

The Role of Policy Research Organisations

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What Capacity Gap?

- Three broad questions:
 - What capacity are we thinking about?
 - What evidence suggests it needs building?
 - What are the reasons?
- Crude caricature:
 - Policies in our countries are often ineffective;
 - This would not be so if we had good policy design and implementation;
 - But we cannot get this due to ‘lack of capacity’.
- Therefore need technical capacity building

Four Capacity Gaps

- *A gap in the capacity to use capacity*
- *A gap in basic everyday office skills*
- *A gap in theoretical understanding*
- *A gap in translating theory into policy analysis*

The Capacity Use Gap

- Lack of specialisation within policy institutions
- Possible reasons
 - management style
 - historical legacy
 - endogenous to the skills shortage
 - endogenous to the political economy of bureaucracy
 - endogenous to the political economy of governance

“Everyday Skills” Gap

- For example
 - Computer skills
 - Report writing
 - Basic data skills
 - Institutionalised work practices
- Training has to be embedded in work

The “Theory” Gap

- Both economic theory and research methods
- Distinguish continuing education from capacity building

The “Theory to Policy” Gap

- Anti-theoretical stance of policy makers
- Infrequent use of theory by policy advisors
- Result of the way economics is taught
 - Describe theory rather than use theory
 - Pre-digested applied work
- Discard theory and use ‘common sense’
- This is a mistake

Bridging the Theory-Policy Gap

- Ideally
 - on-the-job mentoring
 - not the role of universities
- In practice capacity for on-the-job mentoring is absent
 - Historical legacy
 - Staff turnover
 - Missing middle
- Policy Research Organisations can fill this gap
- But this has a number of implications for content and form of training

Implications (1)

- Closer work between PROs and policy partners in the design of programmes
 - Do PROs understand real needs?
 - Needs real buy-in by policy partners
 - Chicken-egg problem
- More interchange between PROs and policy partners at the research level
 - Staff exchanges
- Short courses without follow-up do not work
 - Disconnect between learning and work
 - Institutional inertia
- Require on-the-job and in-house training
 - Requires co-operation from senior staff
 - Difficult
 - Expensive and time consuming

Implications (2)

- Training should be more systemically integrated into the policy institutions
 - Less *ad hoc* more programmatic
- Training ineffective unless integrated with career development
 - Rewards and punishments
 - But bureaucracies often have no formal promotion barriers
- PROs should be more humble than we are:
 - Lack of capacity in PROs
 - Inexperienced at working in policy environment

Implications (3)

- More openness on commissioned research
 - Consultancy reports should be in the public domain
- Monitoring and evaluation of programmes should be more objective and systematic
 - Tracer studies?

Policy Process is Not Clean

Complex, Holistic And Organised
Technical Intervention for Change

CHAOTIC

Conclusion

- These things require policy maker buy-in
- But politics works against this
 - Do not want critical advice
 - Little trust of local institutions
 - Political accountability is lacking
 - Little demand for evidence based policy advice
- What can be done?
- Need to address demand
 - Directly:
 - Small in-house presentations
 - Create trust by cautious advice
 - Show that the work we do has positive impact
 - Indirectly
 - Create public demand for policy
 - Establish our own credibility