Reflecting on a Decade of Building State Capability around the World

October 19, 2023
Building State Capability (BSC) empowers public organizations to find context appropriate solutions to their problems, thus improving the implementation of their policies and programs.

We believe that problems are entry points to change and working in teams is the vehicle for change.

We have developed a dynamic step-by-step approach called **Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)** to empower action, facilitate the emergence of local solutions, and create new capabilities to solve public problems.
We convene implementation teams who work iteratively to solve their own nominated problems. The teams learn new problem-solving tools and achieve results as well as tangible capacity gains.

We have trained and engaged with over 3,500 practitioners in 148 countries and created a global community of practice.
Year 0_2012: BSC Launch

WIDER Annual Lecture 16

UNU-WIDER World Institute for Development Economics Research

www.wider.unu.edu

Folk and the Formula – pathways to capable states
15:00-17:00
27 September 2012
Year 1_2013: 8 Papers + Book outline

**Governance and fragility**

Part of 'ReCom – research and communication on foreign aid' project

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Working Paper No. 2012/64

**Escaping Capability Traps Through Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA)**

Matt Andrews¹, Lant Pritchett¹ and Michael Woolcock²

July 2012
We hosted a workshop to discuss the challenge of creating a governance agenda focused on solving country-specific problems with local people and emphasize learning by doing.
Hirschman told us that implementation involves a journey

written by Matt Andrews

I ran across the following quote from Hirschman today. A reminder that implementation is neither easy nor prone to scientific certainty. Rather, it requires journeys, of finding, fitting, and discovering. Do we promote such journeys in development? Are we open to the destinations we might end up reaching?

We now have 650 blogs.
Can one retell a Mozambican reform story through problem-driven iterative adaptation?

Matt Andrews*
“Books are dead.”
We recorded 35 short videos capturing key PDIA concepts.

We now have 236 videos and over 100K views.
Year 2_2014: Albania

Over the period of 3 years, we trained and supported a total of 131 government officials, in 10 ministries and agencies, working across 20 teams—allowing cross fertilization of ideas and the emergence of new solutions, relationships and capabilities.
We co-hosted a two-day workshop with Overseas Development Institute (ODI) to share practical lessons and insights gained to crystallize our learning, and to build a shared community of practice.
We offered 11 free online courses between 2015 - 2019.

“"The course has sought to intentionally take the classroom to the field and the field to the classroom.”

The PDIA course was rigorous and it was very useful to be able to apply skills learned in the course to real-life problems in real time.”
Year 4_2016: Sri Lanka

Over the period 9 months, we trained and supported 64 Sri Lankan government officials, from 7 different ministries/agencies, working across 8 cross-sector PDIA teams. We also trained 39 economic attaches/diplomats.
ODI, in collaboration with BSC, convened a second workshop to draw out some lessons learned, and chart a way forward for both actors already working in this space, and for actors new to and interested in how to do development differently.

Matt Andrews and Neil Cole from Collaborative Africa Budget Reform Initiative (CABRI) announce upcoming collaboration in Africa.
Year 5_2017: PFM in Africa

We developed a 7-month Building PFM Capabilities Program for CABRI and coached them on how to conduct PDIA trainings. Over the 2-year period we worked with 15 teams in 9 countries.

CABRI continues to run the successful BPFC Program, funded by the Gates Foundation. An independent evaluation conducted in 2018 was recently published in the World Development Perspectives (July 2023).
Year 5_2017: BSC Book

Featured Book

Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action

Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock
Oxford University Press, 2017

This book provides evidence of the capability shortfalls that currently exist in many countries, identifies capability traps that hold many governments back, and describes a process that can be used to escape these traps called PDIA (Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation).

DOWNLOAD BOOK (PDF)
We began to teach a field-lab class at HKS where students learn a research-oriented version of PDIA by working with an authorizer/client on real public problems.
The Toolkit is now available in 6 Languages (English, Spanish, Portuguese, Khmer, German, and Indonesian).

Designed to guide you through the process of solving complex problems while building capability.
Year 6_2018: Honduras

We worked with 7 government teams on key problems identified by the delivery facilitation unit.
Year 7_2019: Implementing Public Policy

We’ve trained 342 practitioners in 5 years.
Year 8_2020: Leading Through Crisis

We launched an 18-part blog series exploring leadership in times of public crisis like the Covid-19 pandemic. This included a series of virtual discussions as well as podcasts.

MARCH 15, 2020

Blog 1: Can Public Leaders Navigate High Winds and Big Waves in Little Boats?

Public officials can struggle to know how to rise to the occasion of a crisis, especially if they have lost sight of their mission to serve the public interest. In the first post of the series, Matt Andrews addresses how public leaders might think of themselves in the face of a crisis.

MARCH 16, 2020

Blog 2: Know Your Motivation, Put Communications and Key People First

Public leaders are in a position to help people move beyond avoiding a frightening situation to facing it. This post outlines how leaders can use thoughtful communication and key people to spur action during a crisis.

MARCH 16, 2020

Blog 3: Be Brave, Calm, Adaptive; There is No Perfect Crisis Response

Driven by tendencies to point fingers or wait for perfection, public officials can freeze or act too slowly during a crisis. Alternatively, the drive to act quickly can lead to rash decision-making. This post outlines the need for leaders to adopt a balanced, adaptive mentality when addressing a crisis.
We offered a virtual action learning program in Portuguese to 60 public servants working across 11 teams, working in secretariats of education in the states of Maranhão and Paraíba.
Year 10_2022: Education Systems

We developed a custom 12-week PDIA for Education systems program and 56 education practitioners across 9 country team (Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Malawi, Pakistan, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia) completed this program.
31 developmental leaders across 6 teams participated in the PDIA program as part of the Local Leadership and Collective Action Program (LLCAP). A cohort of 38 leaders began the second year of the program in August 2023.
Year 11_2023: New Website!

Want to learn more about anything you heard today? Find it on our website (bsc.hks.harvard.edu)
Year 12_2024: Sneak Peak

Policymaking as mountain climbing ...
Thank You!

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