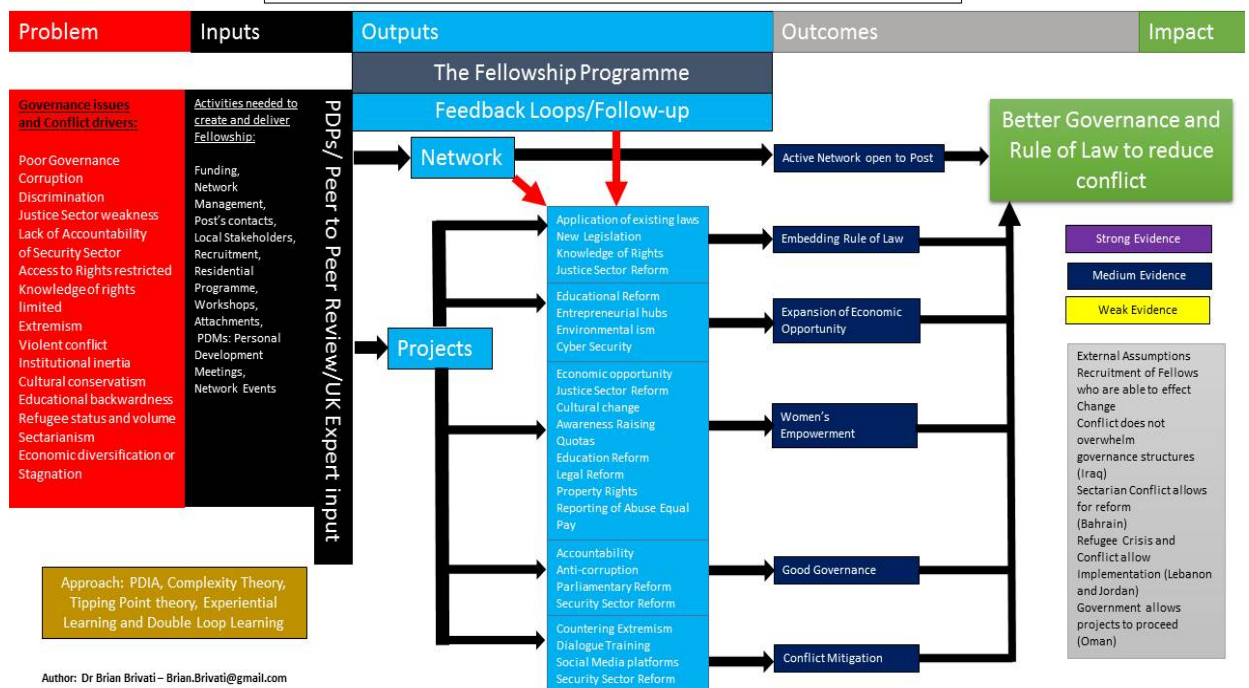


Theory of Change: Beyond Borders Middle East Fellowship Programmes



Explanation:

The Fellowship theory of change is outlined in the diagram above. The problems of a region or transitional state can be helped by inputs from external “actors” that are designed to enable key internal actors deliver the change they can and want to achieve. The inputs are delivered by personal Fellowship programmes that are focused on individual projects that produce outputs that make change happen at organisational and societal level, while also enhancing the skills, network and knowledge of the individual Fellows. The UK experts who deliver the Fellowship, the other Fellows and the alumni network together provide on-going and structured feedback loops on project planning and implementation and support the individual as a leader. Taken together the network produces a set of outcomes that produce progress on the overarching goal of better governance and rule of law to help reduce conflict. The Fellowship methodology can apply to any strategic priority or policy area but can only work if the problem and project concept is locally generated and embedded in local organisations and practice. The diagram illustrates the results chain and programme flow from the perspective of a Fellowship focussing on the rule of law and good governance and in the context of and based on the external assumptions that are relevant to the MENA region at the present time.

The use of Fellowships in this way is based on a Problem Driven Iterative Approach and the twin theories of social change that are often know in short hand as “Complexity theory” and “Tipping Point theory”. This Fellowship methodology is also influenced by learning theories centred on “Double Loop Learning” and “Experiential Learning”. These theoretical approaches have been changed and adapted in practice themselves through the delivery of over 200 individual projects and a dozen group training and capacity building programmes since 2010.

The design, planning and implementation of these projects take a Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA) approach as articulated by Andrews, Pritchett and Woolcock in their June

2012 Harvard CID working paper where the key message is “interventions are successful if they empower a constant process through which agents make organisations better performers”. The aim of the PDIA approach is to avoid falling into the prevalent ‘capability traps’ of international development i.e. “a dynamic in which governments constantly adopt reforms to ensure on-going flows of external financing and legitimacy yet never actually improve”. The four core principles of the PDIA approach attest that efforts to build state capability should:

- Aim to solve particular problems in local contexts/ identifying problems. All Fellowship projects are designed by the Fellows based on particular problems identified by the participants in each country or the region as a whole. The programme aims to broaden Fellows’ perspectives and offer insights into identifying the root causes of these problems that perhaps have not been considered before and help develop the Fellows’ initial project ideas into meaningful action acknowledging the Fellows’ awareness of the local context to establish what methods will/won’t work.

- Create an “authorizing environment” for decision-making that encourages “positive deviance” and experimentation (as opposed to designing projects and programs and then requiring agents to implement them exactly as designed).

Experience suggests that gradual and incremental change based through a broad set of agents will produce consolidated, sustainable change encouraged through positive deviance. However, this gradualism should be adapted from a ‘learning from precedent’ approach that can involve international experts but might also be based on the precedent of success in other sectors and from the experience of other Fellows. The combination of which creates an authorising environment.

- Involve active on-going and experiential learning and the iterative feedback of lessons into new solutions.

The development of Fellows’ projects is based on a dynamic learning including experiential ‘attachments’ and personal development meetings, encouraging “active learning through real-world experimentation.” During the Fellowship the projects are exposed to the intense scrutiny of the delivery team, the peer network and external experts. On completion of residency programme, each Fellow presents their project proposal for feedback. After the programme, the benchmarks are reported on regularly reflecting upon any issues and/or lessons learned. During the Follow-Up conferences experiences are shared and analysed enabling approaches to be adapted and changed as necessary.

- Engage broad sets of agents to ensure that reforms are viable, legitimate, and relevant.

The Fellowship brings a broad set of agents together in a space where they can have meaningful interactions and become part of a network with shared values and a drive for change. The network represents individuals across government, civil society, the private sector and the media with the aim of embedding change across the whole of society that is viable, legitimate and relevant.

This is the essence of the Fellowship approach and as networks build the influence of the broad set of agents engaged will also expand. Peer to peer review further builds-in assessment of projects as to their viability, legitimacy, relevance and sustainability.

This Theory of Change also encapsulates the twin theories of social change that are often known in short hand as 'Complexity Theory' and 'Tipping Point Theory'. Assuming that individuals can affect change in key areas if they select the correct change strategies and are supported in so doing over an extended period of time. Fellowship methodology therefore begins with individuals and builds through their organisations and networks to effect change in their organisations and their societies.

Complexity Theory suggests that to achieve change across sectors, or indeed within an individual sector, there needs to be a critical mass of change agents who are in leadership positions and therefore able to set the norms and values within organisations and/or have policy and project ideas that can inspire and motivate others. The objective is to reach an institutional 'Tipping Point' where the agents of change and reform out-number the opponents of change: the point of 'critical mass'. The timeframe for reaching a 'tipping point' of change will be entirely dependent on the context of the country and the sector targeted.

Complexity Theory applied through a PDIA prism seems to fit best with the experience of transition states where the barriers to change are often attitudinal as well as politically structural, enabling these nuances to be understood properly before a project is initiated. Indeed, profound change like democratic consolidation or conflict transformation is not necessarily achievable all at once; progress might be more effective if there is a particular focus, for example, on a single sector such as local government. If there is a critical mass of individuals in leadership positions who have chosen the path of, for example promoting greater gender equality at local level, because they see it as being in their long-term interests culturally, economically and politically, local government will operate at a point some way ahead of the central polity in terms of transparency and accountability which may then spill over into other systems or sectors.

The iterative approach of these Fellowships allows for experimentation and for Fellows to change and adapt their project plans. This rests on two related theories of learning, Experiential Learning Theory and Double Loop Learning (a variant of the PDIA principle), which have been tested, adapted and improved over twenty years experience and through over 200 projects implemented since 2010 – these theories influence but do not determine implementation mechanisms.

Experiential Learning Theory believes that people learn best by doing and/or by rooting their learning in their own experience and in the experience of their peers. There are two different kinds of experiential learning. The first involves focusing learning directly on a deliverable outcome or project rather than on the abstract absorption of information. The second is achieved through reflection upon everyday experience, adaptation from theory to practice and rapid response to real situations. Participants are usually concerned with concrete experience and therefore tend to conform to what is sometimes called a 'diverging learning style' favouring group work, listening and personalised, rapid and applied feedback loops.

Double Loop Learning assumes that all actors, whether in business or politics, begin with mental maps of how to act. These mental maps are called theories-in-use and are implicit in an individual's perception of how the world works and their reactions to this. Theories-in-use influence the way actors plan, implement and reflect on projects as well as encouraging them to think about and describe what they are trying to achieve and why. I believe that it is crucial to get local actors and leaders to think about and consider these issues as, as summed up in the PDIA approach, "government and organisations pretend to reform by changing what policies or organisations look like rather than what they actually do".

Accordingly, the methodology is based on four pedagogic principles:

- Professionals learn better by doing

Experiential learning has proven to be the most effective way of engaging professionals in new material because it allows them to root their learning in their own experiences and working lives. The Fellowship is therefore always focussed around an individual action plan that connects the Fellow's experience with their work and allows them to explore themes related to this action plan through workshops, individual meetings and attachments. This is based on learning theory but also on feedback from Fellows on the kind of programme that works for them.

- Content should be useful

Participants must see the relevance to their professional development of the material and speakers they are engaging with if they are to actually use the experience to change their approach to problems or be motivated to take on the mantle of change agents. If the content of the programme is too academic, abstract or theoretical they will not engage with the learning experience. If the topics are generalised current affairs discussions then there will be no lasting impact on their professional development. This does not mean that they will not enjoy the Fellowship or that they will not score the sessions highly, however, but it will mean that they might not think about new ways of achieving their objectives or rethink their overall strategic and tactical priorities.

- The team learns from each other

The formal workshop sessions of a programme are the beginning of a learning process but not the end. Learning occurs between participants, in networking events and in the follow-up that occurs after the event and through the alumni networks that are formed as much as it does from speakers and attachments. This process of engagement with each other does not happen by accident but is carefully built into the fabric of the Fellowship from the first time they meet via email or social media, through the first weekend of team building and at each step along the way to their final preparations for and presentation of their action plans.

- The different elements of the programme are reinforcing

The individual mentoring that takes place during the Fellowship Programme is focused on the Fellows as leaders within their own organisations and communities through the development of an action plan. From the beginning of the Fellowship through to the final presentation they reflect on this project and how they can improve its design and achieve its delivery. Fellows diagnose their problems during a range of activities, each designed to reinforce the effect of what went before - individual tutorial sessions, facilitated workshops, the attachment experience and the informal learning environment of the Fellowship cohort. They are also encouraged to ask themselves what they are trying to accomplish, what stands in their way of achieving these objectives, what must they realistically work around and what can they confront through stakeholder analysis, power relationship analysis, and exploring new ways of thinking and communicating which they experience through sessions with leading thinkers and politicians.