

2010

**Making sense in dynamic development policy contexts: socio-cognitive environments as an analytic substitute for 'organizational culture'**

Jenny Morrison  
*University of Wollongong in Dubai*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/dubaipapers>

---

**Recommended Citation**

Morrison, Jenny: Making sense in dynamic development policy contexts: socio-cognitive environments as an analytic substitute for 'organizational culture' 2010.  
<https://ro.uow.edu.au/dubaipapers/325>

Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: [research-pubs@uow.edu.au](mailto:research-pubs@uow.edu.au)

# **Making Sense in Dynamic Development Policy Contexts: Socio-Cognitive Environments as an Analytic Substitute for 'Organizational Culture'**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper presents socio-cognitive environment (SCE) as an alternative conceptual framework to organizational culture to study dynamic development policy environments where groups of stakeholders engage in high degrees of organizational boundary-crossing to achieve collective aims. This paper summarizes a two year study of a group of Cambodian mid-level managers who were charged with implementing a participatory development policy. Such an effort required staff to engage in a collective sensemaking process that spanned organizational, cultural, social, and historical boundaries. SCE serves as a useful device to consider how both macro and micro interactions influence mid-level manager sensemaking. This paper presents a review of the key bodies of literature which have supported the development of the SCE model, before presenting the analytic model itself. The paper concludes with a discussion of how this model might be useful in other contexts.

**Keywords:** managerial cognition; sensemaking; schema; international development policy

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Knowledge Gaps in Understanding of the Management of International Policy Implementations**

Understandings of the *process* of the management of public policy implementations in a variety of contexts, both locally and internationally, have suffered from a lack of application of management lenses to better document the influence of the human dimensions of such experiences. At the heart of such implementations in international development contexts is a collective sensemaking process that typically encompasses a wide array of historical, political, and cultural experiences of diverse stakeholders. As much effort as is put into controlling the structure and inputs of program design, very little understanding exists of how human sensemaking of policy mandates influences their implementation.

The study from which this paper is derived thus aims to make a contribution to understandings of sensemaking processes in international development programs by rendering explicit an implicit process undergirding the management of policy implementation activities - the socio-cognitive transactions between the human beings charged with their enactment. This paper presents an analytic model that provides a multi-level map of collective sensemaking, derived from a study of an international development program environment in the country of Cambodia. Such a model provides a new lens to study the complexities of human interaction and sensemaking in such contexts, as well

as holds promise for enhancing understanding of sensemaking in a wide variety of multicultural and international business settings in an increasingly globalizing, complex world.

### **Initial Frame Driving Model Development: Mapping Collective Sensemaking**

To understand managerial cognition, both as an individual and collective experience, multiple levels of cognitive interactions must be considered and disentangled, since both are socially constructed (Gergen 1994; 2000). A multi-level mapping of collective managerial sensemaking thus helps to consider how people process macro-level forces in their broader organizational environments through micro-level sensemaking activities. In complex multinational work environments, be they private sector ventures being transmitted from international headquarters to local subsidiary staff, or international development programs encompassing a variety of stakeholders at the international and local levels, how local staff makes sense of policy directives can greatly influence the nature of organizational outcomes. By mapping such sensemaking, various schema are able to be documented, such as pre-engagement schema that provide insight into the kinds of socio-cognitive processing staff do about their work, and post-engagement schema, which demonstrate how local staff influence each other in collective ways as they make sense of new policy mandates.

*Managerial sensemaking* (e.g. the interpretive process individuals undergo when confronted with new information) is the focus of the study, explored through the construct of *socio-cognitive environments* (SCEs) surrounding these mid-level managers. I define SCEs as *the space where social, human interactions transpire in which actors negotiate shared understandings of the policy mandate that determine how managers make sense of their work*. SCEs can be complex and overlapping, encompassing both inter- and intra-organizational interactions between a broad range of institutions, government actors, community stakeholders, and beneficiaries. *Schemas, the mental models that are held individually or collectively, that managers consider as they make sense, respond, and act on the mandates they are charged with implementing*, are also used to explore the sensemaking environment.

As a result of the application of these initial frames, the study was able to examine the interactions between locally and internationally-derived understandings of participatory development policies in one program environment in Cambodia. The socio-cognitive environment framework that emerged from the early data collection for this study provides a multi-level mapping tool to untangle such dynamics, allowing for a meso-level analysis between the macro and micro-forces that converge

on local workers charged with implementing internationally constructed ideas. Although the heterogeneous nature of international development program environments like the one studied limits the applicability of the Cambodian case, the findings emerging from this study warrant similar attention to the socio-cognitive dynamics undergirding other international work environments.

### **Study Overview**

The model presented in this paper was derived from a two year empirical study of a United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) program in the country of Cambodia, where local Cambodian mid-level managers were charged with implementing a participatory development mandate, an idea brought from outside the local managers' own political, historical, and cultural frames of experience. The study documented sixteen narratives of mid-level managers employed by the program (and an additional twenty one interviews with international staff and external program stakeholders) to identify *how multiple environments surrounding these managers interacted to create local understandings of the international participatory development mandate.*

To answer this research question, in-depth analysis of the human relationships constructing the work environment was required and the socially embedded nature of managerial sensemaking necessitated its study in a natural setting through the engagement of a social constructionist lens (Berger & Luckmann 1966; Bandura 1986; Wood & Bandura 1989; Gergen 1994), using an interpretivist, naturalistic frame (Ellis & Bochner 1996; Emerson, Fretz, et al. 1995; Hammersley 1992). A qualitative, ethnographic style research design (Cassell & Symon 1994) holds the greatest methodological potential for a study of complex social interactions, having proven capacity to generate analytic categories and develop new theory (Bentz & Shapiro 1998, 60). In total, thirty seven in-depth interviews (Spradley 1979; Rubin & Rubin 1995), a year of observations (Angrosino & Mays de Pérez 1994; Waddington 1994), and a document analysis of fifty two program documents (Caulley 1983; Cassell & Symon 1994; Rigg 2006) were used to capture a variety of data points to form an aggregate picture of collective sensemaking of Cambodian staff operating in the studied program environment.

I chose to intertwine the methodologies, as well as philosophies, at the core of Strauss and Corbin's grounded theory (GT) (Strauss & Corbin 1990; 1997; 1998) and Clandinin and Connelly's narrative inquiry (NI) (2000) approaches to promote, as well as balance, the somewhat conflicting

objectives of maintaining both sensitivity, rigor, and objectivity (Dodge et al. 2005) when engaged in highly relational research. I had conducted a thorough literature review, developed theoretical categories and an analytic framework, yet the research subject and Cambodian context meant that a high degree of inductive analysis would also be required. My research process can best be described as a continued interweaving of deductive and inductive analysis. My study was structured deductively but the qualitative methods allowed me the freedom to think narratively and work inductively while also ensuring research rigor. In short, narrative inquiry served as an approach by which to: a) engage relationally with my research participants, b) guide my interview process, c) and keep my focus grounded on hearing and documenting stories. Although narrative inquiry and grounded theory come from different epistemological foundations (post-modernist in the former and objectivist in the latter) (Bryant & Lasky 2007), the juxtaposition of the two created a rich analytic process. Grounded theory served as an important methodological tool to structure the systematic analysis of over 10,000 pages of document text and 1,500 pages of interview data. The narrative spirit drove the telling of the story, making sense of the fragmented data points which were the result of the grounded theory process. The construction of the socio-cognitive environments was the answer to the narrative question – *what's the story?*

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Managerial Sensemaking in Development Policy Spheres**

The lack of attention to the social experiences surrounding policy implementation is surprising, especially since thinking, acting human beings are the primary conduit through which policy ideas transform into action. This neglect is most likely due to the subjective nature of human interaction and interpretation and the difficulty of measuring these experiences. Yet, the front-lines of international development are rife with cognitive dissonance as local and international staff are confronted with management of the integration of international policy mandates into local cultures. New principles, organizational models, and ways of doing and being that accompany such mandates frequently collide with local culture, history, and traditional organizational dynamics.

Staff sensemaking in geographically and culturally dispersed development environments is particularly poorly understood and requires further study (Nelson & Wright 1995; Blackburn & Holland 1998) since local mid-level managers are particularly significant sensemaking conduits, as

they are positioned to make sense of and transmit local inputs to donors and vice versa. They thus serve as critical linchpins between the strategic apex of international donors and community-level program operations (Mintzberg 1989, 19-20). At the same time, these local program managers find themselves operating in a sea of juxtapositions. They must balance their efforts to empower local actors with monitoring the influence such increases in local autonomy can have on the quality of organizational outputs. They are expected to ensure participation, but not at the expense of ensuring suitable donation-output-impact ratios. Managers may be instructed to play a ‘hands off’ role in program design and implementation in participatory programs where communities are expected to play a lead role. Yet these same managers are expected to intervene in cases where low capacity or limited experience result in failed initiatives. As they negotiate these managerial challenges, local managers working within country programs become important interpretive forces (Holcombe 1995; Estrella 2000; Cooke & Kothari 2001; Long 2001; Lewis et al. 2003; Craig & Porter 2006).

In previous efforts to develop better understanding of these human dimensions of the policy process, macro-level studies have attempted to document the systemic political, economic and socio-cultural contexts which public policies are enacted (*for a variety of examples see* Palumbo & Harder 1981; Marshall et al. 1986; Kingdon 1995; Grindle & Thomas 1991; Stone 1997; Parsons 1995). Yet, such research has typically been limited to documenting the most measurable streams of organizational activities and program outcomes, without exploring the complexity of human interactions driving these efforts or how macro- and micro-level forces interact to influence sensemaking.

Micro-level policy studies have explored individual-level problems, typically aimed at identifying micro-level technical solutions. Such works include examinations of bureaucracies (Wilson 1989), policymaker’s interpretations (Marshall et al. 1985; Yanow 1996), front-line workers (Lipsky 1980; Goetz 1996; Tandler 1997; Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2003), and beneficiaries’ understandings of the policy process (Thomas 1985; Robb 1999; Brinkerhoff & Goldsmith 2003). However, limited efforts have been made to examine the interactive effect of such environments on mid-level managers’ sensemaking. This meso-level study attempts to capture the multiple and competing understandings of participatory development existing to fill this gap. Understanding how

the confluence of macro- and micro-level environments influence those charged with such activities represents a significant contribution to the managerial cognition and policy implementation fields.

### **Human Social Interaction in Organizations: the Role of Schemas in Managerial Sensemaking**

The study of social dynamics in organizational environments has traditionally been rooted in studies of organizational culture (Ouchi & Wilkins 1985; Martin 1992). Even those cultural researchers pushing the boundaries of the understanding of organizational culture to more fluid constructions which encompass divergent sub-cultures and other forms of cultural ambiguity (e.g. Martin & Meyerson's 'Paradigm 2 & 3' Researchers) (1987) have not considered the impracticality of practitioners embracing the term 'organizational culture' in complex policy environments with multiple, overlapping stakeholders and agencies (Martin 2002). Further, 'organizational culture' is an inadequate heuristic for studying behavioral dynamics of international program environments where multiple organizations are typically involved in program environments. *Inter-organizational culture* is another label used for studying the interactions between multiple organizations (Page 2003; Powers 2005). However, as local beneficiaries play an increasing role in program decision-making and operations outside of formal organizational environments, a new language and framework is required which more adequately captures the complexity of relationships across various institutional boundaries.

One field of organizational scholars has started to explore the influence of organizational environments as cognitive entities in and of themselves, as *enacted environments* (Weick 1979), as catalysts of the socio-cognitive experiences of human beings residing in such contexts (Daft & Weick 1984; Gray et al. 1985; Walsh 1995). Scholars interested in identifying the micro-level dynamics of social interaction, those face-to-face encounters or mediated contact in which individuals engage with their social world (Goffman 2003), have also explored how sensemaking connects to *organizing* and *action*, and how these linkages influence organizational outcomes (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Pfeffer 1981). This study draws from these traditions by assuming a view of the organizational world as an enacted environment of "socially constructed systems of shared meaning" (Burrell & Morgan 1979; Pfeffer 1981; Weick 1979 *as cited in* Smircich & Stubbart 1985; Ospina et al. 2007). In this view, organizations offer multiple, converging realities which result in continually new understandings about the world for their members (Weick 1979).

*Schemas*, the organizing frameworks which result from sensemaking (Weick 1995; 2003), guide and give meaning to behavior (Moch & Bartunek 1990, 5), defining the actions the managers take to implement policy mandates (Weick 1995; Starbuck 1982). Schemas can be held individually or collectively, and are “the process by which people reconstruct a story to fit in with expectations based on prior knowledge and expectations. The original story undergoes processes of rationalization, deletion, elaboration, and distortion which...are shaped and guided by pre-existing schemata” (Bartlett 1932, 316). They are one analytic tool for entering the subjective world of human social interaction and interpretation supporting policy implementation.

Jean Bartunek’s research in this field was the first to highlight how *collective schema* held by a majority of an organization’s membership influence the character of organizational processes, such as labor-management relations (Bartunek 1984; 1988) and organizational restructurings (Bartunek 1987). Bartunek defines *individual schema* as “templates that, when pressed against experience, give it form and meaning” (Bartunek & Moch 1987, 484; Hastie 1981, 39-88; Markus & Zajonc 1985, 137-230) and *organizational schema* as “the process [that] participants undergo to develop common orientations towards events” (Bartunek & Moch 1987, 486). In her work with Moch, she defines schema as a function of group and individual choice, motivated by individual and collective interests (Bartunek & Moch 1987). Because they are held by a significant number of members, schemas are an integral part of organizational culture (Gray et al. 1985; Smircich 1983; Ouchi & Wilkins 1985; Shrivastava & Schneider 1984; Showers & Cantor 1985). Thus, these schemas are active organizational interventions, affecting the interpretive perspectives of the individual members, giving coherence and meaning to experience (Moch & Bartunek 1990).

The *sensemaking field* provides a lens to consider individual actor’s cognitive processing of development mandates, allows consideration of collective sensemaking as a contributing variable to individual cognition, and reveals the importance of collective cognitive processing in relation to multiple, converging realities. The *schema* construct provides a container and process for sensemaking which can be studied.

## CONCEPTUAL MODEL

### A Framework for Studying Human Interpretation and Action: Socio-Cognitive Environments



To capture the social interactions and cognitive processes which create the sensemaking foundation of a program environment, I introduce the broad sensemaking construct of *socio-cognitive environment* (SCE). SCEs are the cognitive spaces where social interactions and collective and individual schemas transpire which determine how managers make sense of their work and generate meaning around policy mandates. Importantly, the SCE label transcends the more limited organizational culture label to include managerial interactions with external actors and ideas outside of project and organizational boundaries to include external stakeholders, such as program beneficiaries, government staff, and international and local non-governmental organizations.

From analysis of the empirical data, five socio-cognitive environments were formulated which emulate the multiple sensemaking environments which I propose interact to create local understandings of participation for local Cambodian mid-level managers. As Figure 1 illustrates, the five SCEs include the international macro-level environment, the Cambodian historical and cultural macro-level environments, the intermediate policy environment surrounding the program (e.g. interactions with government and civil society actors), and the micro-programmatic environment (e.g. the program's internal operations and organizational culture). As such, the conceptual framework encompasses the entirety of socio-cognitive processes relating to policy implementation, thus assisting in disentangling the factors that influenced how one group of local staff, positioned at the confluence of these five socio-cognitive environments, negotiated complex cultural and historical realities in juxtaposition to donor conceptualizations of development.

**INSERT Figure 1 here**

### **Application of the Model**

The first socio-cognitive environment documented for the study was the macro-historical SCE within which Cambodian schemas of the development mandate content originally formed. (In this case, the content of this schema is specifically understandings of participatory development, and at a broader level, understandings of democracy.) This material, further documented in the original study (Knowles 2009) provides a snapshot of Cambodian history as it relates to Cambodians' collective understandings of citizen participation, offering evidence of the historical conditions which have led to obstacles to participatory development (PD). It also provides insight into the reasons why

Cambodians experience a high degree of cognitive dissonance as they have come in contact with the idealistic notions of PD embedded in donor programming. Figure 2 elaborates the key historical experiences influencing understandings of participation in Cambodia.

**INSERT Figure 2 here**

The second socio-cognitive environment, the Cambodian macro-cultural SCE, was constructed to include cultural orientations towards democratic development held by individual Cambodians. Such a conceptualization includes the traditional organizational structures and dynamics which support such orientations, although not elaborated here. As documented in the original study, individual schemas of distrust and caution, as well as the patrimonial nature of traditional organizational environments fit within this SCE, offering insights into additional obstacles to participatory programming. Figure three highlights the evolution of understandings of participation to demonstrate the evolution of cultural understandings. For further elaboration of the other components of this SCE and the following SCEs, see Knowles 2009.

**INSERT Figure 3 here**

The third socio-cognitive environment, the international participatory development SCE, holds the multiple layers of international development community understandings, experiences and program operations and provides examples of how they interact to influence local programming efforts. Such a bracketing illuminates how donors' rhetoric exists in stark contrast to the realities of Cambodian cultural understandings, Cambodian traditional organizational environments, and even in contrast to international donor agency dynamics supporting participatory initiatives. Figure 4 further elaborates the content of the most common donor-driven conceptualizations of participation being implemented in Cambodia as an example of the inputs shaping this SCE.

**INSERT Figure 4 here**

The fourth socio-cognitive environment constructed was the micro-programmatic SCE, which includes both formal and informal organizational practices prevalent in both program documents and interview texts. Formal organizational practices include decisions related to Cambodian manager positioning and the substance of the program mandate. The program's participatory mandate would be included here in order to explore its influence on Cambodian manager sensemaking and action, as well as highlight the significant challenges encountered as program staff attempted to transpose the

ideas of participatory development onto the realities of the Cambodian context. Informal organizational practices which further supported Cambodian manager sensemaking, such as role modeling, the common practice of 'learning by doing,' and the necessity to have staff 'see to believe' in many cases, fall within this SCE. Figure 5, columns A and B, provides examples of the kinds of input shaping this SCE.

### **Insert Figure 5 here**

The fifth SCE encompasses the socio-cognitive dynamics operating within the international program context itself. Figure 5 models the elements of the 'counter-culture' dynamic present within the program. The first component (Box A below) represents a stream of sensemaking activities. Box B represents three collective Cambodian mid-level manager practices prevalent in interview texts – role modeling, learning by doing and 'seeing is believing' experiences.<sup>i</sup> Box C depicts a set of collective managerial schema in contrast to generalized schema previously presented, and which appear to have further enhanced the collective nature of the program's sensemaking environment. Box D presents 5 individual managerial practices which appear to have supported manager's coming to serve as vital cognitive links in the transmission of international understandings into locally accessible frames of participatory development. These 5 activities are labeled as 'linking' (Box E) and 'bridging' (Box F) mechanisms to differentiate between what appears to be deeper internalizations of the mandate principles, as evidenced by the degree to which managers described proactive engagement with such principles in the interview text.<sup>ii</sup>

## **STUDY CONTRIBUTION**

*Socio-cognitive environment (SCE)* is a powerful construct to help bracket complex, dynamic interactions into analytically manageable components, facilitating new understandings of participation in local actors. This bracketing also clarifies the factors that helped one group of local staff negotiate complex cultural and historical realities in juxtaposition to donor conceptualizations of development. Study findings also suggest that even in program environments with high degrees of cognitive dissonance due to macro-historical factors, and where international development mandates tend to create additional cultural and organizational blockages, micro-programmatic interactions can significantly influence the ability of local staff to surmount strong cognitive obstacles. The unveiled

knowledge offers a number of lessons for theorizing about the human dimension of policy implementation and for structuring future strategies for appropriately engaging local staff in ways that could make the mandate more accessible to local beneficiaries, and thus more sustainable.

The following key findings offer a first approximation of answers to the research question through the juxtaposition of the macro-level forces, which created cognitive dissonance, against components of the micro-programmatic environments which facilitated cognitive alignment.

*Key Finding 1: Cognitive dissonance may result from the collision of multiple sensemaking environments in the implementation of international participatory mandates, particularly in post-conflict countries where citizens have historically experienced a high degree of trauma. This represents a key human factor to be considered in the theorizing and management of policy implementation in such contexts.*

The ideas and abstract language of the international community's understanding of participatory development starkly contrasts the concrete reality and experience of Cambodians. Thus, the introduction of participatory development programming into the Cambodian development experience has been a highly contradictory process. Historically, practical experiences in participation with authoritarian, elite, and external actors have left Cambodians wary of actively jumping into new programs orchestrated by outside forces and delivered to communities under the auspices of development. The ongoing lack of trust in Cambodian communities, strict social hierarchies, and individual senses of victimization and disempowerment represent key cognitive blockages to building democratic participation which can only be overcome through paying explicit attention to localized sensemaking processes. In short, evolving interpretations of citizen participation are a fundamental component of Cambodians' ongoing struggle to identify their relationship to the state and their role as citizens.

*Key Finding 2: At the country level, contradictions between traditional organizational cultures, mandate principles, and locally-based donor environments that operationalize the mandate may further enhance the cognitive dissonance of local staff.*

Because of the non-participatory manner in which early aid efforts were managed, Cambodians view donor aid projects as externally-led initiatives, delivered and controlled by outsiders. As well, study findings describe donor and local government cultures in Cambodia as exhibiting a high degree of bureaucracy and vertical hierarchy. Donor cultures express a high level of patriarchy, while local government authorities are composed of extreme patrimonial networks. From

within these relatively dysfunctional organizational environments, local development programs are expected to create program operations which integrate multicultural staff and implement the mandate in a highly participatory manner. However, organizational cultures surrounding donor programming have exacerbated Cambodian social hierarchies and the marginalization of lower Cambodian staff, both already deeply embedded in traditional Cambodian organizational environments.

*Key Finding 3: Given an appropriate program design, structure, and culture, Cambodian managers developed a bicultural framing<sup>iii</sup> of their work that allowed them to operate and maneuver their way between multiple, contradictory, and complex sensemaking environments. This bicultural framing was essential to facilitate the cognitive alignment process with a participatory mandate that, given unique historical and cultural factors, was foreign to the Cambodian people.*

Three sets of conditions within the micro-programmatic environment appear to have facilitated the emergence of a programmatic ‘counter-culture’ which in turn facilitated the cognitive alignment efforts of local staff. Findings can be grouped by: a) mandate content and program design (e.g. mandate directives related to decentralization, planning, and participatory development), b) broad program principles, structures, and processes, including Cambodian managers' structural positioning (e.g. being given formal power early on in the program at a time when other organizational environments kept Cambodians disempowered); and c) components of the program culture (e.g. the creation of conditions that allowed testing of Cambodian manager’s emerging understandings without fear and leadership activities of international advisors).

Placing Cambodians in such high profile but non-politicized positions also provided significant role modeling opportunities to other Cambodians, requiring Cambodian managers to first build significant capacity and empowerment. Thus, much like Bell’s documentation of a bicultural frame among professional black women in some US organizations (Bell 1990, 468), the Cambodian managers’ positioning required them to operate biculturally as well. Instead of negotiating between two mutually exclusive worlds, Cambodian managers interpreted the donor mandate simultaneous to performing in a manner accessible to their Cambodian counterparts and beneficiaries.

Program principles, structures, and processes created an institutional safe haven for Cambodian staff to make sense of the participatory mandates, away from traditionally disempowering government and donor organizational cultures. This unique socio-cognitive environment produced collective Cambodian manager schemas of safety, support, trust, and respect which enabled individual

testing and sensemaking of democratic principles. Framing the development process as an ongoing learning experience motivated Cambodian managers to test understandings of themselves, the program environment, and the participatory mandate in ways which influenced their core participatory development schemas. This micro-program environment offered a cognitive space to address the cognitive dissonance emerging from the participatory mandate vis a vis Cambodia's multiple macro-level environments.

It appears that emerging individual senses of empowerment and ownership enabled Cambodian managers to examine and process newly presented values differently than Cambodians trapped in distrustful and cautious orientations. This processing occurred even when ideas ran strongly counter to traditional Cambodian thinking about governance and citizenship. In the supportive program environment, where a sense of trust and support had already been cultivated, it seems Cambodian managers were able to give primacy to donor views over their own pre-engagement schemas of participatory development. It could be interpreted that Cambodian managers adopted a 'corporate identity' as members of the program's counter-culture which facilitated their ability to cognitively negotiate direct conflicts with core Cambodian cultural values, promoting cognitive assimilation.

### **Implications for Future Study**

The study confirms that individual sensemaking of democratic and participatory development principles in complex international development environments is influenced by a multitude of socio-cognitive factors. Individuals are constantly engaged in, and influenced by human interactions which significantly influence their perceptions and actions towards policy mandates. Most evident from the data collected in this study is the importance of the flow of ideas in such environments, where local staff are often the first to make sense of imported development mandates, serving as critical cognitive bridges in the implementation process.

Geographic distance, difficult oversight processes, and general cultural challenges make the global transmission of ideas an ongoing challenging. As both international development programming and private business operations continue to globalize, local embodiment of the *how* of doing such work will be critical to the localization of international ventures to ensure policies from headquarter executives are not just being given lip service, but are blended into local ways of thinking and acting.

Understanding how to ground internationally constructed business practices in local contexts without cultural or historical experience of such ideas is critical to such efforts. Mapping local staff cognitive processing is thus a critical linchpin in this process.

A key contribution of this study is its' multi-level analysis, which has increased the profile of local program environments as worthy of targeted attention in their own right, separate from studies of macro-institutional processes emanating from headquarter level. More data is now needed to test elements of the findings stemming from this analysis and future research will need to refine the construct and further assess its power to consider the socio-cognitive dynamics surrounding a variety of work experiences beyond this specific context.

## REFERENCES

- Angrosino, Michael V. and Kimberly A. Mays de Pérez. "Rethinking Observation: From Method to Context." *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Editors Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln, 673-702. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Bandura, A. *Social Foundations of Thought and Action: A Social Cognitive Theory*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1986.
- Barrett, Ian C., Ronald M. Cervero, and Juanita Johnson-Bailey. "Biculturalism - Outsiders Within: The Career Development Experiences of Black Human Resource Developers." *Journal of Career Development* 30, no. 2 (2003): 109-28.
- Bartlett, Frederic C. *Remembering*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1932.
- Bartunek, Jean. "Restructuring in a Religious Order." *A Diagnostic Approach to Organizational Behavior*. 2nd ed., J. R. Gordon, 724-31. Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1987.
- Bartunek, Jean and Michael K. Moch. "First Order, Second Order, and Third Order Change and Organization Development Interventions: A Cognitive Approach." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 23 (1987): 483-500.
- Bartunek, Jean M. "Changing Interpretive Schemes and Organizational Restructuring: The Example of a Religious Order." *Administrative Science Quarterly* 29 (1984): 355-72.
- . "The Dynamics of Personal and Organizational Reframing." *Paradox and Transformation: Toward a Theory of Change in Organization and Management*. Editors Robert E. Quinn and Kim S. Cameron, 137-62. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Ballinger Publishing Company, 1988.
- Bartunek, Jean M., Catherine A. Lacey, and Diane R. Wood. "Social Cognition in Organizational Change: An Insider-Outsider Approach." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 28, no. 2 (1992): 204-23.
- Bartunek, Jean M., Denise M. Rousseau, Jenny W. Rudolph, and Jenny A. DePalma. "On the Receiving End: Sensemaking, Emotion, and Assessments of an Organizational Change Initiated by Others." *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 42, no. 2 (2006): 182-206.
- Bell, Ella Louise. "The Bicultural Life Experience of Career-Oriented Black Women." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 11, no. 6 (1990): 459-77.
- Bentz, Valerie Malhotra and Jeremy J. Shapiro. *Mindful Inquiry in Social Research*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. *The Social Construction of Reality*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Anchor Books, 1966.
- Blackburn, James and Jeremy Holland, Editors. *Who Changes? Institutionalizing Participation in Development*. London, United Kingdom: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1998.
- Brinkerhoff, Derick W. and Arthur A. Goldsmith. "How Citizens Participate in Macroeconomic Policy: International Experience and Implications for Poverty Reduction." *World Development* 31, no. 4 (2003): 685-701.
- Bryant, Janet and Barbara Lasky. "A Researcher's Tale: Dealing With Epistemological Divergence." *Qualitative Research in Organizations and Management: An International Journal* 2, no. 3 (2007): 179-93.
- Burrell, Gibson and Gareth Morgan. *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis: Elements of the Sociology of Corporate Life*. London, United Kingdom: Heinemann, 1979.
- Cassell, Catherine and Gillian Symon, Editors. *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research: A Practical Guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Caulley, Darrel. "Document Analysis in Program Strategy." *Evaluation and Program Planning: An International Journal* 6, no. 1 (1983): 19-29.
- Clandinin, D. J. and F. M. Connelly. *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc., 2000.
- Cooke, Bill and Uma Kothari, Editors. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* New York, New York: Zed Books, 2001.
- Craig, David and Doug Porter. *Development Beyond Neoliberalism: Governance, Poverty Reduction,*

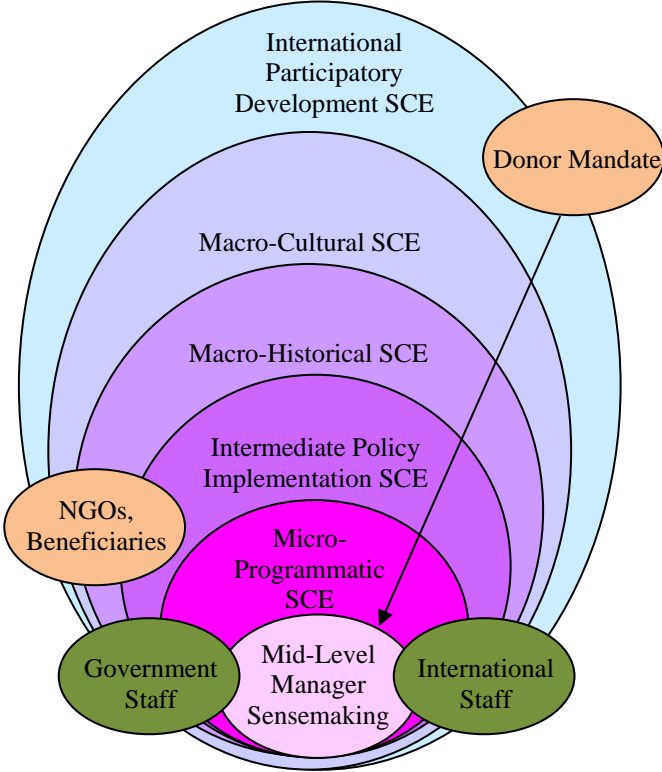


- and Political Economy*. London, United Kingdom: Routledge, 2006.
- . "Framing Participation: Development Projects, Professionals, and Organisations." *Development in Practice* 7, no. 3 (1997): 229-36.
- Daft, Richard L and Karl E. Weick. "Toward a Model of Organizations as Interpretation Systems." *Academy of Management Review* 9 (1984): 284-95.
- Darder, A. *Culture and Power in the Classroom: A Critical Foundation for Bicultural Education*. New York: Bergin & Garcey Press, 1991.
- Dodge, Jennifer, Sonia M. Ospina, and Erica Gabrielle Foldy. "Integrating Rigor and Relevance in Public Administration Scholarship: The Contribution of Narrative Inquiry." *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 3 (2005): 286-300.
- Ellis, Carolyn and Arthur P. Bochner, Editors. *Composing Ethnography: Alternative Forms of Qualitative Writing*. London, United Kingdom: AltaMira Press (division of Sage Publications), 1996.
- Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz, and Linda L. Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, Illinois: The University of Chicago Press, 1995.
- Escobar, Arturo. *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995.
- Estrella, Marisol, Editor. *Learning from Change: Issues and Experiences in Participatory Monitoring and Evaluation*. London, United Kingdom: Intermediate Technology Publications Ltd., 2000.
- Ferguson, James. *The Anti-Politics Machine: Development, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic Power in Lesotho*. New York, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- Gergen, Kenneth. *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1994.
- . *The Saturated Self*. New York, New York: Basic Books, 2000.
- Goetz, Anne Marie. *Local Heroes: Patterns of Field Worker Discretion in Implementing GAD Policy in Bangladesh*. Essex, United Kingdom: Institute of Development Studies, 1996.
- Goffman, Erving. "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction." *Reflections* 4, no. 3 (Spring 2003): 7-13.
- Gray, Barbara, Michel Bougon, and Anne Donnellon. "Organizations as Constructions and Deconstructions of Meaning." *Journal of Management* 11, no. 2 (1985): 83-98.
- Grindle, Marilee and John W. Thomas. *Public Choices and Policy Change: The Political Economy of Reform in Developing Countries*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991.
- Hammersley, Martyn. *What's Wrong With Ethnography?* New York, New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Hastie, R. "Schematic Principles in Human Memory." *Social Cognition: The Ontario Symposium*. Editors E. T. Higgins, C. P. Herman, and M. P. Zanna, 39-88. Vol. 1. Hillsdale, New Jersey: Erlbaum, 1981.
- Hill, Michael and Peter Hupe. *Implementing Public Policy: Governance in Theory and Practice*. New York, New York: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Holcombe, Susan Higinbotham. *Managing to Empower: The Grameen Bank's Experience of Poverty Alleviation*. New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995.
- Joshi, Anuradha. "IDS Research Fellow." Web page, 2003 [accessed 2 December 2007]. Available at [www.ids.ac.uk/ids/news/Archive2003/WDRjoshi.html](http://www.ids.ac.uk/ids/news/Archive2003/WDRjoshi.html).
- Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. New York, New York: Addison Wesley Longman, Inc., 1995.
- Knowles, J. *Constructing Participation: A Study of Cambodian Sensemaking of International Development Policies*, VBNK Publications, Phnom Penh, Cambodia, 2009.
- Lewis, David and David Mosse. *Development Brokers and Translators: The Ethnography of Aid and Agencies*. West Hartford, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 2006.
- Lewis, David, Anthony J. Bebbington, Simon P. J. Batterbury, Alpa Shah, Elizabeth Olson, M. Shameem Siddiqi, and Sandra Duvall. "Practice, Power and Meaning: Frameworks for Studying Organizational Culture in Multi-Agency Rural Development Projects." *Journal of*

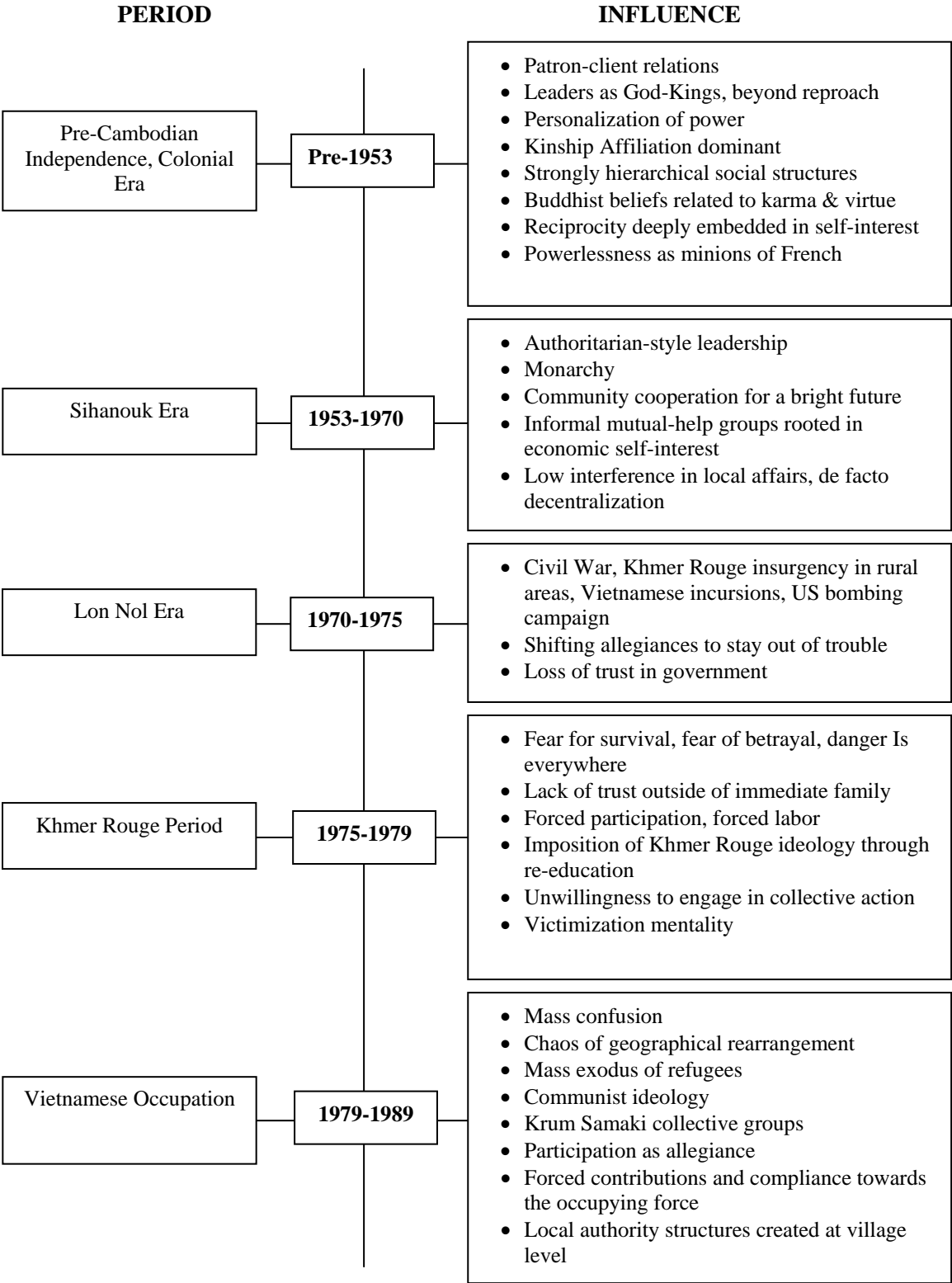
- International Development* 15 (2003): 541-57.
- Lipsky, Michael. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York, New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1980.
- Long, Carolyn M. *Participation of the Poor in Development Initiatives: Taking Their Rightful Place*. Sterling, Virginia: Earthscan Publications, 2001.
- Markus, H. and R. B. Zajonc. "The Cognitive Perspective in Social Psychology." *The Handbook of Social Psychology*. Editors G. Lindzey and E. Aronson, 137-230. New York, New York: Random House, 1985.
- Marshall, Catherine, Douglas E. Mitchell, and Wirt Frederick. "Assumptive Worlds of Education Policy Makers." *Peabody Journal of Education* 62, no. 4 (1985): 90-115.
- Marshall, Catherine, Douglas E. Mitchell, and Frederick Wirt. "The Context of State-Level Policy Formation." *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 8, no. 4 (1986): 347-78.
- Martin, Joanne. *Cultures in Organizations: Three Perspectives*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 1992.
- Martin, Joanne. *Organizational Culture: Mapping the Terrain*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2002.
- Maynard-Moody, Steven and Michael Musheno. *Cops, Teachers, Counselors: Stories from the Front Lines of Public Service*. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2003.
- Meyerson, Debra and Martin, Joanne. "Cultural Change: An Integration of Three Different Views." *Journal of Management Studies* 24, no.6 (November 1987): 623-647.
- Mintzberg, Henry. *Mintzberg on Management: Inside Our Strange World of Organizations*. New York, New York: Free Press, 1989.
- Moch, Michael K. and Jean M. Bartunek. *Creating Alternative Realities at Work*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Harper Business, 1990.
- Morrison, J. Knowles. "From Global Paradigms to Grounded Policies: Local Socio-Cognitive Constructions of International Development Policies and Implications for Development Management," *Public Administration and Development*. 30, 159–174 (2010).
- Nelson, Nici and Susan Wright. *Power and Participatory Development: Theory and Practice*. London, United Kingdom: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1995.
- Ospina, Sonia, Jennifer Dodge, Erica Foldy, and Amparo Hofmann. "Taking the Action Turn: Lessons from Bringing Participation to Qualitative Research." *Handbook of Action Research*. Second ed., Editors Peter Reason and Hilary Bradbury, 420-434. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2007.
- Ouchi, W. G. and A. L. Wilkins. "Organizational Culture." *Annual Review of Sociology* 11 (1985): 457-83.
- Page, Stephen. "Entrepreneurial Strategies for Managing Interagency Collaboration." *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory* 13 (2003): 311-39.
- Palumbo, Dennis J., and Marvin A. Harder, Editors. *Implementing Public Policy*. Lexington: Lexington Books, 1981.
- Parsons, Wayne. *Public Policy: An Introduction to the Theory and Practice of Policy Analysis*. Northampton, Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, 1995.
- Pfeffer, Jeffrey. *Power in Organizations*. Marshfield, Massachusetts: Pitman Pub., 1981.
- Powers, Jennifer Goodall. "Changing Interorganizational Culture: A Case Study of Trust and Power in an Interorganizational Network." *International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management* 5, no. 1 (2005): 119-28.
- Rigg, Jonathan. "Data from International Agencies." *Doing Development Research*. Editors Vandana Desai and Robert B. Potter, 222-30. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2006.
- Robb, Caroline M. *Can the Poor Influence Policy? Participatory Poverty Assessments in the Developing World*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 1999.
- Rubin, Herbert J. and Irene S. Rubin. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.

- Showers, C. and N. Cantor. "Social Cognition: A Look at Motivated Strategies." *Annual Review of Psychology* 26 (1985): 275-305.
- Shrivastava, P. and S. Schneider. "Organizational Frames of Reference." *Human Relations* 37 (1984): 795-809.
- Smircich, Linda. "Organizations as Shared Meanings." *Organizational Symbolism*. Editors L. R. Pondy, P. Morgan G. Frost, and T. Dandridge, 55-65. Greenwich, Connecticut: JAI Press, 1983.
- Spradley, James P. *The Ethnographic Interview*. New York, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979.
- Starbuck, William H. "Congealing Oil: Inventing Ideologies to Justify Acting Ideologies Out." *Journal of Management Studies* 19, no. 1 (1982): 3-27.
- Stone, Deborah. *Policy Paradox: The Art of Political Decision Making*. New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997.
- Strauss, Anselm and Juliet Corbin. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Grounded Theory Procedures and Techniques*. Newbury Park, California: Sage Publications, 1990.
- . *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1998.
- . *Grounded Theory in Practice*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1997.
- Tendler, Judith. *Good Government in the Tropics*. Baltimore, Maryland: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- Thomas, Barbara. *Politics, Participation and Poverty: Development through Self-Help in Kenya*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press, 1985.
- Waddington, David. "Participant Observation." *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research: A Practical Guide*. Editors Catherine Cassell and Gillian Symon, 14-36. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1994.
- Walsh, James P. "Managerial and Organizational Cognition: Notes from a Trip Down Memory Lane." *Organization Science* 6, no. 3 (1995): 280-321.
- Weick, Karl. "Making Sense of Organizational Change." *Making Sense of Organizational Change Paper Session (August 5, 2003) of Academy of Management Meeting*.
- . *Sensemaking in Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 1995.
- . *The Social Psychology of Organizing*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Pub. Co., 1979.
- Wilson, James Q. *Bureaucracy: What Government Agencies Do and Why They Do It*. New York, New York: Basic Books, 1989.
- Wood, R. and A. Bandura. "Social Cognitive Theory of Organizational Management." *Academy of Management Review* 14 (1989): 361-84.
- Yanow, Dvora. *How Does a Policy Mean? Interpreting Policy and Organizational Actions*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1996.

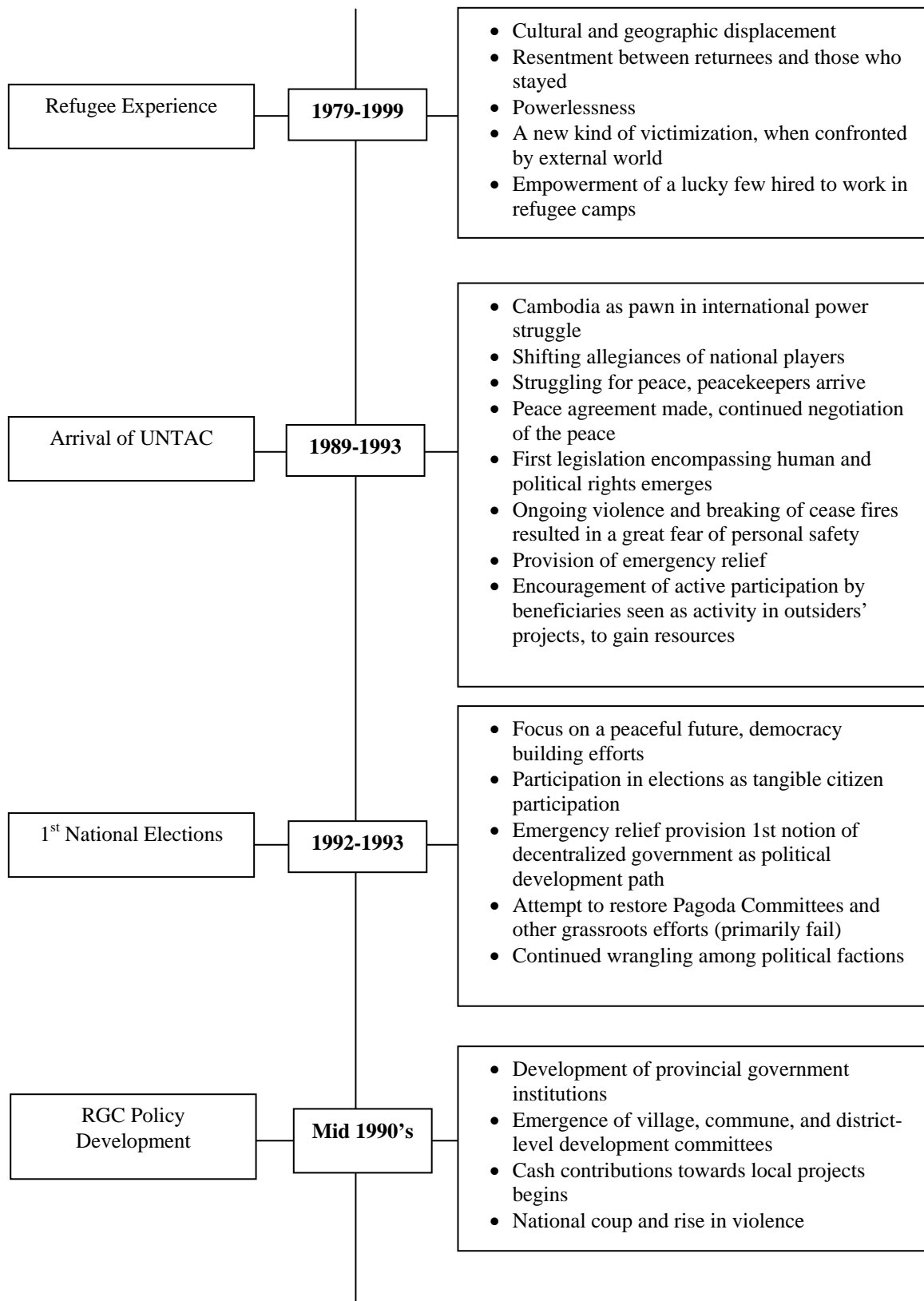
**Figure 1: Multiple Socio-Cognitive Environments Influencing Cambodian Managers**



**Figure 2: Macro-Historical SCE: Overview of Historical Periods and Key Influences on Cambodian Participatory Socio-Cognitive Environment**



(continued on next page)



**Figure 3: Macro-Cultural SCE: Abbreviated Excerpt of Evolution of Terms Related to Citizen Participation in the Khmer Language Through the End of the Khmer Rouge Period<sup>1</sup>**

Phonetic Spellings	Khmer	English Translation
<b>'To Enter In Togetherness': Pre-Independence Conceptions Of Participation (Pre-1953)</b>		
Chol	ចូល	To enter, such as into a room, house, or a meeting
Ruom	រួម	Togetherness, uniting, joining, or sharing
Chol-Ruom	ចូលរួម	Participation
<b>'Community Solidarity, Togetherness': The Sihanouk Period (1953-1970)</b>		
Sa-Ha-Ka-Knea	សហការគ្នា	Cooperation, collaboration
Sa-Maki-Pheap	សាមគ្គីភាព	Sense of solidarity
<b>'Forced Togetherness, Sharing, Putting Together': The Khmer Rouge Period (1975-1979)</b>		
Ang-Ka	អង្គការ	The Khmer Rouge leadership <sup>8</sup>
Chol-Ruom-Chea-Muoy-Ang-Ka	ចូលរួមជាមួយអង្គការ	To participate with the Khmer Rouge leadership
Ruom	រួម	Togetherness, but understood as <i>by force</i> in this period
Dakk-Ruom	បារក្រុម	In the Khmer context, meant "put together" (through <i>forced sharing with others</i> ). An expression of such togetherness would be to "have a meal together in a common canteen."
Bay-Ruom	បាយរួម	<i>Bay</i> is rice and this means to share food, such as having rice or a meal together in the same village canteen, where equally or

<sup>7</sup> All definitions of Cambodian terms have been developed through dialogues with numerous Cambodians, checked against Jetra and Leang's *Modern Khmer-English Dictionary* (2003) and two editions of Headley's *Cambodian-English Dictionary* (1977, 1997). Final translations were confirmed by two Cambodian translators.

<sup>8</sup> It is useful to compare this term to its pre-Khmer Rouge meaning, which was used to refer to a variety of organizational forms, and its post-Khmer Rouge meaning, which often refers to any organizations associated with development, including donors, NGOs, and the Seila program.

**Figure 4: Example of International Participatory Development SCE: A Selective History of Participation in Development Theory and Practice**

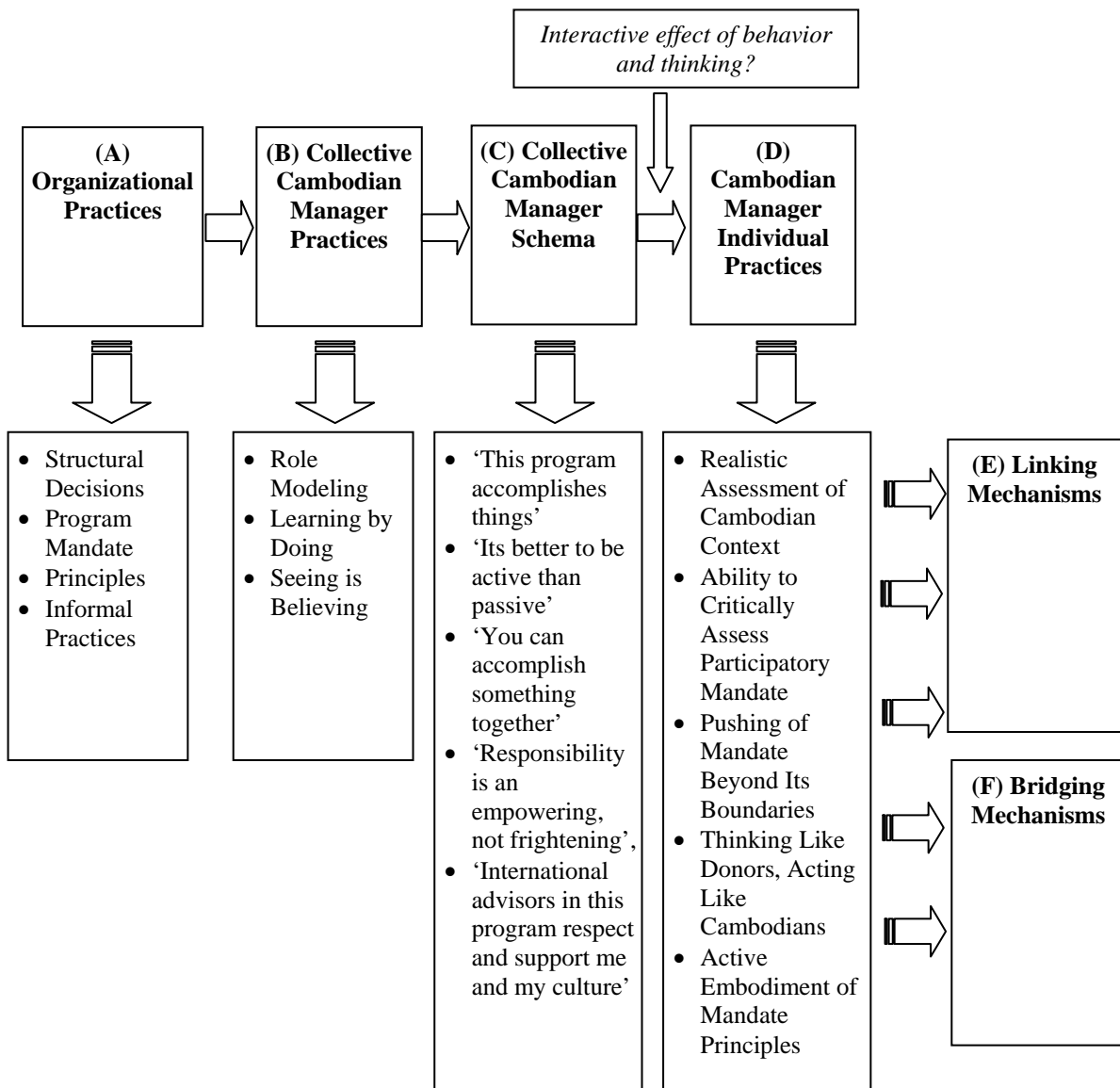
<b>Era</b>	<b>Approach</b>	<b>Institutional and Intellectual Influences</b>	<b>Development Theory: Approach to Immanent Processes and Imminent Interventions</b>	<b>Approach to Citizenship</b>	<b>Locus/Level of Engagement</b>
1940s-1950s	Community development (colonial)	United Kingdom Colonial Office  1944 Report on Mass Education in Africa	<i>Immanent</i> (Re)produce stable rural communities to counteract processes of urbanization and sociopolitical change, including radical nationalist and leftist movements  <i>Imminent</i> Development requires participation and self-reliance; cost-sharing. <i>Animation rurale</i> includes adult literacy and extension education, institution-building, leadership training, development projects	Participation as an obligation of citizenship; citizenship formed in homogeneous communities	Community
1960s-1970s	Community development (post-colonial)	Post-colonial governments (social welfare or specialized departments)	<i>Immanent</i> As above; also development of state hegemony, moral economy of state penetration  <i>Imminent</i> As above; also health, education		
1960s	Political participation	North American political science	<i>Immanent</i> Political development dimension of modernization theory. Participation as securing stability legitimacy for new states and strengthening the political system  <i>Imminent</i> Voter education; support for political parties	Participation (e.g. voting, campaigning political party membership) as a right and an obligation of citizenship	Political system and constituent parts; citizens
1960s-1970s	Emancipatory participation (EP)  Liberation theology (LT)	Radical 'southern' researchers/ educationalists. Freire, Fals Borda, Rahman  2 <sup>nd</sup> Vatican Council, Latin American Catholic priests. Gutierrez,	<i>Immanent</i> Analyze and confront 'structures of oppression' within existing forms of economic development, state information, political rule and social differentiation  <i>Imminent</i> EP: Participatory action research, conscientization, popular education, support for popular organizations	Participation as a right of citizenship; participatory citizenship as a means of challenging subordination and marginalization	Economic and civic spheres; communities; citizens



		Sobrino	LT: Form base Christian communities, training for transformation, popular education		
1970s-1990s	'Alternative development'	Dag Hammarskjold Conference 1974. Development Dialogue, IFAD Dossier. Nerfin, Friedmann	<i>Immanent</i> Critique of 'mainstream' development as exclusionary, impoverishing and homogenizing; proposal of alternatives based around territorialism, cultural pluralism and sustainability  <i>Imminent</i> Popular education; strengthen social movements and self-help groups	Participation as a right of citizenship; citizenship as a key objective of alternative development, to be realized in multi-level political communities	Initially focused on communities and civic society, latterly the state through 'inclusive governance'
1980s-present	Populist/ Participation in development	Development professionals, NGOs (e.g. MYRADA, IIED) World Bank Participation Learning Group, UN Agencies. Chambers	<i>Immanent</i> Little direct engagement; implicit critique of modernization  <i>Imminent</i> Failure of top-down projects and planning; participation required to empower people, capture indigenous people's knowledge, ensure sustainability and efficiency of interventions. Participatory: rural/urban appraisal, learning and action, monitoring and evaluation; NGDO projects	Focus on participation in projects rather than in broader political communities	Development professionals and agencies; local participants
Mid-1990s-present	Social capital	World Bank Social Capital and Civil Society Working Group. Putnam, Bourdieu, Narayan	<i>Immanent</i> Social capital promoted as a basis for economic growth  <i>Imminent</i> Local institution building, support participation in networks and associations	Participation as a right and obligation of citizenship	Civic associations
Late 1990s-present	Participatory governance and citizenship participation	Participatory Research and Action (Delhi), Institute for Development Studies, Brighton (Participation Group)	<i>Immanent</i> Development requires liberal of social democracy, with a responsive state and strong civil society. Some focus on social justice  <i>Imminent</i> Convergence of 'social' and 'political' participation, scaling-up of participatory methods, state-civic partnerships, decentralizations, participatory budgeting, citizens' hearings, participatory poverty assessments, PRSP consultations	Participation as primarily a right of citizenship	Citizens, civil society, state agencies and institutions

Source: Hickey & Mohan 2004, 6-8.

**Figure 5: Micro-Programmatic SCE: Counter-Cultural Practices Serving as Mediating Forces, Diverging from Donor and Government Environments**



<sup>i</sup> I define collective mid-level managerial practices as such due to the prevalence of activities cited related to these three types of cognitive processes.

<sup>ii</sup> Individual practices are differentiated by the strength they appear to hold to influence others’ understanding of participatory development. Although it is unclear the degree to which these differentially enacted activities exist in aggregate, they might represent deeper internalization of participatory principles (see Knowles 2009 for further elaboration).

<sup>iii</sup> Biculturalism was first coined to depict how black minority members interact with white society, defined as an individual’s ability to function in two socio-cultural environments and negotiate between them (Darder 1991; Barrett et al. 2003, 111). Biculturalism has typically been used to refer to minority groups existing as sub-group within a larger mono-culture (e.g. Black Americans existing as a subset of Americans as a whole). As defined by Bell, “the development of individual bicultural framing strategies can mediate experiences that [hold the potential to] result in a high degree of cognitive dissonance[,] into opportunities for cognitive alignment” (Bell 1990). This notion might help explain how Cambodian mid-level managers were able to negotiate the interaction of the complexity surrounding their position. Dimensions of bicultural competence can include: knowledge of both cultures’ beliefs and values (general cultural awareness); positive attitudes toward both

---

cultural groups (acceptance); confidence that one can live effectively within two groups without compromising one's cultural identity (bicultural self-efficacy); ability to communicate effectively with both groups (dual fluency); possession of a continuum of acceptable behaviors for both groups (broad role repertoire); and stable social networks in both cultures (groundedness)" (Bell & Harrison 1996, 52).