operational scheme. Axinn's paper reviewed various attempts to validate certain aspects of the model in the field, and in general these efforts showed that the concepts form a useful checklist in categorizing IB accomplishments and deficiencies. None of them however has proposed a specific evaluation approach that seems to have merit.

The CIC-AID study⁵ used the IB model in an attempt to find more meaningful measures of institutional maturity in the development of indigenous agricultural universities, and their report lists a series of variables that proved very useful in assessing maturity in the "Land Grant University" dimension. The authors of that report had occasion subsequently to attempt to use these materials in a full-fledged evaluation of two other indigenous agricultural universities in cooperation with AID and the host institutions, and they discovered that considerable work yet remains to be done to make this material fully operational. It is instructive to look at some of the problems encountered in those efforts.

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Roskelley and Rigney: op cit

The major problems arose from the need to measure attitudes and personal commitment to institutional doctrine and programs. Such qualities are very difficult to measure objectively and in quantitative terms. Instruments for measuring these qualities must be phrased with great care and with many internal cross-checks. They must be administered under the most exacting conditions and by just the right person to inspire cooperation and to guarantee anonymity of responses. This is a particularly difficult operation in politically unstable societies where professional survival has depended historically on being able overtly to realign oneself with each new wave of institutional influence. Under such circumstances the results from objective measurements are more likely to reflect an understanding of political expediency rather than a sincere commitment to particular persuasion.

Some of the more specific difficulties encountered were:

A. Generally, it was necessary literally to "put words in the mouths of the project planners and implementers" with respect to the specific objectives in such matters as doctrine, leadership, program or linkages. It is hazardous to base an evaluation on objectives which have been injected in this fashion by rank outsiders. It is even more risky to attempt to say what was in the minds of people several years earlier when the leadership and the local environment was quite different. Yet it is impossible to devise adequate measuring instruments if the descriptions are not clear.

B. There was great resistance to evaluation exercises that might reflect adversely on individuals or institutions. Therefore, there was reluctance to full participation on the part of host nationals if they felt that the results of the review would be circulated widely

in their own administration or in foreign circles. Similarly, team leaders were apprehensive that their cherished personal relationships with host nationals might be jeopardized in the process.

C. Some items in the IB model had not been consciously incorporated into the project strategy and there was a feeling on the part of project managers that it was, therefore, unfair to bring these ideas into an evaluation exercise. This obviously was a defense mechanism, and in part it suggested that past evaluations had been used more to place blame for inadequate performance than for cooperative planning and revision of future courses of action.

D. Much more understanding is needed of the interrelationships among the several categories of the model and the implications they have for appropriate timing of project activity. For example, could environmental linkages be forged before leadership and program content are firmly established? If leadership is weak should other IB activities be de-emphasized until it is strengthened? Should a structural reorganization be attempted before a new doctrine is widely accepted? If the review is to have major impact on continuing project operation there must be a better understanding of what to do with the review findings. Something resembling a PERT flow chart which incorporated the IB model elements would provide useful guidance to projects managers.

E. If the review is to have major impact on the future course of the project, it must enjoy the active participation of the host institution as well as the external agencies involved. However, it was difficult if not impossible to get meaningful participation by those who had not been previously exposed to the model and its implications. Exposure in

this case means a sufficient acquaintance with the underlying rationale to be able to use it effectively in designing the review exercise. At the present stage this would perhaps require a 3 or 4 day short course for a dozen or more people, and the format and conduct of the undertaking would be delicate at best. The two-week workshop at Purdue University this summer provided evidence that most national leaders find the IB model very appealing when they are studying it for general information purposes. These same ideas were more suspect when proposed without advance warning as the basic rationale to be used in reviewing institutional progress and maturity.

In summary, it appears that the IB model has excellent potential as an outline for project review and evaluation of maturity. Much more work is required, however, to make it completely operational in a given situation. This is not to argue against its use but rather to urge rapid and widespread efforts to gain experience and understanding.

Several major developments are needed to make the IB materials operational in evaluation.

The first and most obvious need is to broaden the purpose for which review and evaluation is made, and to bring about a completely different climate for its operation. The change must be away from strong emphasis on justification of expenditure of funds and toward effective guidance, leadership and help in the more efficient operation of the project. The IB model, even in its present form, can be of great value in bringing about such a transformation. It focuses the attention of all parties concerned on the real objectives of the project, and it contains the

seeds for helpful criticism. It allows for objective evaluation to be impersonal in its implications for revised strategy. It is interesting to note that the periodic reviews of project performance by the Cooperative State Research Service of the USDA are looked forward to by State Agricultural Experiment Stations with great anticipation. They are regarded as opportunities for exchange of ideas, for improved approaches, and for exciting new dimensions to their activities. This is the spirit that must be captured in the review of technical assistance projects.

A second need in making the model operational is the development of more adequate instruments and procedures for measuring the subtleties implied in the model. We have a vast experience in this country in assessing institutional achievement for purposes of accreditation and for measuring progress. This experience needs to be distilled and the pertinent ideas made available and tested in technical assistance projects. For example, in accreditation reviews it is common to encourage an institutional self-study, with the expectation that the process will eliminate the necessity for much unfavorable criticism by external persons. There is also the implication that the institution can objectively answer many rather tender questions internally, but that external examiners would find it difficult to get reliable answers. How are such data treated in satisfying the requirements of all parties? Much research has been conducted by psychologists and sociologists on measurement of attitude and personal commitment. These insights must be brought to bear on the process of institutional evaluation in technical assistance projects.

A third need in making the model operationally useful in evaluation is a better understanding of alternative strategies in institution building.

A systems approach to planning would be very helpful if it were couched in IB model terms. For example, a specific plan for developing the leadership of an institution, with numbers of people in different boxes and time intervals scheduled for certain accomplishment would be ideal. But everyone knows that personal as well as political developments are highly unpredictable, and therefore there has been a tendency to have no specific plan. What is even worse, there has been little objective assessment of alternative strategies in the event that certain time schedules are not realized. A much stronger case for measurement of certain qualities could be made if there were clearer indications of what project managers might do with the data. How accurate must it be? How necessary are certain pieces of information at this time? If you knew one factor well, what other information would be required in order to be able to act on it? Unless this type of question has some approximate answers it would be difficult to use the model on a continuing basis.

Finally, there needs to be a sorting out of data which can be routinely reported to a wide spectrum of users in contrast to the information which will be useful to a narrow segment of project management. Sensitive information cannot be collected at frequent intervals without creating an atmosphere of suspicion and rebellion; and few people would be willing to expose their innermost feelings to every evaluator that comes along. How frequently do you need to inquire about doctrine, or leadership? Are there certain indicators of these institutional qualities that could suffice over a 2 or 3 year period in between full scale reviews?

It is not likely that we will be able to resolve the above needs until we actually begin to incorporate the IB model concepts into on-going

evaluation practices. There is every reason to expect, however, that a little experience along these lines would be highly rewarding in increasing the value of project reviews.