AIDING AID:
A monitoring & evaluation framework to enhance international aid effectiveness

Doctoral Dissertation
by Paul Crawford
2004
STATEMENT OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of the requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of candidate:

[Signature]

Paul Ward Crawford
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is difficult to pinpoint the start of an intellectual journey. For me, the journey presented in this thesis may have begun on a day in 1994 while seated in a looted and bullet-pocked office in Kigali, Rwanda. With me were Peter Truscott, the person who first recruited me as an aid worker and Barry Chapman, my boss and mentor at the time. We were planning a project to rehabilitate war-damaged schools in northeastern Rwanda, and Peter introduced me to a tool called ‘logical framework analysis’ (or the ‘logframe’). For an eager, but ill-equipped programmes officer, this tool shed a shaft of light onto an area within which I had been fumbling in the dark for some time.

While I have since come to appreciate much of the critique of the logframe and to recognise that its apparent simplicity belies a deeper complexity, this meeting marked an important intellectual milestone in my professional development. I recognised that the effectiveness of the projects for which I was responsible, could in part, be improved through more rigorous planning, and better use of information.

In numerous other field assignments since that day I have continued to grapple with how we can ‘do aid better’. In this quest, I have appreciated the support and guidance of many people. I will attempt to acknowledge them, while recognising that any list will be inadequate.

Lyndon Voigt, a colleague and ‘fellow quester’ has invested countless hours debating with me the subtleties of monitoring and evaluation information system (MEIS) development. Fred Kumah of Oxfam GB has continually challenged me professionally and supported me personally. Nagi Khalil, formerly of ADRA Rwanda, the International Programmes team at ADRA Australia, and the staff of ADRA Kenya have also supported my efforts in the field at various times. I especially acknowledge the assistance of the Ikutha project team (Peter Karinge and Edward Ontita in particular) from whom many of the insights in this thesis were gathered. At the ADRA International
office, Amy Wilsey, Dr David Ameyaw and Dr Solomon Wako have indirectly supported my research through enabling learning opportunities.

Numerous people have guided and influenced my thinking. Some important influences at ISF/UTS include: Dr Neil Hamilton, Rod Hayes, Dr Mark Diesendorf, Dr Juliet Willets (my ‘unofficial’ supervisor), Associate Professor Peter Petocz, Eva Cox and others including my fellow doctoral researchers. Other non-university staff who generously read my material and offered insights include: Dr Doug Shaw (CSIRO), Dr Basil Cracknell (formerly of DFID Evaluation), and Dr Linda Kelly (Praxis Consulting).

In terms of the preparation of this document, Ann Hobson, Vaughan Hughes, Michelle Crawford, Karen Zeuschner, Leanne Voigt, Tonia Crawford, Deon Goosen and Jason Cook all variously assisted with editing1, data entry, information sorting/analysis, IT help, and generally feigning interest in my omphaloskepsis2.

The greatest contribution to this work has come from my supervisors, Associate Professor Cynthia Mitchell and Adjunct Professor Paul Bryce. Quite simply without this pair of brains, this work would not be. They somehow managed to find the balance between my need for freedom of thought and the pragmatics of sound academic writing. They appropriately criticised, praised, cajoled and restrained me. As annoying as the ‘good cop, bad cop’ routine may have been, it worked.

Cynthia, who in her own words, has “a reputation as a tough critic to protect” provided valuable quality assurance in terms of the arguments presented. Her insights into the domain of learning and the challenges encountered with applying ‘hard’ concepts (e.g. engineering) within ‘soft’ contexts (e.g. society) were tremendously instructive.

Paul, whose years of experience in the NGO sector, and whose appreciation of the complexity of the aid operating context, constantly challenged my thinking. As a highly regarded academic, his ‘editor’s eye’ for detail was also much

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1 The editing of this document was in accordance with UTS Graduate School Policy.
2 Omphaloskepsis (noun): contemplation of one’s navel as an aid to meditation.
appreciated. Although officially retired, Paul’s countless hours spent pouring over my ‘opus’ was beyond the call of duty. His consistency throughout my candidature amid changes in supervision was greatly appreciated.

Finally, I am fortunate to have a large network of supportive friends and family, many of whom have ‘chewed the fat’ with me on philosophical topics relevant to this work. Beyond this, is the unquantifiable moral support that I have received. The chief protagonist in the ‘come-on-Paul-you-can-do-it’ stakes is Michelle Crawford, my partner in life.

Thank you.
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ABSTRACT

This thesis aims to provide a coherent theoretical framework to guide the development of monitoring and evaluation (M&E) information systems within international aid agencies. The thesis applies soft systems methodologies (SSM) to explore the research question and to develop conceptual models.

The theoretical basis for the M&E framework proposed is drawn from a transdisciplinary review of three academic fields: information systems, organisational effectiveness and project management. It is argued that inadequacies in the operationalisation of M&E systems arise from divergent epistemological and ontological assumptions about the nature of information and its role within organisations that are concerned with effecting social change. The M&E framework proposed seeks to resolve the dilemma posed by these divergent assumptions. This involves a M&E information system (i.e. MEIS) that is novel in terms of its scope, purpose and application.

Firstly, the scope of the proposed MEIS takes in the entire aid organisation, going beyond the dominant, conventional approach, which is project-centric. This enables alignment of project strategies with organisational mission. Further, it aims to promote the institutionalisation of lessons learned within projects (conceived as ‘social experiments’) for organisational learning, thereby enabling informed debate about the effectiveness of the organisation in fostering sustainable development.

Secondly, the purpose of the proposed MEIS has been defined as being concerned with promoting organisational success. The critical success factors of learning and accountability are identified, and the role of M&E in encouraging responsive management decision-making and critical inquiry and reflection is described.

Thirdly, the application of the proposed MEIS involves a modified logframe. The ‘3D-Logframe’ serves as a conceptual basis to address limitations found
with the conventional two-dimensional logframe matrix when employed for M&E purposes.

The proposed M&E framework was developed out of iterations of action in the field and reflection. Further research will involve applying the framework in its entirety.