ipat
international peacebuilding
advisory team

'JILL' AND 'JACK' Of ALL TRADES, MASTER OF SOME.
Competency Requirements for Effective Advising in International Cooperation Contexts.

EFFECTIVE ADVISING IN COMPLEX AND FRAGILE SITUATIONS. WORKING PAPER 2.   February 2015

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ABSTRACT: At any given time, there are thousands of 'advisers' to governments and public sector institutions facing complex and delicate situations. On the surface, it seems that there are big differences among them: many are nationals and others 'internationals', they have of course different types of expertise and they find themselves in very different contexts. Notwithstanding, an implicit or explicit objective of their advisory role is to contribute to more efficient and effective public sector institutions. An effective public sector can be an important factor contributing to 'good governance', if there is also a very healthy relationship between government and citizens.

The effectiveness of an 'adviser' depends on a variety of factors, many of them out of her or his control. Other factors however are more under the control of the individual adviser, and can be consciously cultivated as personal competencies. Effective advisers do not only have their 'thematic expertise'. They also come with an understanding of and competencies related to capacity-strengthening and change processes. They actively seek to understand the various contexts in which they operate, which is a learning process. They are able to exercise good situational judgment, and can see tactical opportunities to move forward towards a greater strategic goal. They have excellent interpersonal skills, also across 'cultures'. Confronted with challenges and dilemmas, they show pragmatism but also rely on a strong moral compass. They can do this because they have a maturity and self-mastery that is the result of conscious personal development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. DIFFERENCES AND COMMONALITIES AMONG ADVISERS.

A. Different Scenarios, Different Terms of Reference.

1. <u>Different Scenarios.</u>

There is no generic situation for experts or advisers that are deployed to support the public institutions of a given country:

- Many primarily provide their expertise and advise to 'national' actors, but some are primarily advisers to other international actors within the international mission;
- Some have one or a few clearly identified national 'counterparts', while others arrive with a 'mandate' but no such 'counterpart' identified;
- Some operate more at the strategy or policy level, others more at the programme/project management level, and yet others very much at the level of practical action and implementation;
- Most 'advisors' have no executive authority, but some do;
- Some have control over budgets while others do not;
- Some are the first 'advisor', others come into their position in a succession of advisors;
- Some may find that there are also one or more 'national' advisors, within the government structure, while for others there may not be such;
- Some are the sole international advisor to a national entity, others have to operate in an environment where there are many international advisors, who may be competing for influence.

Advisors and technical experts are also deployed within in a broader historical and political environment that will influence how they are perceived and received, and how they can best operate to be effective. For example:

- An advisor deployed in UNMIK-governed Kosovo in 2004 presumably offers different advice and operates in a different way from an advisor deployed in that same Kosovo in 2010, after several years of international presence and after the Kosovo government declared its independence.
- An advisor who is being deployed by a former colonial power (e.g. France in Mali, Belgium in Rwanda, or Australia in Papua New Guinea) may have to face certain sensitivities that do not apply to some of the other advisors who have been sent by countries without prior historical relationship with the one they are deployed to.
- Advisors or technical experts in countries with relatively little international presence (e.g. Guinea Bissau, Colombia, Fiji) presumably will find themselves operating quite differently from countries with a very heavy international presence (e.g. Kosovo, Timor Leste until a few years ago, Iraq until a few years ago, Afghanistan).
- There are also 'national' or 'regional' advisors, which are hired by international organisations, typically on significantly higher salaries than their national 'counterparts'. Some may have come from the 'diaspora', others were would have been hired in country or in the region. They have certain 'insider' advantages, but their employment with an international organisation may sometimes create some 'awkwardness'.
- Finally, some advisors find themselves in a position that has been explicitly demanded by the recipient government institution, who have contributed to the job description and possibly even the selection of the individual for the post. Other advisors however land in a post that has been 'created' more by the international

partners, with terms of reference and a selection process that the national actor has not contributed to.

2. <u>Different Terms of Reference.</u>

Within the context of international cooperation, experts/advisers usually get deployed with a certain 'mandate' or more detailed 'terms of reference'. As they have different sorts of expertise, and are being put in different contexts, these terms of reference will vary a lot.

B. A Common Operational and Strategic Goal?

Technical Performance; a Healthy Governance Relationship: Notwithstanding these significant differences, expert-advisers seem to have a common operational goal: Whether stated explicitly or not, international experts/advisers deployed to work with national institutions presumably are expected to make a contribution to the 'better performance' of that institution. We can also assume that such 'better performance' is expected to be 'sustained' and 'institutionalised', not just a better performance of a few individuals that the adviser(s) are closely working with.

A broader operational goal of better, institutionalized and sustained performance of an organisation or institution implies many complex things:

- It implies that the organisation(s) concerned have the capacities to perform better, which invites us to unpack what we understand by 'capacities', how we assess existing capacities, and how stronger capacities can be developed; (see Working Paper 3)
- 'Institutional' or 'institutionalised' performance signals that we want to go beyond enhanced capacity and commitment of some individuals, even if they are key individuals;
- 'Better' invites us to unpack what the benchmarks are. In practice this is often taken to refer to 'international standards' and to 'models' from other countries that are perceived or presented as more efficient and effective than those of the counterpart organisation. But it may also refer to any improvement beyond the current performance, or to 'the best possible achievement in the current context in this country';
- 'Sustained' implies that there is more than the 'know how' of 'capacities' but also the will and the commitment to do, i.e. enough 'national ownership' and 'political will'.

The expert or adviser is supposed to contribute to such better performance through advising/mentoring, other ways of 'strengthening capacities' and encouraging 'commitment' and 'will'.

But the performance of individual components of the public sector is more often than not dependent on the performance of several components, and their effective collaboration. Indeed, effective 'delivery' by government typically requires that different parts of government work closely together (e.g. the executive actually implements the laws of the legislative; the police under the Ministry of Interior and the judiciary under the Ministry of Justice collaborate effectively in order to uphold the rule of law; the Ministry of Social Welfare needs reliable population data from local authorities etc.). Ultimately we need strong 'capacities' not only *within* but also *between* different organisational entities, and strong interagency collaboration. Otherwise we find overall performance, within and

between public sector organisations, impaired by the 'silos' phenomenon: each one working in isolation of the other.

Yet is improved 'technical' performance of a public sector institution the end goal? Possibly not. Certainly in conflict- and violence-ridden environments, but not only there, the overall strategic goal of international 'technical' assistance seems to be 'improved governance'. The quality of governance is not just a matter of technical capabilities, but of the relationship between authorities and citizens, of roles and responsibilities, of rights and obligations. In that sense, expertise and advisory services presumably are supposed to contribute to a situation where the national authorities and public sector institutions uphold the rule of law (in line with international standards about human rights), deliver public services and public goods, communicate effectively with and are transparent, responsive and accountable to their citizens.

The quality of 'governance' is ultimately a 'whole-of-government' endeavour. It requires a certain mind set and attitudes that prevail throughout the civil service and that are respected and promoted by the political class., and that there is effective interaction between government and citizens. This is not a simple 'technical' matter, but is deeply linked with the socio-political dynamics and the political economy of a society.

C. Possible Unintended Impacts of Experts-Advisers on the Governance Relationship.

There seems to be little explicit reflection about potentially problematic 'governance' impacts of expert-advisers, for example through where they get concentrated and how they 'advise'.

a. <u>Where advisers are concentrated.</u>

For example: If advisors are overwhelmingly concentrated at the central level, they may be contributing to a more centralizing trend of governance. If many are situated with local authorities, they may contribute to a more decentralized mode of governance. A concentration of advisors and technical experts in the areas of 'law and justice' rather than in those of 'economic development, trade and commerce', may intentionally or not influence the policy priorities of the national government. And of course, the sort of 'economic policies' that international experts 'advice' can have a major impact on the socio-economic relationships of the country, for decades to come. These are important choices however that citizens should have a major say in. Not in the least because the recent work on 'fragile states' has clearly shown that 'resilient' societies have both a strong state and a strong citizenry.

b. <u>Expert-advisers and the citizenry.</u>

Many experts and advisers are working on issues of great public impact and hence interest. Yet in many cases, there is very little public participation. Moreover, if the government is listening far more attentively to its advisers (national and international) than to its own people (and parliamentarians), and these advisers do not consciously advise for broader public engagement, they unwittingly foster a 'technocratic' governance. Especially if the government fails to communicate the reasons for important policy choices. This has often been seen e.g. in relation to monetary policy or to constitution-making, two topics of major significance and societal impact, they should not be discussed

and developed just by a small group in a comfortable international hotel. Such practices reinforce a disconnect between elites and populations and do not encourage more participatory and responsive governance.

II. BEING AN EFFECTIVE ADVISER: A BROAD SPECTRUM OF COMPETENCIES.

A. Thematic Expertise.

'Advisers' are deployed for their thematic experience and alleged expertise. In practice, 'experience' is sometimes confused with 'expertise'. Someone may have many years of practical experience which is definitely of real value. But that doesn't by itself amount to 'expertise', if one understands the latter to mean: a person who has a broad comparative and reflected perspective, and is also knowledgeable about the relevant research, evaluations and learning about various approaches and developments in the given thematic field. To illustrate the point: You would expect an 'adviser' on police reform not just to be a policeman or police woman with solid progressive experience in her or his home country police force, but someone who has a comparative perspective on different police structures, and regularly accesses (and perhaps even contributes to) the critical and reflective thinking and learning about approaches to policing and to police reform in different contexts. If the 'adviser' does not have that broader expertise, then you would hope and expect that – if needed and when appropriate- s/he would advise that such expert be called upon.

But to be an effective 'adviser' outside one's normal environment, many more skills are required. Some of the more important ones are:

B. Learning to Understand the Multiple Contexts.

It usually doesn't take that much for an 'outsider' to be able to move around in an unfamiliar environment, and to get the impression of understanding it sufficiently so as to be able to operate in it. Appearances are deceptive, and the most important elements are often the least visible.

There are always multiple contexts, for example:

- That of the wider environment: The relevant history (which sometimes can include events of a long time ago or at least the contemporary narratives thereof), the culture(s) of the people of this society, the lived experience of 'political' life, the contemporary political economy, and other factors that shape people's worldview, attitudes and behaviours;

- The immediate operating environment of the adviser, let us say one or a few public sector institutions. Those working there are part of the wider historical and cultural context, but there may also be particular ways in which the 'political' life and political economy play out in these institutions. There may also be one or more specific organizational cultures at work, and possibly a strong influence of certain individuals who may or may not be in formal 'leadership' positions. All of this can be factors that shape the actual behaviours of the people in that institution. The nature of the relationship and dynamics between the 'central' and the 'local level' can be relevant, as well as how (components of) this public sector institution

interact with 'citizens'. No less important is understanding what probably has already been tried to change and strengthen the institution, and why earlier attempts may not have delivered as much as was expected or hoped for. This is a lot to learn, and not always obvious;

- That of the 'international community' and its interaction with this society in the relevant past and the contemporary situation. This will be more than one story-line, as there may be significant differences in the relationship of other states with this society. The dynamics between the external actors engaging with this society, can also be a part of the relevant context. The schematic picture in Annex visualizes some of the major components of the wider landscape in which advisers operate.

- That of the particular situation in which a significant action unfolds: A 'policy process' for example doesn't just follow a certain established procedure. It will be influenced by the nature of the topic, the interests and concerns around it, and the political dynamics of the moment. Adequately understanding this may increase the probability of effective advising on policy.
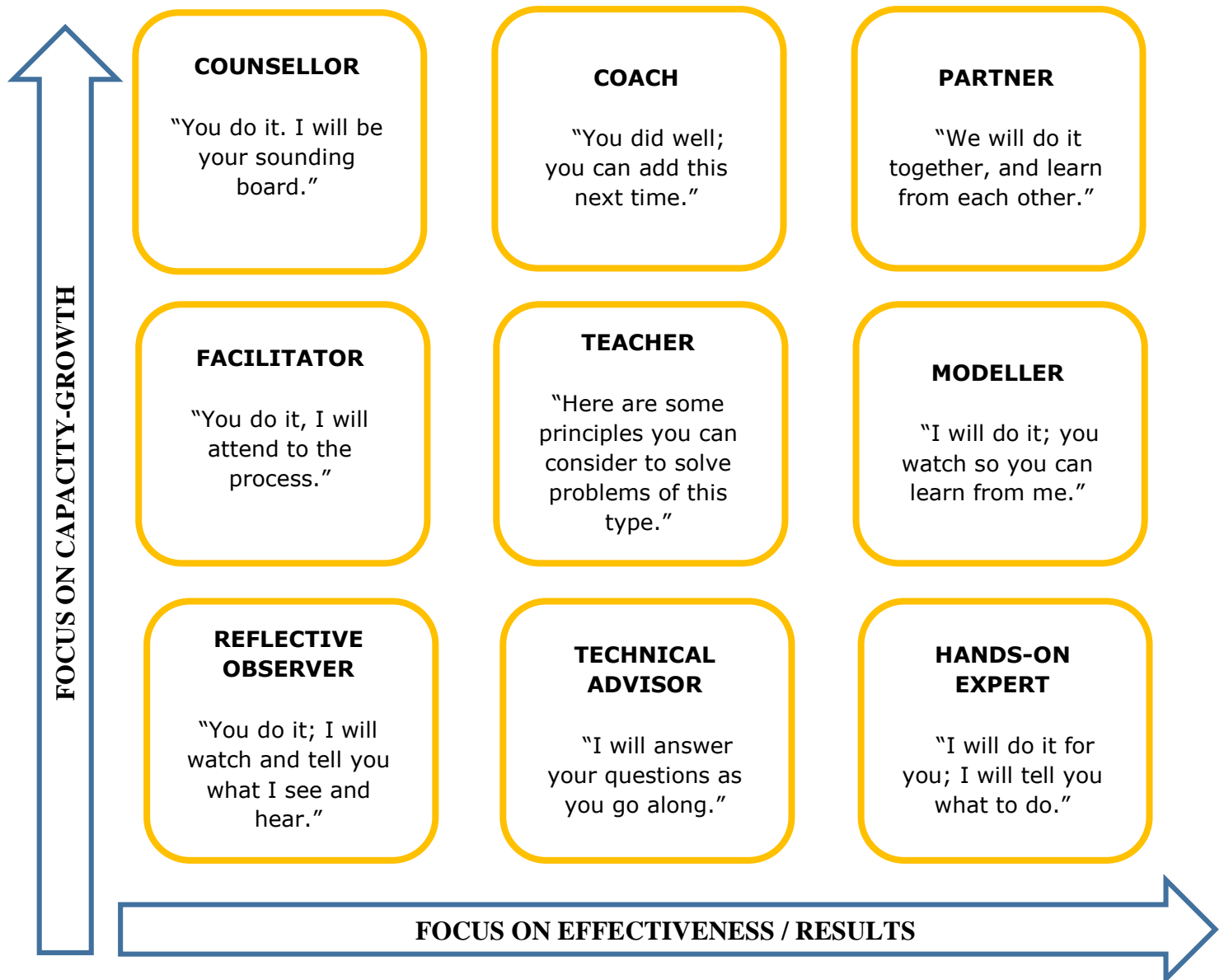
C. Building on Existing Capacities.

Whether explicitly stated in the Terms of Reference of the international adviser or not, the strengthening of national capacities must be an intrinsic objective. So 'advisers' need to have frameworks with which to understand what is meant by 'capacities', ways of assessing what 'capacities' exist, and skills to strengthen and further develop 'capacities', perhaps first of individuals, but also of teams and wider organisations.

The discourse about 'capacity-development' is predominantly oriented to the capacities of individual 'organisations', with some formal-legal boundaries. Yet as mentioned, effective performance is often dependent on the ability of different organisations (and networks or otherwise organized interest groups) to 'work together'. An 'Inland Revenue' service for example, is dependent on other public sector institutions maintaining accurate records of who lives where, on employers producing paperwork related to pay, on retailers keeping accurate records of sales on which VAT is being levied etc. Increasing domestic tax revenue then will not be simply a matter of strengthening the capacities of the Inland Revenue Dpt., but will also depend on the will and effectiveness of others to play their part. Therefore advisers need to understand and be able to foster such 'collaborative capacities' between organisations and organisational units. Often that will require fostering a willingness to collaborate among key individuals in each.

If capacity-development must be an objective, then advisers' will find that in the course of their assignment their role changes or has to change. Or they may consciously adopt somewhat different roles in different situations, or towards different interlocutors, even within the same day.

A frequently referred to spectrum of possible roles, developed with reference to consultants but equally relevant for advisors, is that of Champion, Kiel & McLendon. The graph visualises an emphasis more towards the adviser's "*responsibility for results*" or "*responsibility for capacity growth*".

FOCUS ON CAPACITY-GROWTH

COUNSELLOR "You do it. I will be your sounding board."	**COACH** "You did well; you can add this next time."	**PARTNER** "We will do it together, and learn from each other."
FACILITATOR "You do it, I will attend to the process."	**TEACHER** "Here are some principles you can consider to solve problems of this type."	**MODELLER** "I will do it; you watch so you can learn from me."
REFLECTIVE OBSERVER "You do it; I will watch and tell you what I see and hear."	**TECHNICAL ADVISOR** "I will answer your questions as you go along."	**HANDS-ON EXPERT** "I will do it for you; I will tell you what to do."

FOCUS ON EFFECTIVENESS / RESULTS

It can be argued that the 'hands-on expert' role is not really an 'adviser' one but that of the 'do-er'. [1]

D.   Supporting Change Processes.

Sometimes advisers operate in the context of an explicit 'reform' agenda, in other situations they may just seek to encourage some more modest change in how a limited number of individuals 'do' things. In either case they are likely to be confronted with resistance to change. Part of the professional competencies required is the ability to understand why there is resistance (and acknowledging that advisers too can exhibit resistance), and find constructive and effective ways of working with, on or around it. If some relevant change can be fostered or catalysed, the question then becomes what needs

[1] There are other roles that individuals who are formally held to be 'advisers' can and do play. Some also have 'project management' responsibilities. Some are asked to also act as 'advocates' or take on that role.

to happen to ensure its likely sustainability? Part of that may be dependent on the public sector concerned having the right competencies and capabilities, but to quite a degree effecting and sustaining positive change will depend on broad buy-in and support.

Getting and maintaining broad buy-in and support will require advisers to also have a fair understanding of participatory approaches and multi-stakeholder processes. Indeed, developing the capacities and strengthening the performance of an organisation, is typically a task that will encounter multiple stakeholders: actors that affect and are affected by the actions (or lack thereof) on an organisation's status quo or change. Some of these stakeholders will exist within the formal boundaries of the organisation concerned, but others will be beyond them. That there are multiple stakeholders is even clearer for any issue of real societal relevance.

There is strong evidence that, generally, for 'capacities' to be institutionalized, for change to be implemented and sustained, early and active engagement of multiple stakeholders is recommended. So in most instances, advisers need to be attentive to stakeholder dynamics, and be able to at least advice on the relevance and the principles of multi-stakeholder processes and on the competencies required to design and lead them.

Two key roles in multi-stakeholder processes are those of 'connector' and of 'convener'. Conveners' bring people directly together; 'connectors' create linkages that can lead to direct contact among different stakeholders or interest groups, or remain indirect. 'Conveners' and 'connectors' have roles to play in building basic confidence between the different actors and stakeholders, and reducing somewhat the asymmetries in power, status, confidence, knowledge etc. They can be further assisted in this by 'facilitators' during the actual encounters of various stakeholders. As a matter of principle, 'national actors' should be playing the roles of 'convener' and/or 'connector', though there can be situations when also the (external) adviser plays such roles and may –initially- be better placed to do so. 'Connecting' is a key role to catalyse what some refer to as the critical 'capacities between'.

E.   Strategic Vision, Situational Judgment, Tactical Skill.

Like those they advise, advisers themselves are likely to get occupied by the day to day problems and tasks. But an effective adviser keeps on eye on the bigger picture and the larger goal, and is able to look at the daily occurrences as potential tactical opportunities to move a step in that direction. Finding the most appropriate role, communication style, moment and message etc. and the most appropriate ('best fit') advice, require also strong situational judgment. The better one understands the contexts, the stakeholders, the personalities and the relationships between them, the greater the potential for sound situational judgment.

F. Handling Various Challenges and Dilemmas.

1. Frequently Encountered Challenges.

From the very outset, advisers will have to deal with challenges beyond the specifics of their area of expertise, related for example to:

a. *How they got where they are*: The national actor genuinely demanded external assistance as part of their own capacity-strengthening and reform efforts, or the position of adviser was more pushed upon the national actor and is only 'accepted' because it is a non-negotiable component of a larger aid package; (see Working Paper 1)

b. *The first 'identity' perceived*: The first perceptions of the advisor's 'identity' will rely on surface characteristics such as national identity, gender and age and perhaps skin colour. This will influence the initial framing and connotations of the adviser, which can be enabling or constraining;

c. *The broader 'advisory' setting*: For example, the newly arrived adviser succeeds a predecessor without meaningful overlap period and hence no ability to gain some institutional memory and 'tips' from that person (the institutional memory will be with the national actors!); the newly arrived adviser succeeds a predecessor who left a bad experience in the eyes of the national actor; the newly arrived adviser finds her or himself in a setting where other advisors (national and/or international) are actually competing for attention and influence; the national counterparts may be using this situation also to their advantage e.g. to 'shop around'; the adviser is a woman finding herself in a male-dominated environment, or a 'civilian' in an environment dominated by 'uniformed personnel' etc.

d. *The task and location*: The framing of the task as described in the terms of reference, may reveal itself to have been well informed and appropriate, or turn out to have created a 'misfit'; also where the adviser has been located may turn out to have been a smart move or not: being mandated to work with one national entity (government institution or section/unit therein) whose performance is intrinsically linked to its collaboration with others, may not be so helpful; being given an office in the international mission or in the national institution also creates somewhat different perceptions and dynamics.

There are also frequently encountered challenges related more directly related to the task as such.[2] For example:

a. *No strong national leadership*: There seems to be no apparent leadership for change (be it strengthening the overall organisational capacities or institutional reform) in the national entity. This need not immediately be an indicator of 'resistance', it may simply be a result of a situation in which national actors are overwhelmed by a multitude of 'priorities' and daily 'problems' to resolve, and are struggling just to keep functioning;

b. *Turnover among the national counterparts*: Established working relationships and changes in progress seem to disappear in quicksand because of a change in key people among the national actors (but the same holds for the national actors, when there is a change in international adviser!);

c. *Primary interest in financial resources*: The national actors' main preoccupation is with getting more financial resources. Hence, they 'advice' that attracts attention is the one that promises most 'money on the table';

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[22] A fuller overview of complicating factors can be found in Working Paper 1: Value-for-Money? The overall record of technical assistance for institutional and governance reform. Geneva, Interpeace-IPAT 2014

d. *Encountering 'resistance'*: The most frequent focus in on alleged 'resistance' to change among the national actors. Yet a positive framing of such moments is to see them as 'learning opportunities': apparent 'resistance' is an indicator that something important has been touched, and hence an opportunity to deepen the understanding of the actual dynamics of the entity that the adviser is engaged with. Less easily recognized is 'resistance' in the sender/donor group or international mission, to acknowledge that what it might be doing and how it is doing it, might be unhelpful and even do harm, and hence to adapt and change. Perhaps most difficult to recognize is 'resistance' in the expert/adviser her- or himself e.g. because culturally or professionally they are way out of their personal 'comfort zone', and/or may find their legitimacy and expertise not being acknowledged or even deliberately ignored or challenged.

2. Frequently Encountered Dilemmas.

Advisers are also likely to encounter some significant dilemmas, among them:

a. *Personal interest dilemmas:*

Short term deployments (6-12 months), unless it is for a very specific input into a more broadly managed process, tend not to enable effective advising. By the time the adviser has familiarized her or himself with the environment and built up some functional relationships, it is time to leave. But sustained engagement can create its own dilemmas: e.g. prolonged absence from family and friends, and possibly the loss of career prospects at home.

b. *Effectiveness dilemmas:*

The overall finding of comparative research and evaluation is that no change will be effectively implemented, and sustained, without strong and broad-based support of multiple national stakeholders, and hence strong 'national' ownership. Yet advisers also have to deal with the impatience of the international actors, and sometimes to take into account the acute needs and high expectations of the national populations. This generates a lot of effectiveness dilemmas, for example:

- *Rhythms and speeds?* The formal planning, budgeting and implementation time lines of international and national actors do not always align. But beyond 'formal time' there is also 'political' and 'social' or 'anthropological' time, which may have a critical influence on the actual effectiveness of the effort. Whose 'time' and 'rhythms' will the adviser be following? Does the advisor 'step in' and 'step up' by becoming more 'hands on' in order to move things forward, or do s/he stay with the often slower rhythm of nationally-driven capacity-strengthening and institutional reform? When does this become acquiescing in the 'status quo'?

- *Doing yourself*? Can the 'adviser' resist the temptation to *do* her or himself, which seems the quickest way to get a good product - even if s/he is sometimes explicitly requested so by national colleagues?;

- *The likelihood of sustainability?* Does the adviser encourage the creation of internationally driven and –supported structures and procedures, even if it is clear

that they will not, in the medium-term future, be sustainable with national resources and skills only?

- *Local solutions – international standards?* Does the advisor encourage and support 'local solutions' (that, for the time being, are the 'best possible fit' for a certain context) even if they fall quite short of what are held to be 'international standards'?

- *The right to learn through trial – and sometimes error?* Does the adviser 'allow' the national actors to 'experiment' and to 'learn-by-doing', including to 'learn from mistakes', even if s/he is very skeptical that their proposed move will produce results?

- *Advising the international actors?* Does the adviser take the initiative or not to also advice 'upstream', i.e. engage the international actors to act differently, when s/he realizes that their current modus operandi is counterproductive and may even be doing harm, and that unless there is a more structural change in that engagement, her or his efforts will remain relatively futile?

- *Encouraging participatory governance?* Does the adviser encourage the national counterparts to actively engage with, listen to and enter into conversation and dialogue with, their populations – not only to identify priorities and get support for certain initiatives, but also to create an actual 'governance relationship'? This may take more time, although a more participatory governance culture promises great long-term benefits;

What does 'being effective' mean for an advisor? How can an 'advisor' demonstrate 'effective performance', when so much is beyond her or his control and when a factor for 'success' may actually be letting others take the credit?

c. *Ethical dilemmas:*

- *How to handle discomforting cultural or social practices?* Advisers may find themselves in situations where there are cultural or social practices they find very hard to accept e.g. child marriage, harsh and even capital punishment, systemic discrimination of women, smoking and drinking in the workplace etc. Should they bring this up at all, challenge this?

- *How to deal with alleged criminals?* Advisers may find themselves in situations where they have to work closely with people that are suspected or known to be responsible for serious human rights violations and to have 'blood on their hands', but who – for political purposes- have been coopted in the current governance structure. Are they unwittingly complicit in perpetuating 'impunity'?

- *How to deal with (alleged) misconduct?* Advisers may find themselves in situations e.g. where they strongly suspect serious misconduct e.g. funds being misappropriated through embezzlement or corruption or sex solicited in exchange for what should be normally available services (by national or by international actors). Is it their responsibility to 'blow the whistle'?

- How to deal with competing demands for 'loyalty'? Advisers often find themselves in a situation where they have to answer to multiple bosses, or at least multiple stakeholders: minimally their national counterpart(s) and their field- or mission-

level superiors, and possibly their home government who mobilized them in the first place. Other international actors may ask them for insight information about what is being discussed and happening within the national entity they are working with. The latter may suspect them of 'being spies' for one or more international actors, and may even deliberately try to 'test' the advisors on this. Where do their loyalties lie, who do they see themselves as most accountable to?

Advisers therefore need a strong moral compass. But it has also been pointed out that such situation cannot be left to individual advisers, and that more explicit guidance is required. This can take the shape of e.g. a 'Code of Ethics for Advisers' and/or guidance by the international organization deploying or fielding the advisers.

In short, with regard to the ethical and effectiveness dilemmas, advisers have to walk a tight-rope between 'going with the grain' and promoting external models and normatively inspired change.

G. Interpersonal Skills Across 'Cultures' and Personal Mastery.

Strong interpersonal skills across 'cultures': Strong institutions are partially made up of rules and procedures. But ultimately there is no institutional functioning without people, and the role of people is even more important in weak institutions. Advising therefore, like so many endeavours in life, is first and foremost about working with people. This requires an ability to work across 'cultures' [3]and across age, gender and other identity markers. An effective adviser also needs to have very strong communication skills, all the more so in environments were various interlocutors have to operate in a language that is not their mother tongue or even through interpreters and translators, and where some come from 'high context' and others from 'low context' communication traditions. [4]

Self awareness and self mastery: All of the above requires quite a broad spectrum of knowledge and expertise, as well as a variety of skills. But effective advising, especially in unfamiliar and complex settings, will also require a lot of self-awareness and self-mastery. Adviser need to find the right level of self-confidence, so as not to be hampered by excessive uncertainty but also not by perceived arrogance. Advisers need to learn what are their personal strengths and weaker sides, their personal comfort zones and their spontaneous reflexes towards situations that threaten that comfort, such as tensions and conflict, persistent stress, prolonged uncertainty, conflicting demands, feelings of frustration. Conscious personal development is required to reach the maturity that will enable them to quickly recognize the sensitive points in themselves and in others, and deal with them constructively.

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[3] 'Cultural' differences do not exist only between societies but also within societies, and between professional sectors: there are 'cultural' differences for example between uniformed personnel and civilians, but also between uniformed personnel from different countries and civilians from different types of organisations)

[4] The concepts of 'low context' and 'high context' cultures were coined by the anthropologist Edward Hall in 1976. In 'low context' cultures, most of the 'message' is being communicated through the explicit word. So attention has to be paid to what is being said and the choice of words. In 'high context' cultures, much of the message is conveyed also through other means, the choice of timing and setting, who is present and who not, the tone and non-verbal signals i.e. various other 'contextual elements'. All these non-verbal elements that are part of the message will be understood by those familiar with that 'culture', but possibly not picked up and/or correctly interpreted by others not familiar with it.

The picture on the next page visualizes the various competency areas:
- Knowing: Thematic expertise, competencies regarding capacity-strengthening and change processes;
- Being: Moral compass and personal maturity, that shows in self-mastery;
- Understanding the contexts in which you find yourself and have to find the best ways of acting in;
- Doing: Strategic vision, situational judgment and tactical skill; demonstrating interpersonal skills across 'cultures' and appropriate choices of 'role'; handling challenges and dilemmas.

BEING

Moral compass and self-mastery

KNOWING	**DOING**	**UNDERSTANDING**
Thematic expertise	Interpersonal skills across cultures, roles and choices	the contexts
Skills in capacity strengthening		
Competencies regardind change processes	Strategic vision, situational judgement, tactical skills	
	Handling challenges and dilemas	

SOURCES:

This paper draws on interviews with various advisers and on the collective learning from a course on 'Effective Advising in Complex and Fragile Situations', which was piloted in 2014. For its 2015 edition, the course is being retitled to "Effective Advising in Peacebuilding Contexts."

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Enhancing your Impact

INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

COUNTRY LEVEL

MULTI-LATERAL ACTORS

BI-LATERAL ACTORS

MANDATE PROVIDERS MULTILATERAL MISSION (E.G. Security Council, Council of Europe)

MISSION COMMAND (CIVILIAN HEAD, FORCE COMMAND)

INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE MISSION (includes « experts-advisors »

BILATERAL ASSISTANCE DEPLOYMENTS

BILATERAL POLITICAL DIRECTIVE PROVIDERS

IMF

POLITICAL AUTHORITIES CENTRAL LEVEL E.G. PRESIDENTS'S OFFICE, CABINET, POLICY ADVISORS, LEGISLATURE ETC.

MIN OF FINANCE

MINISTER

PUBLIC POLICIES

MINISTRY OF X

MINISTRY OF Y

MINISTRY OF Z

NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE

TOP MILITARY COMMAND, POLICE COMMISSIONER

ARMY

POLICE

Pag

LOCAL AUTHORITIES (STATE, « TRADITIONAL »)

POPULATION AT LARGE - CITIZENS

rii
an initiative of interpeace

The above sketch represents some generic features of many contexts of international cooperation in tension and conflict affected areas. It is not intended to be complete and all elements may not be present in every context of course. In the real world the picture gets more crowded and hence more complex and becomes of course more dynamic. Its primary purpose here is to draw attention to the fact that key people in the advisory/reform- capacity strengthening relationship operate in a wider context, that they need to understand and pay attention to, and usually also tactically and strategically engage with.

Main features of that landscape are:

a. Set up of the national state institutions: There are different line ministries (and other governmental bodies such as for example ad hoc or standing commissions), typically headed by a Minister (or a Chairperson), whose operations supposedly are shaped by a legal framework and public policies (or a particular official mandate). Capacity-developers and reformers may focus mostly on the structure and functioning/performance of an individual line ministry or unit therein, or individual governmental commission etc. But the sketch draws attention to the fact that individual public sector entities may not be totally independent from other government institutions. Most in any case will be dependent on the Ministry of Finance. How a public sector entity operates and can operate may or may not be influenced by the political authorities. Their actual performance may also be influenced by local political authorities who cannot be assumed to be simply executing directives and policies from national authorities. There is also the population at large ('citizens') that has certain expectations and demands of the government/state institutions, and that in its behaviours may or may not be contributed to their greater effectiveness.[5] Not in the sketch but relevant is of course the national parliament which, at least formally, has legislative and oversight responsibilities. Such picture therefore invites us to look beyond a 'dyadic' relationship of an international expert and her or his immediate national counterpart(s).

b. Set up of international assistance actors: Sometimes, though not always, there is a larger international mission with its own civilian and perhaps security forces command structure, and within which the 'experts' are embedded. Such missions are mandated by and answerable to their own political masters. The international advisers therefore also operate within this wider environment, that in different ways will shape what they do and how. The situation may create some tensions about whom the advisers are primarily responsible to. Where there is no multilateral mission (or sometimes even if there is one), there may also be foreign countries that act directly or bilaterally, and may (in addition) directly deploy their own experts/advisors. These may or may not compete with each other and with the advisers embedded in a multilateral mission. 'The sketch seeks to remind the individual adviser that s/he operates within a larger landscape. That larger

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[5] Awareness of this can be reflected in the language we use: 'Reform of the military' suggest a focus very much on the army. 'Security sector reform' invites a broader perspective, that includes e.g. the police, intelligence services, border controls etc. but may already include policies and doctrines, as well as the training of personnel for these services. 'Security system reform' takes a still broader perspective, and will include e.g. the public or population's relations with the security forces, the role and responsibilities of parliament with regard to the security services etc.

landscape contains many bigger and smaller dynamics that may influence the performance and effectiveness of the adviser. 'National' advisers of course also have to contend with the wider dynamics of this crowded landscape, and if their position is actually paid by a foreign actor, may also experience the dilemma of primary loyalties and responsibilities. Rarely put into the picture is the IMF. Yet the IMF can have significant impact on national policies especially in the public sector, through its engagement with and demands related to macro-economic and public debt management. That too can be a factor that influences what actually happens in a particular national institution such as a line ministry.

c. For each of these two major 'institutional actor-fields' (national entities and the international ones) there will be a formal functioning (i.e. how they are supposed to function) and an informal functioning (i.e. how they really function). Effectively navigating these complex environments typically requires developing an insight into the informal functioning.