KEY FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN INDIVIDUAL WORKPLACE LEARNING. A CASE STUDY OF THE AFGHAN PUBLIC SECTOR (2002-2014)

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Abstract

At the turn of the century Afghanistan started receiving significant development assistance, becoming the world's top aid recipient from 2007. A major share of this assistance has been allocated to learning and other interventions aiming to improve the capacities of Afghan government institutions and employees. Such support has been predominantly delivered by externally-funded consultants embedded within host government agencies. Yet the return on this investment has been questionable, with some suggesting that the effectiveness of the national government in this period actually declined. Consequently, this thesis explores the key factors that enabled or inhibited individual workplace learning in Afghanistan's public sector during the period 2002-2014, the years marking the influx, peak and recent decline of development assistance to the country. It makes use of multiple data sources anchored around 34 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Afghan civil servants and advisors at the forefront of aid delivery. To answer its research question, the study brings into conversation the workplace learning literature with insights from the literature on development. While the features of the aid-dependent Afghan bureaucracy clearly diverge from the typical sites studied in the West, this case study confirms the applicability of workplace theories into the unchartered territory of capacity building practices. Furthermore, by adopting a Bourdieusian theoretical framework, the thesis presents an explanation that includes contextual, subjective and power-related factors influencing learning outcomes. This study concludes that contextual factors sourcing from both the provider and recipient side of development assistance are highly influential modifiers of the effectiveness of learning interventions. It also refutes the assumption characterising most development practice that psychological and interactional factors can be safely ignored. Finally, this thesis indicates that the practice of capacity building can be experienced as a means of reinforcing the unequal power relations of development.

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Contents

List of illustrations

List of tables

List of figures

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overseas aid has had a significant impact on the lives of Afghan people in recent years. Shortly after the fall of Taliban in 2001, foreign development assistance arrived harbouring ambitions for a rapid and wholesale societal transformation. The first in a succession of grand reform programmes entitled "Securing Afghanistan's Future" (GoIRA et al., 2004) sought to lay the foundations of a self-sustainable state by 2015, and the Government of Afghanistan was to be the key player in this plan.

Through decades of conflict, the Government had proved to be a resilient structure, and a semblance of central administration was in place as early as 2002 (Malikyar, 2007). However, the Afghan public sector needed substantial strengthening before it could be safely put into the driving seat of the country's own development. It took a relatively short time to renovate the shelled buildings of the national government, but development work behind their walls continues today. To improve local institutions and civil service expertise, aid agencies[1] invested and continue to invest heavily in technical cooperation and technical assistance, defined as follows:

> "Technical Cooperation is often associated with actions aimed at strengthening individual and organisational capacity by providing expertise, training and related learning opportunities, and equipment. Technical Assistance refers to the personnel[2] involved in the implementation and the management of technical cooperation services" (EC, 2008: 7).

Often referred to as "capacity building", such interventions are a standard modality of aid amounting to a quarter of all publicly funded development assistance globally (Greenhill et al., 2006). Despite its prominent place in donor portfolios, successive evaluations have found that the return on investments in capacity building programmes, and especially so in least developed countries, is negligible (Berg, 2000; OED, 2005; OPM, 2006). According to Nelson (2006:

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[1] Typically labelled as 'donors'
[2] Typically labelled as 'consultants'

3), "no major study has found that increasing spending on technical cooperation has been associated with better outcomes on capacity development". Afghanistan has fared worse than others: according to the World Bank's Worldwide Governance Indicators (World Bank, 2014), government effectiveness actually declined relatively between 2003 and 2013 (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Government effectiveness in Afghanistan (2003-2013). Source: World Bank (2014).
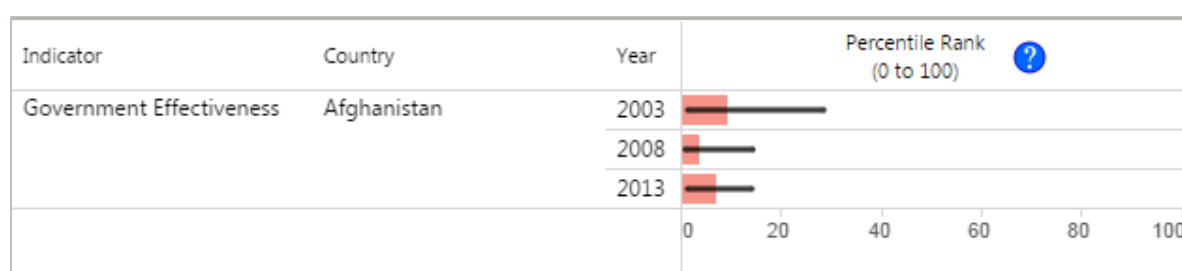
These disappointing results present a compelling reason for wanting to improve the impacts of technical cooperation. Consequently, this thesis explores the most salient factors that facilitated or inhibited individual capacity building in Afghanistan's public sector in the period 2002-2014. The research objective does not encompass all types, forms or aspirations of technical cooperation, rather it focuses on one of its most prominent modalities (IEG, 2013a): learning interventions delivered by expatriate consultants embedded within host government agencies.

Morgan (2006: 4) notes that the concept and analytical treatment of capacity development so far have had "a weak intellectual standing… with no accepted and tested body of theory that people can use with any confidence". On this basis, this study engages with theories of workplace learning, whose broad subject is defined as "learning in, through and for the workplace" (Evans et al., 2006: 7). Although traditionally oriented towards private sector organisations in developed countries (Bishop et al., 2006), this corpus of research provides valuable insights that are relevant to public sector development settings.

Key amongst them is the realisation that workplace learning is not only a factor of individual learners' characteristics, but that it is also situated and interactional (Lave and Wenger, 1991), or inseparable from the social context where it occurs. From that perspective the donor-aided Afghan public sector is a particularly stimulating learning site to study, as it is rife with challenges and complexities outlined in the sections which follow.

Research context

Born out of geopolitical rivalry, Afghanistan was shaped in the 19th century into its present boundaries as a buffer state between the Russian and British empires (Illustration 1).

Illustration 1. Geopolitical influences on Afghanistan, 19th century. Source: Playdead (2012).
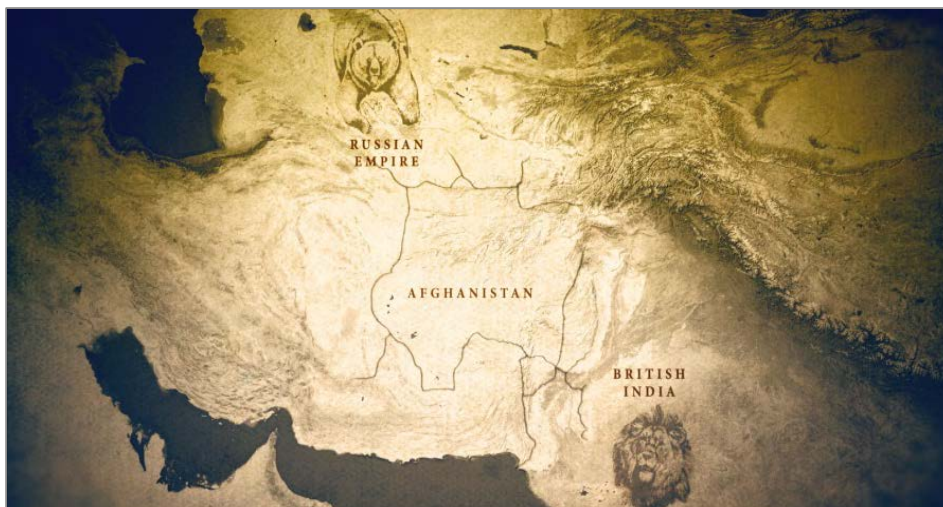
The 20th century saw Afghanistan drawn into the Cold War, receiving military and development assistance from both the Soviet Union and the United States (Illustration 2). A communist coup in 1978 was followed by a Soviet occupation in 1979, which then led to more than two decades of political instability, factional violence and religious dictatorship.

Illustration 2. Geopolitical influences on Afghanistan, 20th century. Source: Playdead (2012).
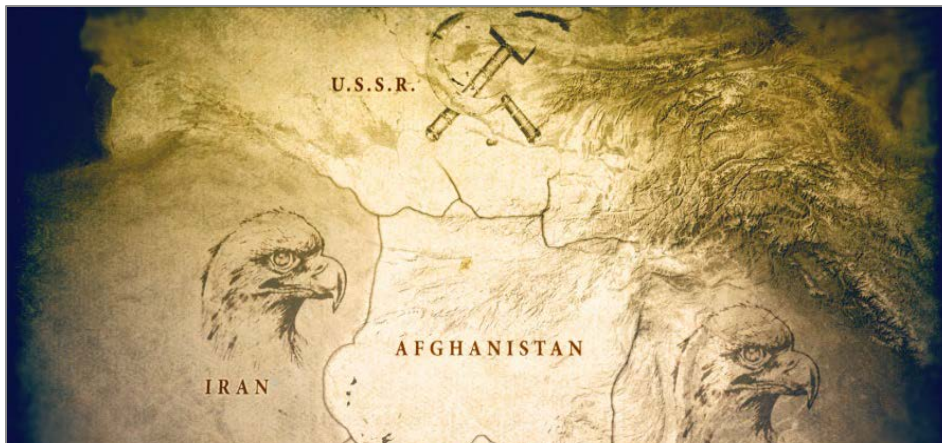
As a consequence of the 11 September terrorist attack on the United States, the Taliban regime ruling Afghanistan was toppled by the US and its allies in 2001. NATO forces maintained significant presence in country until 2014, when national forces took the lead security role. 2015 marks the beginning of the so-called 'transition decade,' when the Afghan Government is supposed to start assuming sovereign authority in all its functions, and the military and developmental role of the international community is to reduce.

This brief account demonstrates that Afghanistan's key historical experiences have been shaped by foreign non-Muslim powers. The state has been a long-term recipient of external financing; subsidies from British India in the 19th century and funding by Cold War rivals USSR and USA during the 20th century. With the influx of foreign aid since 2001, the Afghan budget has received between seven to nine times more resources from international donors than from the national economy (Nixon, 2007; World Bank, 2008). Yet the country and its people have remained fiercely independent; as a prominent member of the Afghan royal family stated, "We have accepted poverty, because we want to be free" (Stewart, 2012).

Indeed, throughout its existence Afghanistan has remained an extremely poor country with low social indicators. The Human Development Report (UNDP, 2014) ranks Afghanistan 169th out of 187 countries, falling in the category of

"low human development". As an illustration, about 60% of the population lives in multidimensional poverty and only 38.2% of Afghans aged 15 and over can read and write against a global average of 86.1%. Figure 2 indicates Afghanistan's human development standing in relation to the rest of the world.

Figure 2. Human Development Indicators, trends by country (1980-2013). Source: UNDP (2014).
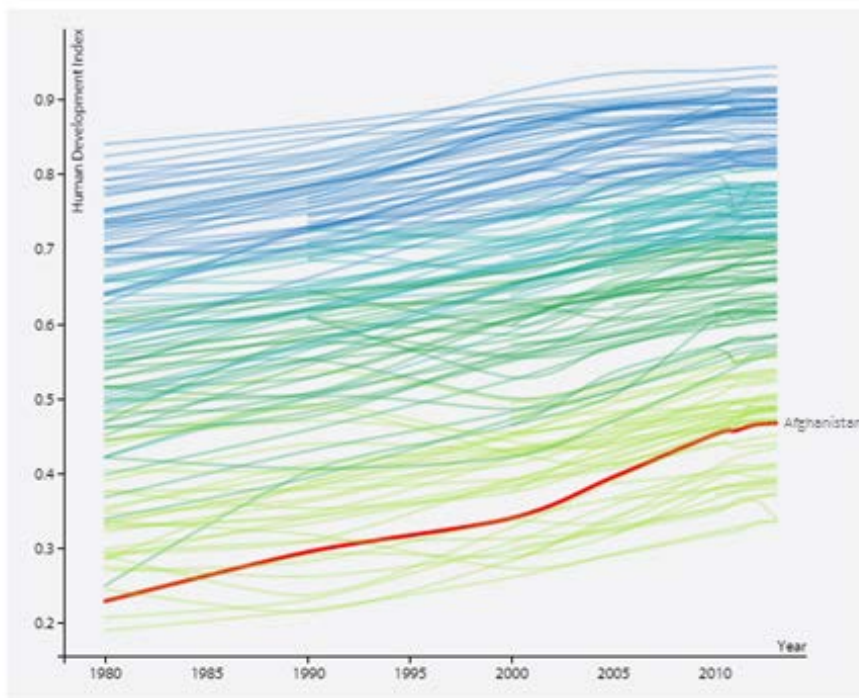
A deeply traditional and conservative society, Afghanistan has resisted successive attempts at rapid modernisation, both internal and external. For instance, the country's last King, Mohammad Zahir Shah forged relations with the Europe, transformed the Constitution, and brought in 'Western' advisers. There was little popular support for such change and the King was ousted in 1973.

Only a few years later hundreds of Soviet advisors were arriving "to try to build 'socialism'" (Braithwaite, 2012: 146). The Afghan government institutions were re-modelled after those of the Soviet Union, and tens of thousands of Afghan civilian specialists received USSR-sponsored training. The strength of popular reaction against an atheistic foreign invader can be measured in approximately

100,000 casualties of the Soviet-Afghan war, eventually leading to the USSR withdrawal from the country in 1989.

Despite abundant lessons from recent history, development approaches attempted after the fall of the Taliban have been found to be 'remarkably ahistorical' (Byrd, 2012: 1). Scores of 'Western' advisors took the places once belonging to the Soviets. In fact this model has become so pervasive that a World Bank review of Afghanistan's public sector talks about a "second civil service" of "externally-funded consultants and advisers " (World Bank, 2008).

Post-2001 'Western' aid came with ambitions to replace Moscow's vision of an advanced socialist state with a thriving democratic neoliberal state. During 2001-2014 Afghanistan attracted considerable international aid flows, becoming the world's top recipient of aid in 2007 (OECD, 2014). Over this period, the cumulative civilian aid disbursements to the country are just short of USD53 billion (OECD, 2015). An illustration of the types of activities supported through donor investments in Afghanistan is provided below.

Figure 3. Aid bundle to Afghanistan 2006-2012. Source: Poole (2014)
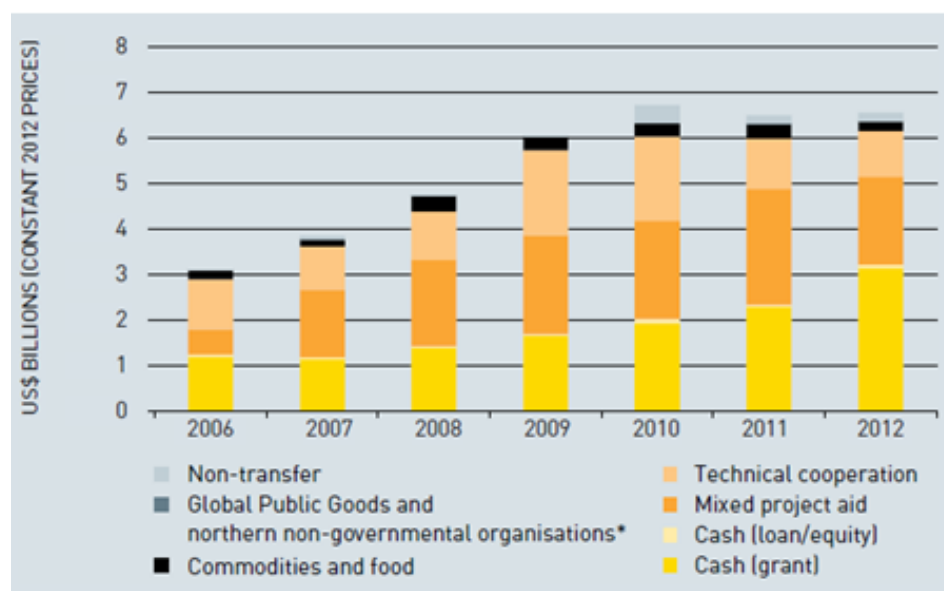
From Figure 3 it is evident that a significant share of the aid bundle to Afghanistan is allocated to technical cooperation, as the mixed project aid

category is itself mostly a combination of technical cooperation and cash grants (Poole, 2014). This reflects the efforts to build government capacity, central to the strategies of all major international donors post-2001 as a means of restoring state legitimacy, mitigating further conflict and increasing the sustainability of development interventions.

For instance, the United States government, which provides a major share of the total development assistance to Afghanistan, considers capacity building to be one of its "key foundational investments" and the vast majority of its programmes "include capacity building components to improve service delivery and strengthen institutions' ability to perform their mandates" (Checchi, 2011: 5). A similar approach is adopted in the country plans of most other large bilateral and multilateral development partners (IEG, 2013a).

Aims and approach

This contextual outline demonstrates that for over a decade Afghan civil servants have been exposed to a multitude of learning stimuli at work. As the definition of technical cooperation suggests, these learning opportunities have included a broad range of guided instructional modalities, from formal training programs to informal and collaborative experiences of consultant-mediated problem-solving on the job.

The aim of this research is to advance understanding of the most salient factors that have influenced the effectiveness of such interventions for individual workplace learning in Afghanistan. Born out of the researcher's professional experience as a consultant to central government agencies in Afghanistan, the thesis opens up 'the implementation black box' (Mosse, 2004: 643) of development assistance to better understand the enablers and barriers to learning through aid, and suggest approaches for enhancing outcomes.

Conceptualisations of workplace learning as a process that is embedded in a particular social context have become dominant in the literature (Hager, 2010). Implicit in contextualism is the idea that "[w]orkforce learning manifests and

constructs itself in different ways according to the character of the organisation and the wider context" (Fuller et al., 2003: 4). To help elucidate an environment that is moulded not only by its unique historical legacies, but also by the structure and practices of an external aid industry, this research will bring into conversation the workplace learning literature with insights from the literature on development.

A comprehensive understanding of individual workplace learning requires that attention to context does not overshadow the actors engaged in it (Billett, 2001; Manuti et al., 2015). The Afghan government organisations are after all a site where people are separated culturally, historically and institutionally, have been enmeshed and involved in a process of learning and development. For that reason, the research explores the dispositions and motivations of recipients of aid and advisors at the forefront of aid delivery, two groups that are generally underrepresented in the academic or practitioner literature on development assistance.

This thesis strives to present an explanation that is mindful of the interdependencies between context and subjectivities for learning outcomes. To bind these elements together, the study leans on the theoretical framework developed by Bourdieu (1977), an approach recommended in both the literatures on workplace learning (Hodkinson et al., 2008) and international development (Eyben, 2008). This theory is helpful inasmuch it views social practices – like those through which people learn, as the product of the dynamic relations between the cognitive and the situational. Afghan civil servants' responses to learning opportunities will thus be preconditioned by the environmental cues, but also by their individual interpretations of those cues, in turn conditioned by the environment.

Another relative advantage of Bourdieu's theoretical framework is the centrality he ascribes to power as the root of all social struggles over symbolic and material resources. Development theorists such as Escobar (1995a) observe that the main currencies of aid - knowledge and capital, are resources of power, which imply developers' authority "to impose a certain vision of the social world" (Bourdieu, 1994: 106). In this sense, capacity building and other

social practices in development settings are characterised by intense power dynamics and competition between indigenous and external visions of the social world. How such tensions affect individual learning is a key concern of this study, and an issue that is relatively neglected in the workplace literature (Hodkinson et al., 2008).

The methodological approach chosen in this research is case study, as it is considered particularly suitable for the examination of relational complexity (Flyvbjerg, 2001). This method allows the use of a range of evidence, including semi-structured interviews, publically available archival records, and policy and project documentation. Qualitative analysis is employed to seek salient themes related to the factors inhibiting or facilitating workplace learning in Afghan government agencies.

Research questions

Therefore the main question that this study seeks to address is:

- What are the key factors that influence the effectiveness of technical assistance in individual workplace learning within the Afghan public sector in the period 2002-2014?

As outlined earlier, this research is based on an integrative and holistic understanding of workplace learning. This prompted the following sub-questions derived from Bourdieu's conceptual framework outlined in Chapter Two, and which guide the focus and structure of this study:

- What are the key field-related factors?
- What are the key habitus-related factors?
- Do interactional dynamics between providers and recipients of aid have an influence?

Thesis organisation

Chapter Two of this research provides its theoretical context. It starts with an overview of Bourdieu's sociology, his main concepts and their relevance to the practice of workplace learning in Afghanistan's development settings. Next, it presents key discussions on workplace learning, including competing theories of workplace learning, and recent attempts at their synergy. This is followed by an outline of relevant literature on the practice of development.

Chapter Three describes the methodological choices made by the researcher. It includes a discussion of the use of case study as a preferred research strategy, along with approaches to data collection, sampling and analysis. Issues to do with the role of the researcher and ethical considerations are also examined.

Chapters Four to Six outline the empirical findings of this study. Chapter Four starts with an analysis of the characteristics of the Afghan public sector post-2001. It then examines the most salient categories of contextual factors identified by the research participants – those pertaining to the workplace, and those related to the way learning interventions are designed. Chapter Five draws on the lived experiences of capacity building interventions as reported by Afghan participants, and discusses their dispositions and attitudes to learning, aid and technical assistance. The Sixth Chapter challenges the assumption of unproblematic instructional relationships contained in much of the workplace learning literature. It shows that intervention style, attitudinal qualities and power imbalances can turn into a "disability" (Chambers, 1997: 76), yielding resistance and inhibiting learning.

Chapter Seven concludes the study and highlights its most significant findings and theoretical contributions. It also puts forward recommendations for policy and practice, and suggests areas for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

The core focus of this research is on the factors that enable and constrain the effectiveness of technical assistance in workplace learning within the Afghan public sector. This calls for engagement with the literatures on workplace learning and development studies, which are otherwise rarely in dialogue (Berkvens, 2012). To provide a sociological explanation that binds these diverse traditions together, the study will employ the theory of practice developed by Pierre Bourdieu.

This literature review begins with an overview of Bourdieu's sociology, his main concepts and how they account for practice in transitional settings, such as that in Afghanistan. The second part presents key discussions on workplace learning, including competing theories of learning, and an exploration into the influencing factors on learning described by existing theories. This is then followed by a critical appraisal of the practice of international development and capacity building as elaborated in development studies. Throughout, the review demonstrates the potential of these diverse literatures to contribute to a coherent and fine-grained analysis of learning in international development settings.

The sociology of Pierre Bourdieu

The influence of French sociologist, anthropologist and philosopher Pierre Bourdieu has grown steadily internationally since the 1990s. Although earlier considered obscure and inconsistent in the Anglophone world (Jenkins, 1992), with a turn towards inter-disciplinarity he has appealed to researchers in organisational studies, anthropology, media studies, sociology, geography, literature, feminist studies and cultural studies. Recently, Bourdieu has also inspired work in workplace learning (e.g. Hodkinson et al., 2008; Colley, 2012) and development studies (e.g. Eyben, 2008).

Bourdieu's extensive work offers a meta-theory, which aims to overcome the long-standing division of agency and structure in social sciences. His rich and

nuanced account of practice was first developed based on observations of modernisation in colonial Algeria, and later in Béarn, which resulted in uprooting of traditional life (Bourdieu, 1962; Bourdieu, 2008). Social transformations are at the very core of Bourdieu's project, and for this reason he has been described as a historical sociologist (Calhoun, 2012). Similar to the situations analysed by Bourdieu, international development is typically engaged with processes of westernisation or modernisation of traditional, underdeveloped societies. From this perspective, Bourdieu is "enormously good to think with" (Jenkins, 2002: 11) when it comes to analysing the practices of foreign aid.

Although some argue that his theory focuses too much on reproduction of the established order (Lash, 1993; Thomson, 2008; King, 2009), Bourdieu's theory of practice has been fruitfully applied to the study of change, at the societal (Gorski, 2013), organisational (Everett, 2002; Emirbayer and Johnson, 2008), and agentic levels (Kerr and Robinson, 2009; Reay et al., 2009). Whatever the research object, Bourdieu's approach does not allow for an explanation that disregards agency or structure for the sake of the other. Rather it explores their interaction and mutual constitution in what is sometimes described as relational sociology (James, 2011). This approach is theoretically realised through the master concepts of *field*, *habitus* and *capital* (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), which should be mutually applied to realise the full potential of the theory.

Bourdieu's concepts: field, habitus and capital

The concept of *field* was built on the insights of social psychologist Kurt Lewin, who highlights the influence of the socially constructed environment on individuals, and argues that "actual behaviour depends upon every part of the field" (Lewin, 1939: 884). Bourdieu defines the field as "a kind of arena in which people play a game which has certain rules, rules which are different from those of the game that is played in the adjacent space" (Bourdieu, 1994: 215). Fields are thus autonomous social spaces, which are differentiated and endowed with a structure, and in whose boundaries individuals interact. State

bureaucracies (Bourdieu et al., 1994), large organisations (Bourdieu, 2000; Kerr and Robinson, 2009), and the professionalised international development industry (Kothari, 2005) have all been viewed as fields.

Such fields necessarily influence the individuals taking positions in them. Bourdieu accounts for this agentic level through the concept of *habitus,* which is considered central to his theory. A more recent definition of habitus is provided in "The Logic of Practice" as follows:

> "Systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them" (Bourdieu, 1992: 53).

While some authors have dismissed the concept as unclear and abstract due to its complexity (Alexander, 1995; King, 2000), a "kind of theoretical deus ex machina" (DiMaggio, 1979: 1464), others have demonstrated it to be key to his sociological explanation of practice (Lizardo, 2004) allowing for "bundles of relations" (Wacquant, 1992: 16) between agency and structure.

The concept of habitus integrates unique, subjective dispositions shaped by cognition and ontogenesis with collective predispositions invisible to the eye and generated by class, gender, culture and shared history (Bourdieu, 1992; Golsorkhi et al., 2009). For its function to direct action – "a structuring structure," critics have viewed the concept as overly reductionist and deterministic (Jenkins, 1982; Alexander, 1995; King, 2005), a kind of a straightjacket that leaves little room for individual's voluntary actions (Noble and Watkins, 2003).

However, Bourdieu as well as others (Bourdieu, 1977; Lizardo, 2004; Hilgers, 2009) remind us that the habitus does not determine but orients actions through cognitive schemata that store assumptions about the world. Thus habitus has generative capabilities and the individual is granted with a capacity

for creativity in adapting to new circumstances that "makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks" (Bourdieu, 1977: 83).

In fact, Lizardo (2004) argues that the concept of habitus as a structuring structure derives directly from Piaget's (1977) conceptualisation of knowledge acquisition in his developmental theory. Here knowledge acquisition is understood as the process in which the external world wields effects onto the individual's cognitive schemata. This 'experiential flux' triggers alternating "states of equilibrium and shorter lived episodes of disequilibrium and subsequent re-equilibration" (Lizardo, 2004: 15) in the individual, either transforming or preserving existing cognitive structures.

The conceptual proximity between the workings of the habitus and the process of knowledge acquisition is perhaps one of the reasons why habitus has lent itself easily to the analysis of individual learning. Illeris (2004) notes that this applies to considerable parts of British research on workplace learning, especially approaches that focus on issues of identity and identity transformation (Frykholm and Nitzler, 1993; Hodkinson et al., 2004; Colley, 2012).

While allowing for, and subject to change and transformation, both *field* and *habitus* represent structures: as Lizardo (2004) argues, Bourdieu suggests a duality of structures, as opposed to Giddens' (1984) duality of a structure. However, structures do not account for action. To do that Bourdieu brings into the equation another master concept, namely *capital*, which he describes as the "energy of social physics" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 118).

Bourdieu is not a proponent of the Marxist emphasis on prominence of economic capital, as he distinguishes various types of socially and historically constructed capital (Calhoun, 2012). While different forms of capital are valued in different fields (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), three pervasive forms are identified: social capital pinpoints the importance of social networks, which an individual can mobilise; economic capital equates with material wealth; and cultural capital exists as either cultural/professional competence, possession of cultural goods, or educational qualifications (Bourdieu, 1986). Any form of

capital can function as symbolic capital, as long as it is collectively recognised (Bourdieu, 1977).

The unequal distribution of capital explains relations of domination and social struggles between individuals competing to maintain or accumulate it (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986). This is because the possession of capital is capable of conferring degrees of authority and power on disparate actors within a field (Skeggs, 1997). Bourdieu has also observed the ability of power to surreptitiously legitimise and normalise otherwise arbitrary relations of dominance (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), e.g. gender differences or the categorisation of people as developed and developing. In describing such instances in which domination is "exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 142–43), Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic violence.

Capital, power and dominance are of particular importance to the current research. The very notion of aid denotes disparities in economic capital between givers and recipients of aid, and power imbalance ascribed to economic capital has become a central topic in the development studies discussed later. Technical expertise – or cultural capital, is a main currency of capacity building professionals. The claims of superior knowledge inherent in the practice of development thus have the potential to compete with the cultural capital of aid recipients, and even devalue and reduce the convertibility of local cultural capital. Arguably, such effects would be even more pronounced in capacity building work with government officials, as their legitimacy and power is based on the assumption of embodiment and concentration of capital, or what Bourdieu et al. (1994) term 'statist capital'.

Social practice

The interaction between capital, habitus and field at any given time accounts for social practice (Bourdieu, 1977). According to Bourdieu, the default outcome of social practices is unconscious reproduction of the established order: of positions of domination, field configurations and the tacit rules of the

game, which the author refers to as *doxa* (Bourdieu, 2001). Reproduction comes in situations of fit between field, habitus, and dominant doxa:

> "…when habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product, it finds itself "as a fish in water", it does not feel the weight of water and takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu, 1989 in Wacquant, 1989).

But as argued earlier, the theory of practice allows for more than just docile reproduction. There are times when new stakes, new rules and new forms of capital are imposed, for instance by newcomers from other fields (Bourdieu, 1996), such as development agencies and practitioners. Some recent research in international relations and development have employed Bourdieu's conceptual toolkit and provided insights into the effects of such processes.

For instance, Esteves and Assunção (2014) have conceptualised aid as a 'doxic battle,' or a contestation over the meaning, goals and means of development. Through a different lens, Bigo (2011) suggests that development practice can be described as *acts of piracy.* This phrase refers to the situations in which agents from weaker fields, such as the recipient of aid, are temporarily submitted to rules coming from other fields, such as the providers of aid. Recipient fields are thus in a constant flux, shaped and reshaped by internal struggles and external interventions.

These contributions imply that in international development, the balance between habitus, field and doxa can be disturbed, and the value of capital changed. Bourdieu elaborates on similar discordances in his studies of Algeria, where he observes how the workings of the habitus delay or obstruct adjustments to a new context. Such rupture between taken-for-granted ways of being and the requirements of a new field is termed 'hysteresis effect' (Bourdieu, 1990: 108). According to Bourdieu, the hysteresis effect accounts for situations in which agents are unable to recognise the value in new opportunities, and take advantage of them.

For instance, McDonough and Polzer (2012) explore the staff struggles generated by organisational change in a public sector and describe a

"destabilized habitus, torn by contradiction and internal division" (Bourdieu, 2000: 160). The mismatch between cognitive and objective structures is also used by Kerr and Robinson (2009) to explore instances of dissent in post-Soviet Ukraine. Reay et al.'s (2009) case studies of working class students in elite universities demonstrate that disjunctions between field and habitus can result in a range of responses - from positive and generative, to ones of disquiet, ambivalence, insecurity and uncertainty.

Times of change also test what Bourdieu terms *illusio*, or the individual's motivation and commitment to the game (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). For this added dimension of emotional investment in the field, this paper queries Sayer's contention (Sayer, 2005 in Silva and Warde, 2010) that Bourdieu's theory neglects the role of emotions in social practices. The concept of habitus as *embodied* dispositions does not seem at odds with emotions either – Probyn (2005) understands emotion as the biographical understanding attached, through the habitus, to one's affective experiences. Sociologists such as Gillies (2006), Reay (2000, 2004) and Colley (2006) have drawn on the work of Bourdieu to theorise the concept of emotional capital and discuss emotional involvement. In this context, Colley (2012) brings an interesting perspective of *not* learning in the workplace as a result of 'shattered' illusio brought about by the changing doxa in the public sector field at times of austerity.

As elaborated in the next section of this chapter, this research conceptualises the process of workplace learning as imbedded in social practice, "an integral part of generative social practice in the lived-in world" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 35). Thus Bourdieu's conceptual architecture can be usefully operationalized to explain what enables and constrains the practice of workplace learning within the Afghan public sector, and even more so at a time of change. Moreover, this theoretical approach calls for an analysis that integrates issues of agency and structure (habitus and field), an ongoing conundrum in the literature of workplace learning, which will be discussed in the next section of this review.

Workplace learning

Interest in workplace learning has been spurred over the last two decades in industrialised countries by concerns about maintaining competitiveness through workforce upskilling. While the term is rarely recognised in development studies or aid policy documents, workplace learning is de facto a pervasive element of the significant investments in technical cooperation to developing countries discussed in the introduction to this study.

Competing conceptualisations of workplace learning

Concurrently, research interest in workplace learning has increased dramatically, leading to a 'raging debate' (Hodkinson et al., 2008) about how learning in and through work is to be understood. A number of authors (e.g. Felstead et al., 2004; Hager, 2005) point at two competing trends in the literature - those that conceptualise learning as a transferrable product, and others that see it as a process. Respectively, the labels of 'learning as acquisition' and 'learning as participation' coined by Sfard (1998: 5) are commonly used to denote these two camps.

The early studies, mostly concerned with vocational education were strongly influenced by behaviourism and as such emphasized formal training (Hager, 2010). The gradual realisation that much expertise is developed informally and on the job, has changed the focus from behaviourism to cognitive theories of learning. The most influential contributions in this literature include Argyris and Schön's (1974, 1978) concepts of double and single-loop learning, Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) model of knowledge creation, and Marsick and Watkins' (1990) analysis of informal learning. As Engeström (2004) observes, these cognitivist explanations are based on assumptions of individualism (the individual as autonomous learner) and stability (the acquisition of codified and stable knowledge). The mind is understood as a 'vessel' to be filled with content (Sfard, 1998; Felstead et al., 2004).

However, this exclusive focus on the mind poses some limitations. To start with, these approaches overlook the non-cognitive, i.e. emotional and physical dimensions of learning (Illeris, 2010), suggesting a Cartesian idea that body and mind are separated (Hodkinson et al., 2008). Despite the fact that workplaces are not specifically intended to be sites for learning, the cognitive tradition does not problematise the very concept of workplace learning – its occurrence is taken for granted (Beckett and Hager, 2002; Elkjaer, 2003). Perhaps most importantly, this literature downplays or outright ignores the social, organisational and cultural factors affecting learning (Wertsch, 1998; Hager, 2005), which Hager terms as 'weak contextuality' (Hager, 2010: 22).

This disconnect between the learner and their environment is found to be a key weakness of the cognitive conceptualisations of workplace learning, inasmuch it provides only a partial account for the diverse learning practices in the workplace (Billett, 2002). As a correction to the cognitive theories, a new approach adopting a participatory perspective emerged in the 1990s. It understands workplace learning as a ubiquitous, often unconscious process. Due to the shift in focus onto socio-cultural factors and the embeddedness of learning in practice, the study of workplace learning is predominantly centred on locations (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010) and collectives (Fuller and Unwin, 2010), rather than atomised individuals. The two most influential approaches adopting a participatory perspective are the communities of practice of Lave and Wenger (1991), and Engeström's (2001) cultural and historical activity systems.

For Lave and Wenger, the unit of analysis is the community of practice, and learning is embedded within the activities and relations that constitute the social setting. They study novices' learning, which occurs through peripheral participation and as such is situated in a network of relations, as well as the person's mind (Fuller and Unwin, 2010; Hager, 2010). Identity of community members is conceptualised as belonging. In contrast, the activity theory developed by Engeström (e.g. Engeström et al., 1999; Engeström, 2001) anchors its exploration on the workplace, as a system of rules, communities, division of labour and various mediating artefacts. Its unit of analysis is joint activity or practice, not individual activity. Instability, internal tensions and

contradictions are seen as the "*motive force of change and development*" (Engeström, 1999: 9).

With their strong contextuality (Hager, 2010), relational perspective and procedural focus, these approaches mark landmark contributions to the theory of workplace learning. However, it is increasingly acknowledged that their explanatory potential is weakened by the tendency to marginalise the individual and downplay learner agency (Anderson et al., 1997; Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2003; Hodkinson et al., 2008; Billett, 2010b).

For instance, Lave and Wenger's theory cannot account adequately for the learning of experienced participants in communities of practice (Guile and Young, 1999; Elkjaer, 2003), an issue pertinent to this research. Moreover, their learners seem to have no lives outside the community (e.g. Wenger, 1998). Similarly, activity theory sees the individuals as a part of something bigger, and it does not provide an explanation of the different attitudes to learning displayed by participants in the same activity system (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010). Additionally and in relation to how learning is generated, it is questionable whether contradictions and tensions unproblematically produce learning, and whether all learning occurs in this way.

Furthermore, Fuller and Unwin (1998) argue that in distancing itself from acquisitional perspectives associated with formal learning, the literature on community of practice undermines the importance of pedagogic practices, such as training or coaching in the workplace. Engeström (1994: 48), on the other hand, provides a role for structured instruction alongside informal learning: "Investigative deep level learning is relatively rare without instruction or intentional self-instruction". Both theories claim that knowledge is necessarily socially derived, and reject the notion of transfer. This however creates a common problem, inasmuch the application of historical knowledge into new circumstances remains unexplained (Cole, 2002; Hodkinson et al., 2008; Billett, 2010b).

Fittingly Sfard (1998: 11) points out that the acquisitional/transfer and participatory/process approaches outlined above have relative advantages that the other cannot provide, and calls for research that "stands on more than one

metaphorical leg". To conflate these two traditions, Hager and Hodkinson (2009) propose the alternative metaphors of 'becoming' and 'construction' in order to provide a fuller account of learning at work.

Attempts in the literature to address individual learning from a socio-cultural perspective include contributions from Marsick and Watkins (2001), Billett (2004), Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2003, 2004), Eraut (2004b), Illeris (2010), Kyndt et al. (2009), Jacobs and Park (2009). These accounts share a commitment to a more holistic, integrative enquiry that strives to overcome the division between the cognitive and the context-considering approaches to learning.

For instance, Billett (1996; 2001; 2004) proposes a generic model that views learning as socio-cultural construction derived from the interaction between the individual and the context. Building on the participatory perspective of learning (e.g. Lave, 1993), the author argues that individual learning is contingent on two types of suggestions (Billett and Pavlova, 2005), 1) the social suggestion, or how the workplace affords and supports opportunities to participate in learning and work, and 2) the personal suggestion, or the extent to which individuals choose to engage with these opportunities (Figure 4). Resonating with Bourdieu's (1977) conceptualisation of habitus, Billett (1996, 2001) views individual intensity and direction of engagement to be the product of ontogeny, personal epistemologies and a drive to secure ontological security (Billett, 2010a).

Billett's conceptual model of workplace learning conflates participation and acquisition, because he understands learning as a cognitive legacy resulting from the interaction between environmental affordances and individual engagement (Billett and Somerville, 2004). Such integrative accounts are particularly relevant to the current study, which seeks to explore not only the contextual, but also the dispositional and interactional factors that enhance or constrain the effectiveness of donor-provided technical assistance for individual workplace learning within the Afghan public sector. Pertinent to this research, the elements in this model are salient to the outcomes of all types of workplace learning potentialities (Billett, 2001), from those contained in everyday work, to

the more formal and structured arrangements characterising capacity building practice.

Figure 4. Social and personal suggestions for learning. Source: Billett (2001).
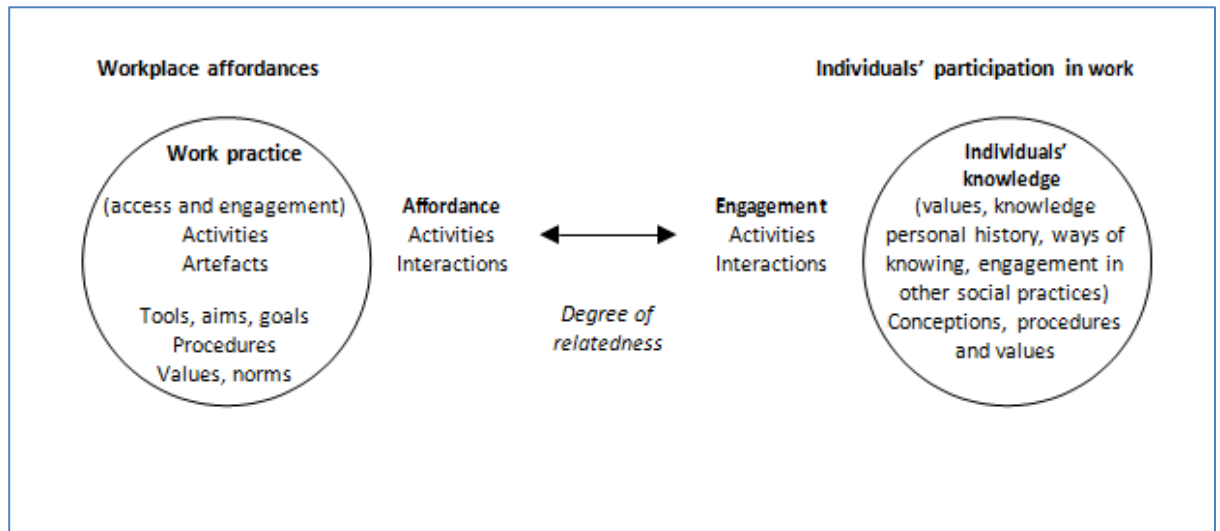
However, Hodkinson et al. (2008) argue that while Billett's and other similar models (e.g. Illeris, 2002, 2010) aim to consider both agency and structure, they still view them as distinct elements, albeit interacting dialectically. Hodkinson and Hodkinson (2004a) contend that due to the complexity of workplace learning, no one theory can yet fully deal with all its aspects. The authors suggest that sufficient integration can be achieved by applying a Bourdieusian approach, because this theoretical framework understands structure and agency as mutually constitutive elements. As highlighted earlier, this is a recommendation taken up by this research.

Specific factors influencing workplace learning

Learning is a broad topic that has been examined in the literature in detail. A great number of studies have explored specific factors moderating the effectiveness of learning at work from different theoretical angles, and employing a variety of terminological nomenclatures. Contributions include Sambrook's (2005) identification of organisational, functional and individual

influencers; Kyndt et al.'s (2009) investigation into stimulating learning conditions; Ellinger and Cseh's (2007) and Eraut's (2004) categorisations of positive and negative contextual factors for informal learning; Fuller and Unwin's (2004) continuum of expansive-restrictive learning environments, Baert et al.'s (2006) model of antecedents to individual learning intentions, and many others. The majority of these studies share a particular interest in incidental learning occurring as a side effect of work; some strive to encompass all forms and modes of workplace learning, defined by Tynjälä (2008) as incidental, non-formal and formal.

This research is primarily concerned with learning that is *intentional* (by donor/project intent), *instructor-mediated* (by consultants), and provided for the purpose of *changing work practices*. In this regard, extant research on the variables influencing learning and transfer (e.g. Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Baldwin et al., 2009; Blume et al., 2010; Grossman and Salas, 2011) is helpful to the discussion, because it shares similar concerns and parameters.

In the majority of cases, transfer is understood as meaningful changes in on-the-job behaviour resultant from formal training courses (Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993), or other forms of guided learning (De Rijdt et al., 2013). As outlined in Chapter One, these same aspirations and modalities of delivery characterise a great share of technical cooperation for development (EC, 2008). It is of further relevance to this study that over the past two decades the transfer literature has focused on studying the specific factors that influence the outcomes and application of intentional learning at work, an issue that is central to this enquiry.

The classification of inputs influencing learning in the transfer literature is based on the model developed by Baldwin and Ford (1988). It categorises the factors moderating learning and its application into the following groups: 1) learner characteristics, 2) intervention design, and 3) work environment. Strength of this literature is that its taxonomy of factors is largely replicated by subsequent research into guided learning. This is evident in the reviews and meta-studies of Colquitt et al. (2000), Merriam and Leahy (2005), Burke and

Hutchins (2007), Cheng and Hampson (2008), Blume et al. (2010), De Rijdt et al. (2013) and others.

While valuable in identifying clusters of discreet influencers, the transfer literature has some limitations. For instance, the conceptualisation of a linear progression from input to learning and then application has been found wanting of a 'unifying model' (Burke and Hutchins, 2008: 108). A number of authors (Tracey et al., 1995; Holton, 1996; Clarke, 2002) have attempted alternative explanations and argued that learning and transfer should not be understood as a mere combination of individual factors but a process that is greater than the sum of its parts.

By virtue of its predominantly acquisitional perspective and empirical methodological affinity (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010), the transfer literature places little emphasis on learning as a situated process of interaction and transformation. For that reason, Lave (1996: 151) rejects the notion of transfer outright, and terms it "an extraordinarily narrow and barren account." Some more recent contributions discussing transfer from a socio-cultural perspective, (Hager and Hodkinson, 2009; Billett, 2013) have argued that it creates misleading and unrealistic expectations of learning as generating 'wholesale' transferrable knowledge. Instead, Billett (2013) proposes that transfer should be recast as a problem of adaptability of learning, mediated through the interplay between individual cognitive experiences and the social world.

A contribution to resolving the incompatibility between the notions of transfer and situated guided learning is made by Taylor et al. (2009). They suggest "a persuasive counter-argument to the commonly held notion that transfer and situativity are incommensurable", namely that "contexts can be socially framed to create intercontextuality" (p.10). Thus the authors highlight the role of instructors in intentionally framing learning and transfer contexts to mediate their interactions, and in actively supporting learners to see the linkages between them.

The next section will provide a brief outline of the key factors found to influence guided learning at work. The discussion will follow the categorisation of factors

as suggested in the transfer literature but it will include relevant highlights from socio-cultural perspective on workplace learning. In keeping with Taylor et al. (2009)'s recommendation and because capacity building is premised on developmental exchanges between providers and recipients of aid, the review of factors will include an additional dimension related to instructors and learning interaction.

Learner characteristics

According to Blume et al.'s (2010) meta-analytic review of the transfer literature, the empirically best-supported individual characteristic predicting learning is individual cognitive ability. As this factor is hardly susceptible of intervention other than by trainee selection, it will not be given extensive consideration in this discussion.

On the other hand, *motivation to learn* is a factor that can be induced, and is therefore of central concern to this thesis. Studies in transfer posit that motivation is a key influencer of engagement with learning and its utilisation, an assumption that is confirmed by ample analysis (Lim and Johnson, 2002; Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008; Blume et al., 2010; Grossman and Salas, 2011; Grohmann et al., 2014). Yet these studies have offered little coherent explanation of the social and individual precursors of motivation, which are of particular interest given the understudied nature of donor-funded learning in the Afghan bureaucratic field.

Billett (2007: 6) argues that "effortful engagement" with learning is "buoyed by interests and intentionality". The complex triggers of such individual volition can be understood by applying Bourdieu's (1992) concept of habitus as a collection of stable but alterable dispositions orienting action in response to situational cues. As Ryle (1949: 43) explains, "to possess a dispositional property… is to be bound or liable to be in a particular state, or to undergo a particular change, when a particular condition is realised". Recent research (Riveros et al., 2012; Entwistle and McCune, 2013) has confirmed that dispositions are of important educational relevance, affecting the willingness and effort to engage with learning and apply acquired knowledge.

Dispositions are generated through past and ongoing experiences, and Hodkinson et al. (2004) have highlighted the importance of personal histories for engagement with workplace learning. The issue of individual biographies is relevant to the current study: some of the respondents are senior civil servants who were educated in the USSR in the 1980s, survived the civil war and the Taliban rule, and are now functioning in a society subject to external pressures to modernise along democratic, neoliberal values. Their attitudes to work, learning and societal reform are expected to differ from those of the young Afghan professionals interviewed, who remember little of the turbulent past, and frequently obtained higher educational qualifications in the West.

On a related point, Rees and Fevre (1997) have put forward the idea of 'learning identity,' or the personal values and beliefs about learning and oneself as a learner, which either facilitate or inhibit individual learning experiences. The transfer literature puts forward the related concept of *self-efficacy*, defined as the belief people have in their own capacities to acquire necessary skills and perform new tasks (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Grossman and Salas, 2011). Research suggests that higher self-efficacy has a positive influence on motivation (e.g. Colquitt et al., 2000; Chiaburu and Marinova, 2005; Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008)

Studies in conceptions of learning also suggest that individuals' beliefs about knowledge and learning influence how they engage with learning (Trigwell and Prosser, 1991; Schommer, 1994; Marton, 1998; Biggs, 1999). Some authors (Hammer, 1994; Pillay et al., 1998, 2003; Collin, 2002) argue that workers who see work and learning as disconnected concepts would not engage with workplace learning. Similarly, Billett (2009) stresses the importance of considering learners' epistemological beliefs about learning and work.

While individual dispositions can clearly precondition learning, learning can also test or modify dispositions. For example, Lave and Wenger (1991: 53) maintain that learning "involves the construction of identities" and Brown and Duguid (2001: 200) contend that "[l]earning is inevitably implicated in the acquisition of knowledge, but it is also implicated in the acquisition of identity." Hodkinson et al. (2008: 43) argue that learning leads to ongoing reconstruction

of the habitus, the process through which dispositions are "confirmed, developed, challenged or changed". It is reasonable to expect that such processes intensify in transitional settings. As mentioned earlier, the Afghan bureaucratic field is undergoing sweeping reform, and donor-funded workplace learning is part of the reform package.

In general, situations of profound contextual change have been understudied in the workplace learning literature. Engeström (2001) views tension as mostly generative of innovative practices and learning, while Lave and Wenger (1991) illustrate learning as a conflict-free result of practice relations. However, Reay et al. (2009) note that when individuals encounter unfamiliar or changing fields, the outcome of these encounters is neither easily predictable, nor unidirectional. Billett and Somerville (2004) and Billett (2008) have described cases ranging from superficial compliance, to disidentification and complete withdrawal to active participation, which are generated by the particular mix of personal histories and contextual settings.

In this context, the learning transfer literature (Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Velada et al., 2007; Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008) maintains that the *perceived utility of learning* can be an important precondition for engagement or disengagement with learning. Positive perceived utility can relate to new opportunities for progression of career, accumulation of cultural capital or other tangible or symbolic gains. This resonates with Bourdieu's (1977) observation that strategic calculations may influence the responses of the habitus, and respectively the uptake of learning.

The findings of Boud and Solomon (2003) are consistent with this argument. These authors note the power and identity tensions surrounding the label of 'learner' in the workplace, and its potential to devalue one's cultural capital as an expert. In the same way, the cognitive categorisation of recipients of aid as undeveloped and in need of upskilling may reduce the perceived utility of engagement with development learning interventions, and exert a demotivating effect.

According to Billett (2009), fundamentally individuals seek to maintain equilibrium with what they experience. This implies that if learning "entails

anxiety provoking identity change" (Brown and Starkey, 2000: 102), a possible reaction might be that "the validity of the information or its source is denied, or other kinds of defence mechanisms are used to ensure that the self-concept remains stable" (Whetten and Cameron, 2011: 59). Similarly, Corley and Gioia (2004) describe instances of loss of motivation for learning, where there is inconsistency between what they term organisational and individual identities. These findings suggest the relevance of Bourdieu's concept of hysteresis effect to the reform-oriented practices of capacity building, and aid generally.

Billet (2009: 212) argues that "more nuanced accounts of interpsychological processes" are needed to capture better the complex processes related to workplace learning. This need is particularly pronounced when analysing the effects an external environment in flux exerts on individuals, and the outcomes this generates in terms of their involvement with learning. This interrelation is discussed next.

Work environment and intervention design

Despite the strong contextuality (Hager, 2010) characterising recent studies into workplace learning, Fuller and Unwin (2010: 8) maintain that "much more" research is needed in order to understand the environmental influences on individual learning. This is because the range of suggested contextual factors in the workplace literature is extremely broad: from political and economic context, to sectoral characteristics, institutional arrangements, organisational size and history (Fuller et al., 2003), consideration about the ways work is structured (Ashton, 2004), team size, tasks, processes and reflection (Druskat and Kayes, 2000; Ellis et al., 2003).

As illustrated in Figure 4, Billett (2001) moves the discussion away from listing specific factors, and focuses onto the qualities of the workplace to invite opportunities for and participation in learning. Akin to Billett's work, Fuller and Unwin (2004) developed a categorisation of workplaces as learning environments on the expansive/restrictive continuum, according to employees' access to participation in learning, and on the way work practices are organised to facilitate such access (e.g. job design, organisation of work). A

multitudinal study by Eraut and Hirsh (2007) similarly shows that the structuring and allocation of work is central to learners' progress, because it affects processes of collaboration.

The transfer literature is particularly helpful as a springboard for discussion of the types of intentional and guided learning interventions subject to this research. This is because it offers a well-established taxonomy of influencers related to the broader context (work environment) and the way learning interventions are structured (intervention design).

That said, the cluster of inputs under the category of *work environment* has received considerably less analytical attention in the transfer literature than learner characteristics or intervention design (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Alvarez, 2004; Burke and Hutchins, 2007; Lancaster et al., 2013). Work environment refers to factors such as strategic link, transfer climate, support by others, opportunity to perform, and accountability to use (Grossman and Salas, 2011).

Strategic link, or how aligned learning interventions are to organisational goals and strategies, is the most understudied factor within this cluster. For instance, Burke and Hutchins' (2007) integrative literature review mentions only three studies that link strategic alignment of learning content with higher learning outcomes and their application into actual work practices. A more recent interdisciplinary review by De Rijdt et al. (2013) suggests that strategic link may be a prominent work environment factor related to learning and transfer. As suggested earlier, development learning often occurs in the context of 'doxic battles' (Esteves and Assunção, 2014), hence the potential relevance of this lesser-studied influencer.

Support by others is consistently shown to contribute to learning and changing work behaviour (Holton et al., 1997; Saks and Belcourt, 2006; Burke and Hutchins, 2008; Chiaburu et al., 2010). Resonating Lave and Wenger's (1991) ideas around communities of practice, research into transfer has highlighted the importance of peers for establishment of environment that is conducive to learning, participation and experimentation (Noe, 1986; Chiaburu and Harrison, 2008). Supervisors have an even greater role (Blume et al., 2010; Grossman

and Salas, 2011) by means of goal setting (e.g. Burke and Hutchins, 2007), providing reassurance (Salas et al., 2006), positive feedback (Lim and Johnson, 2002) and encouragement for the utilisation of new knowledge and skills (Kontoghiorghes, 2001). Thus direct supervisors can enhance motivation, stimulate action, and increase persistence, or influence learners' 'effortful engagement' with learning (Billett, 2007). Similarly, managers' support is an important ingredient of the expansive learning environments described by Fuller and Unwin (2010).

The role of senior leadership, removed from the immediate learning site, has received less attention. Contributions by Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe (2006), Chen et al. (2007) and Chiaburu et al. (2010) note the importance of top managers in providing positive role models but also their wholesale impact on the work environment for learning. This could include influences on the *transfer climate*, or the organisational norms that encourage the use learned skills (Rouiller and Goldstein, 1993; Blume et al., 2010). Senior managers and general organisational approaches to sanction and reward (e.g. performance evaluation and promotion) can encourage *accountability to learn and use* new skills and knowledge (Holton et al., 2000; Pham et al., 2013).

Intervention design is the second cluster of factors that is found to influence learning and its transfer. Intervention design has been subject to considerable research (Burke and Hutchins, 2007) and it includes issues related to the content of learning and the instructional methods used.

For instance, the importance of pre-intervention *needs assessments* is a well-established and long-standing principle in the literature (e.g. McGehee and Thayer, 1961; Rossett, 1999; Swanson, 2003). Needs assessment are the basis on which the appropriateness of a planned intervention is determined (Burke and Hutchins, 2007). They also ensure the *relevance of what is learned* to learners (Holton et al., 2000), thus moderating the degree of fit between learning content and job requirements (Lim and Morris, 2006; Martin, 2010). As Baldwin and Ford (1988) and Lancaster et al. (2013) observe, interventions that are similar to practice and linked to real work pressures improve understanding and retention of new information. To ensure the quality of needs

assessments and the content validity of interventions, research has suggested including learners and their supervisors into the assessment process and the design of training (Brinkerhoff and Montesino, 1995; Broad, 2005).

The *instructional strategies and methods* employed during and after learning interactions have received significant attention in the transfer literature (Grossman and Salas, 2011). Meta-analytic studies have focused on a range of approaches facilitating or inhibiting learning: e.g. rehearsal, repeated practice and feedback (Arthur Jr. et al., 1998), role modelling (Taylor et al., 2005), error-based examples (Keith and Frese, 2008), and the on- or off-the-job nature of the intervention (Saks and Burke-Smalley, 2014).

A precursory search in two established international development journals, namely "Public Administration and Development" and the "Journal of International Development" suggests that insights from transfer research are partially adopted in development practice. A search for "needs assessment" returned over 70 results, while the phrases "training transfer/transfer of training" and "Baldwin and Ford" returned zero results. It will be a subject of further discussion whether such selective application has had an impact on the ability of capacity building projects to extend an invitation to participation in learning (Billett, 2002).

Learning interactions

As discussed earlier, a limitation of transfer research is that it rarely discusses the interactional influences on learning, despite its exclusive focus on mediated learning. The dominant model assumes a linear progression from input to learning, leaves little room for intra-personal dynamics, and largely ignores the role of the instructor (Burke and Hutchins 2007; Hutchins *et al.* 2010). The socio-cultural accounts of workplace learning are similarly uninterested in the role of instructor, because the prime focus of analytical attention has been consistently placed on unguided learning occurring through daily participation in work.

Although trainer characteristics are excluded from the most common conceptualisations of transfer, some studies have suggested the importance of this factor (Towler and Diboye, 2001; Yelon et al., 2008). Burke and Hutchins' (2008) updated model of transfer proposes to include trainers as key stakeholders alongside peers and managers. The authors also highlight trainer's knowledge, experience, and mastery of teaching principles as important areas for future research.

Similarly, Brad Harris, Chung, L. Frye, et al. (2014: 271) find that "instructor competence (i.e. the extent to which a trainer is viewed as an expert and reliable source of information in the content area) positively predict trainees' satisfaction." Perceptions of instructor competence are also reported to be a predictor of trainee motivations to learn (Tibbles et al., 2008), and of positive learning outcomes (Finn et al., 2009).

In the socio-cultural accounts of workplace learning, it has been suggested that expert guidance can make significant contributions to learning, and be considered an important element of a workplace pedagogy. For instance, Billett (2000) posits that instructors can assist the development of conceptual knowledge that is inaccessible through accidental learning. More recently, Jacobs and Parks (2009) have proposed to integrate the role of the trainer/facilitator as a key variable of workplace learning, and Manuti et al. (2015: 11) recommends that design of training in the workplace needs to include "relational dimensions that may interfere with the efficacy of a learning programme."

In this respect Collin (2008) calls for research into the dynamic interactions between learners and instructors, and their impact on learning. Billett (2000) proposes that an informed view about guided workplace learning can be based on insights from mentoring and other relevant research. Others (Hodkinson, 2005; Brad Harris, Chung, Hutchins, et al., 2014) have uncovered similarities in college- and workplace-based learning processes, implying some applicability of educational theories to workplace learning context.

In that sense studies of mentoring relationships provide relevant explanations about the key interactional factors that facilitate learning. Specifically, research

focused on relationship micro-processes establish that satisfaction with the relationship and perceptions of mutual benefits are key aspects of mentorship effectiveness (Allen and Eby, 2003). Equally, person- and learner-centred educational models (Rogers, 1969; McCombs and Whisler, 1997) maintain that positive teacher-student relationships are strongly associated with optimal learning.

For instance, it has been argued that relationship success is more likely where learners and developers share a certain positive chemistry (Cull, 2006). This has been widely associated with perceived similarities in demographics, values, personality or interests between the members of a learning dyad (Allen and Eby, 2003; Wanberg et al., 2007; St-Jean, 2012). Against this backdrop, development learning poses interesting questions, as it typically involves interactions between people who are historically, culturally and geographically separated.

It has been also suggested that instructor-learner relationships that create and maintain a psychological climate of trust and respect strengthen learner motivation (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2003; Kreber and Klampfleitner, 2013). That is because "safe, trusting and respectful learning environments" (Drago-Severson et al., 2013: 93) have the ability to reduce anxieties, increase confidence (Frego, 2006) and thus learner self-efficacy. In the context of development, such interpersonal comfort could be expected to mitigate the anxieties provoked by change and development practice discussed in the earlier sections.

Driven by the need for equity in social exchange (Bourdieu, 1992), trust and respect should be reciprocal (e.g. St-Jean, 2012) to foster relationship quality. As indicated by Hauer et al.'s (2014) recent investigation into trainee supervision and learning in the workplace, instructors' propensity to trust the learner is an important dispositional quality. The authors also note that "[w]ithout trust, trainees can be perpetually marginalized to an assisting or observational role" (Hauer et al., 2014: 435) and important opportunities for legitimate learning participation curtailed (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Person- and learner-centred educational theories (Rogers, 1969; McCombs and Whisler, 1997) also emphasize instructor's ability to express "confidence and trust in the capacity" of the learner (Rogers, 1969: 109), and flexibility in instructional methods based on empathy with the learner. Being open to learning from each other, and being willing to be changed are amongst the hallmarks of the these educational frameworks too (Cornelius-White, 2007). Such reciprocal, mutually changing relationships may be restrained in the Afghan development context by aid's tendency to advance blueprint approaches to development.

The accorded power positions of instructors and learners are also found to influence the activities of both learners and the instructors, and thus the relationship quality (Koopmans et al., 2006). While in Afghanistan there are no firm organising principles that hierarchize consultants in relation to civil servants, development relationships in general are characterised by unequal power due to differences in capital endowments – economic, cultural and symbolic (Bourdieu, 1986).

Power relations, as a factor in learning through work, seem to be a relatively neglected area of study in the workplace literature (Yoong Ng and Cervero, 2005; Kira and Frieling, 2007; Fenwick, 2008; Owen, 2009). As Harris (2000: 27) suggested, "issues of power and control... are conspicuously absent from most discussions of workplace learning". A telling example of such absence is Lave and Wenger's situated learning theory. While power relations are integrated in the core definition of communities of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991), their analysis focuses solely on instances of consensus and stability (Contu and Willmott, 2003). However, the authors recognise that "…unequal relations of power must be included more systematically in our analysis" (Lave and Wenger, 1991: 42).

Where instruction is the focus of study, most research into workplace learning considers it a cooperative interaction between and among actors (Boud, 1989; Fenwick, 2005). Nevertheless, a number of studies (Contu and Willmott, 2003; Collin, 2005; Lizzio et al., 2005; Owen, 2009) acknowledge that workplace

practices may be contested and conflictual, and learning processes shaped by the exercise of power and control.

The effects of power on learning are often understood to foster or impede access to unequally distributed learning opportunities in the workplace (Billett, 2002), or as Lave and Wenger put it, to enable or "truncate possibilities for identities of mastery" (1991: 42). Lizzio et al. (2005) encapsulates another common view, namely that power, politics and hierarchies may disrupt the learning relationship.

Bunderson and Reagans (2011) argue that power relations at work lead to a variety of interpersonal dynamics, which affect processes such as "anchoring on shared goals, risk-taking and experimentation, and knowledge sharing" (p. 1183). As Collin (2008) argues, the interactions between instructors and learners are far from straightforward, and both may influence learning in ways that are benign or malign. Devos (2004) takes a different perspective by conceptualising learning interaction as a site of governmentality, where one acts upon oneself and allows others to act upon them.

In connection to this last point, Hart and Montague (2015) note that there is still limited attention paid to the ability of workplace learning to reproduce tacitly power structures and relations of inequality within the workplace, wider society, or even across societies. This understanding resonates with Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) contention that education reproduces domination. It also echoes with the ideas of Freire (2002: 78), which have been widely influential in critical analyses of development, that education is "the exercise of domination… indoctrinating them [students] to adapt to the world of oppression."

This literature demonstrates that guided workplace learning can be energised or constrained by the dynamic interactions between learners and instructors. It also implies that to be effective, the learning approaches espoused by aid interventions need to be considerate of the relational qualities of development practice. As the next section of this Chapter will discuss, this seems to be in stark contrast with the approach of the international aid industry to capacity development of its recipients.

Development theories and practice

How to achieve beneficial impact of foreign aid has long been a central preoccupation of policy makers, development theorists and practitioners. Yet after decades of experimentation and investment in international development assistance, the issue of aid effectiveness has remained "a puzzle" (Easterly, 2003: 39).

From its early days, international development has persistently been concerned with accelerating economic growth (Todaro and Smith, 2002). This primacy of normative economics is evident in the dominant theories of development, which will be discussed first. To achieve growth, the practice of aid has been oriented towards two core functions: as a transfer of capital and of knowledge (Malik, 2002).

Despite substantial inputs, the 1980s brought about general disillusionment with the tenets and practices of development to the extent that some authors declared an impasse in development theory (Booth, 1985). Arguably, the impasse along with parallel general shifts in social science provided the stimulus for more diverse analyses to challenge the hegemony of 'mono-economic' doctrines (Hirschman, 1981) in development studies. These include the radical post-development theory and the participation approach reviewed second.

The discussion will be concluded with a review of the literature, which focuses on the actual practices in the development field and on the interactions of aid providers and recipients intended to produce key developmental outcomes, such as learning.

Dominant paradigms in development theory and practice

At its outset in the 1950s, development was perceived as a process involving imitation, in which the less developed countries would gradually acquire the qualities of the industrialised nations by means of capital accumulation (Rostow, 1960). This early model maintains that growth could be not only

achieved but also accelerated by an active state, as it has the instruments to deliver "government engineered economic transformation" (Toye, 2003: 21). This raised the issue of the state's capability to prepare and administer economic development plans, and started the tradition of provision of training and technical assistance from more to less developed nations (Barakat and Chard, 2002).

These early interventions exerted a general disregard of what was available locally due to the belief that "the indigenous culture is incompatible with modernization and must be abandoned or abolished" (Huntington, 1996: 73). Since then, the practice of planned development has been consistently predicated on setting developing nations on a path to a 'Western' version of modernity, viewed as universally applicable and desirable. In Bourdieusian terms, modernisation is the doxa of international aid, that which "goes without saying because it comes without saying" (Bourdieu, 1977: 167).

As Rostow's (1960) linear-stages approach did not deliver the expected results, the belief in government-led economic reform was shattered. An outward, export oriented growth model based on economic liberalization has since become a central pillar of development theory and practice, and it is pursued by all major bilateral and multirateral donors. The early versions of neoliberalism claimed universality: its leading proponent, Larry Summers said in 1991 that "[t]he laws of economics, it's often forgotten, are like the laws of engineering. One set of laws works everywhere" (quoted in Arestis and Sawyer, 2013: 78). A "standard" reform package for developing countries was summarized in the Washington Consensus, which outlines "10 policy measures about whose proper deployment Washington can muster a reasonable degree of consensus" (Williamson, 1990: 7).

The Washington Consensus singled out excessive government intervention as the cause for the weak performance of the developing economies: "there is clear evidence... that it is better not to ask governments to manage development in detail" (World Bank, 1991: 4). The leading wirters of the neoliberal school (e.g. Bauer, 1969; Lal, 1983; Krueger, 1986), considered government failures more costly and damaging than potential market failures

they were earlier set to address, and called for state contraction. The primacy of these neoliberal ideas, fiercely criticised by Bourdieu as an 'infernal machine' (Bourdieu, 1998: 113), is still evident today – alongside modernisation, the necessity for developing countries to have market economies has become a taken-for-granted, unquestioned truth in development.

In implementing this strategy, overseas development assistance confronted the 'orthodox paradox' (Kahler, 1990: 55), namely that an effective state would be needed to carry out the reforms envisaged by the neoliberal theory. Investment in technical co-operation and in programmes for development of public sector capacity did not stop but its objectives and content had to undergo significant shifts in line with the new role allocated to the state (Marquette and Beswick, 2011). Importantly, bureaucracies in developing countries had to promptly unlearn their interventionist ways, and embrace the minimalist state and market facilitation. In Bourdieisian terms this required shrinkages in the bureaucratic field of power and devaluation of the "statist capital" (Bourdieu et al., 1994: 4).

However, premature financial liberalisation put a number of countries on a fragile, debt-led growth path (Leftwich, 2005). By the 1990s there was a broad acknowledgement of the positive contribution that a capable state can make to market economies and social protection. It was strengthened by the realisation that economic practices do not come institution free (Rodrik, 2005) and that governance matters (Kaufmann et al., 2006).

This 'good governance agenda' did not displace economic neoliberalism but it allowed for a much more open recognition of the importance of political and contextual factors for development outcomes (North, 1990; Rodrik et al., 2004; Acemoglu et al., 2005; Leftwich, 2005, 2010). Today's donor investments target all 'institutional arenas' (Hyden et al., 2004) constituting the overall framework of governance in developing jurisdictions: civil society, political class, government bureaucracy, economic players and the judicial system. Or, as Mosse (2005: 5) argues, "the means of international aid have expanded from the management of economic growth and technology transfer to the reorganisation of state and society".

Alternative paradigms in development

In parallel to neoliberal structural reforms, an altogether different theory was being formulated mostly by intellectuals originating from countries that receive aid. Informed by abundant evidence of failure of development interventions and noting that "huge numbers of people are affected adversely by development" (Sheth, 1997: 331), post-development is probably one of the most pessimistic theoretical conceptualisations of development.

While this theory shares a basic belief in modernisation with the dominant theories, it is also characterised by a strong aversion to the conventional international development practices in the previous decades – "[y]ou must be either very dumb or very rich if you fail to notice that development stinks" (Esteva, 1987: 135). Aid is seen as a 'Western' construct designed to further 'Western' interests, turning nations into "net food importers" (Escobar, 1995a: 104) and depriving "the excluded from their means of sustenance" (Rahnema, 1997: 391). Thus underdevelopment itself is presented as a product of aid.

Strongly influenced by the post-structuralism in European social sciences of the 1970s, this literature understands development as a discursive and cultural construct (Pieterse, 1998; Brigg, 2002; Ziai, 2004). Post-development authors are particularly critical of the power inequalities inherent in development, the related "sense of the superiority of the 'modern' and the 'scientific'" (Jayawardena, 1990: v), and the assumed universalism and desirability of the 'Western' economic model (Lehman, 1997; de Rivero, 2001). In particular, Escobar (1995) who is one of the most prominent post-development theorists, contends that the valorisation of knowledge has become a tool for cultural domination. In his view, the discourse of development has become a "political economy of truth" (Escobar, 1995b: 213), whereby development's premises are accepted uncritically.

According to Pieterse (1998), another central feature of post-development is its interest in home-grown culture, traditions and practices, as a reaction to the 'Western' "tendency to overlook the local systems of knowledge" (Escobar, 1995a: 225). This brings about a shared faith in the endogenous, because "interventions based on local knowledge and experience are more likely to be

relevant" (Kothari, 2001: 139). Post-developmentalists take this argument even further, maintaining that all interventions should be completely controlled by the grassroots. Development, after all is supposed to be all about people, and instead it has turned into a top-down process, characterised by technical interventions and the treatment of people as commodities (Escobar, 1992).

Based on its track record, development as we know it is rejected outright (Escobar, 1995b; Watts, 1995; Rahnema, 1997): post-development is "interested not in development alternatives but in alternatives to development" (Escobar, 1995a: 215). However, post-development does not venture to offer another grand theory and solutions to development. It stops by placing development within a broad critique of modernity and by linking development to the ideas of power and knowledge.

The lack of a future programme is one of the central criticisms that this literature has received. Post-development is presented as incapable of linking discourse to practice (Kiely, 1999; Veltmeyer, 2001), a "theoretical play pit for academics to amuse themselves" (Hamnett, 2001: 167). A further point of criticisms is that, much like earlier theories, post-development reduces diverse experiences to a few simple axioms. Its position that people do not want development is in itself homogenising and essentialising (Corbridge, 2007).

Despite these criticisms, many acknowledge the contributions of this literature to an improved understanding of development (Munck, 2000; Brigg, 2002). By questioning all assumptions, post-development has broadened the intellectual debate, offered new explanations of intervention failure, and, most importantly, provided an impetus for enriching the development instrumentality (Simon, 2006).

Importantly, this literature has encouraged researchers to refute their focus from the "object" to the "subject" of development. According to Munck (2000), this aspect institutes the core value of the theory. Simin (1998: 240) maintains that post-development grants "space and time to different voices, categorisations, world views, explanatory systems, and identities". Moreover, it emphasizes capacities for indigenous innovation and insists on localised development.

The post-developmentalists' faith in the endogenous and local knowledge is associated with the proliferation of participatory methods in the practice of development (Edwards, 1989). Participation rejects earlier one-size-fits-all approaches, which might be "brilliantly successful in engineering" (Chambers, 1997: 189) but are incompatible with social development. Participation thus seeks to redress the unequal power relations inherent in the dominant development paradigms by helping "people in the South become the architects and engineers of their own development" (Hoksbergen, 2005: 18).

Chambers (1983), arguably the main proponent of participatory development practice calls for "putting people first". In practical terms, this is to be achieved through the involvement of development's subjects in all stages of the development process, from its needs evaluations through implementation and evaluation (Turner and Hulme, 1997: 141–142). These suggestions resonate with recommendations from the learning literature for collaborative approaches to the assessment and designs of learning interventions (Broad, 2005), and with the conceptualisation of learning as a process of participation (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Billett, 2001).

The approach developed by Chambers is underpinned by Freire's (1972, 1974) ideas of self-reliance in critical pedagogy. Freire maintains that the marginalised would "realize that they, too, 'know things'" through an assisted process of "co-intentional education" (Freire, 1972: 39 and 44). In this, the participatory literature draws attention to the role of development professionals. Their attitudes, sensitivities and behaviour are considered vital for development outcomes (Chambers, 1995b). This is elaborated in the recommendations "to be sensitive, to decentralise, and to empower" (Chambers, 1995b: 22). In a similar vein, Korten (1980: 480) suggests that developers should have "a capacity for embracing error, learning with the people, and building new knowledge and institutional capacity through action".

In practical terms this means that outsiders should consciously relinquish some of their power (Chambers, 1994). To be successful in flattening existing hierarchies, development practitioners need to be prepared to invest sufficient time in the participatory process and to possess appropriate dispositions and

people skills. It is interesting that while the modernisation and neoliberal approaches have little interest in the traits of the development professionals (beyond their technical expertise), the participatory school of thought reaches insights that are remarkably close to those of the learner-centered educational theories and the mentorship literature (Cornelius-White, 2007; Wanberg et al., 2007).

Although praised as a thoughtful corrective to the predominant "over-technical, authoritarian top-down" (Parfitt, 2002: 32) approaches, participation has received criticisms in terms of its practical application. Since the 1980s, the language of participation and empowerment has started to appear in policy, programme and project documents of major multilateral and bilateral donor agencies. In 1991, the United Nations elevated participation to a right (UN, 1991). Participation alongside related notions of empowerment and partnership have recently become central to mainstream development policies, featuring prominently in the Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (2008).

In the early 1990s, Korten observed that participation is already becoming tokenistic and turning into a blueprint approach, where donors "not only planned the project, they planned how the poor would participate" (1991: 7). A decade later, Kothari (2005) maintains that the participation/partnership agenda has been fully co-opted, institutionalised and technicalised in order to respond to the strategic and operational needs of the funding agencies.

Relatedly, Crush (1995: 4) observes that "what [development] says it is doing, and what we believe it to be doing, are simply not what is actually happening". The concluding section of this chapter will review the literature that has advanced explanations for the disjuncture between development discourse and its practices, as what actually happens in development is of central importance to this research.

The practice of development

Despite the emergence of alternative paradigms, Barakat and Chard (2002) observe that the operational realities of aid have undergone little change since the 1970s, and approaches previously identified as ineffective are still applied. In particular, various evaluations of development programmes are in general agreement that institutional strengthening and capacity building present in all generations of development theory and practice have been the least effective component of technical assistance (Berg, 1993; Grindle and Hilderbrand, 1994; OED, 2005).

Capacity development is still one of the most visible aspects of donor action, identified as a priority in the Paris Declaration (2005). However, the very concept of capacity remains contested, as it "seems to exist somewhere in a nether world between individual training and national development" (Morgan, 2003: 1). The UN defines it as "the process by which individuals, organizations, institutions and societies develop abilities to perform functions, solve problems and set and achieve objectives" (UN, 2006: 7). At the individual level, it involves development of capabilities necessary to carry out technical, service delivery and logistical tasks across sectors (Brinkerhoff and Morgan, 2010).

A number of development theorists have suggested that a reason for the unsatisfactory track record of development interventions in general is related to the structures and rules on the supply side of aid, and the way aid institutions 'think' (Douglas, 1987). The *field* of the international development industry encompasses a disparate collection of government bureaucrats in bilateral and multilateral donor agencies, who allocate funding, set policy directions, design and oversee projects and on occasions become involved with actual implementation. Funding agencies are imbued with economic and political capital and hold a position of power over other players in the development field. Their accountability lies with donor country politicians, and as such they respond to the imperative to demonstrate results to aid provider constituencies, not to recipients (Easterly, 2002).

The realities of the donor bureaucratic field require that public money is spent in line with relevant procurement and administrative rules. According to Leach

(1995), this is one of the reasons why over decades the technical assistance *project* has been a favoured means for disbursement of funds - the direct accountability between donor and implementing consultancy/NGO provides sufficient fiduciary safeguards (Nunberg and Taliercio, 2012). And while donors have recently started experimenting with different modalities such as provision of aid through recipients' budgets, the fixed-term pre-planned project culture is still very strong in war-torn, fragile states such as Afghanistan (Kadirova, 2014).

Actual project implementation is typically outsourced to nongovernmental organisations, consultancies, individual experts and academics (Stone, 2003). They play a significant role in the delivery of development aid: Stirrat (2000) estimates that there are more expatriates employed by development agencies in Africa than at any point in the colonial period. Development consultants are largely constrained in what they are able to do, as they are "governed by organisational rules" (Bebbington, 2004: 736) and have to embrace ideologies and objectives pre-set in donor capitals to secure positions within the field (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2002).

Drawing on Bourdieu, Ebrahim (2005) suggests that donors and implementers are in fact interdependent, in that implementers convey positive reputational/symbolic capital onto their resource providers by reporting stories of development success. Kowalski (2012) and Ellerman (2005) draw attention to a different causality, which also characterises the field – the existence of donors and implementing parties relies on the continuous dependence of the recipients, and the interpretive instruments of aid tend to produce success only to the extent that it legitimises its continuation.

Aid recipients, on the other hand, are party to a fundamentally unequal relationship (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000; Barakat and Chard, 2002) and as such rarely in a position to reject donor assistance. This should not obscure the fact that they operate in fields that are imbued with already established organising principles, rules of the game, and capital configurations. Thus the particularities of the recipient fields might not afford easily donor objectives, or

interventions for the development of expertise of how to pursue donor-formulated development goals (World Bank, 2012).

The configuration of power in the development field explains why the predominant model of donor assistance is "often that of a 'development church' giving definitive ex cathedra views on all the substantive questions" (Ellerman, 2000: 27). On a related point, a number of authors have noted that the dominant modernisation and neoliberal paradigms are characterised by claims of universality (Kenny and Williams, 2001; Leftwich, 2005; Rodrik, 2005), leaving little room for alternative, home-grown approaches based on local knowledge.

This supply-drivenness of foreign aid is one of its most criticised aspects. It is a persistent and robust feature, which has not been corrected even by explicitly people-centered, participatory approaches. Despite very recent and repeated calls at high level to espouse the principles of partnership (Deutscher and Fyson, 2008; OECD, 2011; Nunberg and Taliercio, 2012), it endures. From this perspective, critiques of partnership understand it as a "terminological Trojan Horse" (Fowler, 2000: 7), masking donors' ongoing control of international aid relationships (Ashman, 2000; Baaz, 2005; Mosse, 2005). Partnership is also analysed as a strategy to re-establish the legitimacy of donor actions (Lister, 2000), and as an institutional defence strategy against declining aid levels (Fowler, 2000; Hudock, 2000). The instrumental fashion in which partnership is being implemented reflects the fact that power inequalities have not been remedied through the introduction of different rhetoric (Eade, 1997; Harrison, 2002; Crawford, 2003; Abrahamsen, 2004; Brehm, 2004).

The very existence of 'Western' development agencies is predicated on their ability to bring about 'disciplined' social change and to do that in a demonstrable and rapid fashion to meet domestic accountability imperatives. This creates pressure on donors to disburse funds and implement programmes rapidly (Easterly, 2002; Williams et al., 2003), leading to relatively short intervention time-frames - typically of three to five years (Leach, 1995).

This "results orientation" is exemplified by the logical framework (logframe) concept, which has been adopted by most funding agencies in recent years

(Berg, 2000) as a tool for rationalisation and management of development interventions. The logframe approach is borrowed from military science and it is based on the idea of linear causation from intervention to social change, and on the premise that development is a technical problem calling for technical solutions (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000).

To maintain the notion of causality, approaches to development are presented as rooted in science (Tamas, 2007). According to Sen (2000: 36), this reinforces the perception that the West has an exclusive access "to rationality and reasoning, science and evidence". In this respect, development workers are not only transmitting abstract knowledge but are also involved in the reproduction of the power relations of development (Kothari, 2005).

As Kothari (2005) argues, this has resulted in a stable epistemic community of development consultants, who are "conduits and translators of a meta-language reflecting a particular view of social change" (p. 437). The importance of deep understanding of places and people is completely overshadowed by technical expertise. Today's recruitment market for development practitioners holds in little esteem the facilitatory and pedagogic qualities of the development expert, and privileges technical expertise and experience (Brinkerhoff, 2010). Such an approach is in contrast with the people-centered paradigm advanced by Chambers (1983), and with the emerging appreciation of the importance of instructional quality in workplace learning (Collin, 2008).

The supremacy of the technical, and the notion of transferrable and universal expertise lie at the heart of aid's strategy of transplanting knowledge (or cultural capital) from developed to developing countries by means of capacity building. The implication is that recipient learning is understood largely as an unproblematic acquisition of stable and codifiable knowledge, or what the workplace literature terms the 'acquisition metaphor' (Sfard, 1998).

This acquisitional perspective is evident in the way the more influential models of capacity development conceptualise learning (Olsen, 2006). One of the main contributions by Brinkerhoff and Goldsmith (1990) views capacity as a characteristic of the systems as a whole, and learning as managed through

"system strategies." This implies that systems have universal characteristics, and that learning and social transformations are non-contextual and apolitical - a view rejected by the socio-cultural theory of learning outlined earlier (Billett, 1996). In one of the applications of this framework, the authors optimistically state that "swift change is predictable in the arena of international development" (Finsterbusch and Ingle, 1990: 49).

Grindle's (1997) systems approach identifies a broader set of dimensions that have a role in capacity building - the environment external to the system, the institutional context, the task network, organisations, and human resources. A fundamental premise in her analysis is the faith in intervention design - it is possible to "identify capacity gaps and design intervention strategies" (Grindle, 1997: 34) in order to achieve desired outcomes. This instrumental approach is widely internalised in donor strategies for capacity development (e.g. UNDP, 1997, 1998), as it suggests that learning will occur whenever the right entry point is identified, and projects are well designed and implemented. The inherently political nature of interventions is ignored (Long and Villarreal, 1993).

Both positions obscure the human factor in the development encounter. In general, the study of the otherwise central process of human learning in development co-operation is considered "more or less virgin territory" (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000: 7) and there are few productive encounters with the insights of the theory of workplace learning. In this context, Olsen (2006) proposes that the study of capacity development should take an actor-oriented approach and analyse the concepts of policy, social actors, power, and knowledge to generate new insights into its processes and outcomes. As Bruton (Bruton, 1985: 1104) contends "knowledge about the development process in a particular environment at a particular time does not exist in transferable form, rather it is the product of the development process itself", essentially reflecting the situated view advanced by the workplace learning theory (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Mosse's ethnographies (2004) and Eyben's (2010) insider observations of a donor agency demonstrate that the official narratives and repesentations of development are very different from the messy reality of aid, and function

primarily as a means to securing the field's reproduction through ongoing political and financial support. These analyses reveal aid delivery as a set of divergent policies and practices, riddled by contradictions such as ownership and conditionality, autonomy and dependence.

Interestingly, Eyben (2010) and Kowalski (2011) maintain that the asymmetries of power, which donor rhetoric seeks to obscure, are generated by the logic of the gift. Bourdieu (1992: 126) argues that "[a] man possesses in order to give. But he also possesses by giving": because of the laws of reciprocity that characterise social interactions (Bourdieu, 1992: 98), every gift takes something away. Thus incapacity to respond, an unreciprocated gift might make "the person who has accepted it inferior" (Mauss, 2002: 83 in Kowalski, 2011: 194).

For instance, the central terms "technical assistance" and "capacity building/development" imply non-existence of parity between suppliers and recipients of aid (Cooke, 2004). This raises the question of what it feels like to be at the receiving end of development (Kowalski, 2011). As discussed earlier, post-development theory and participatory approaches brought agency to development studies but their focus was exclusively on the grassroots. Thus issues of recipient agency are resolutely still in the periphery, and theoretical contributions such as Carr et al.'s (1998) discussion of the motivational foundations of international aid are rare.

As Tamas (2007) observes, recipients are not rid of capacity to structure the development relationship and the orthodoxies of developers are by no means adopted uncritically by them. For example, Weijer (2012) points out that various players in the Afghan bureaucratic field hold different views on the development of the national agricultural sector: "The productionist narrative… The developmentalist narrative...The market-driven narrative… all three perspectives are prevalent… fought out over different versions of policy documents" (p.14). Such tensions may produce disjunctures that were shown to have an effect on individual motivation to engage with development and learning.

This chimes in with Tamas' contention that the literature often overlooks how recipients "play with, resist the constraints of, and/or pursue paths other than those mandated by development" (Tamas, 2007: 902). In his discussions of education, Dewey (1916) asserts that incentives administered in controlling manner provoke the "instincts of cunning and slyness" (p.26). In this sense, the manner of giving preconditions the response to it: whether receipt of aid is experienced as threatening or supportive is determined by situational conditions, such as donor, aid and context characteristics, along with recipient's dispositions and ability to reciprocate (Fisher et al., 1982).

It follows that relations between givers and recipients in the field are of significance, as they can conceal or exacerbate the potential symbolic violenceof the gift (Bourdieu, 1992). Borda-Rodriguez and Johnson (2013) note that there is still limited analysis on the dynamics between consultants and recipients of aid. Drawing on Bourdieu, Eyben (2008) calls for relational approaches in development, which would analyse the various development practices as a process, or participation and interaction between givers and recipients.

 While development practitioners are often regarded as neutral in the development process (Pottier, 1997; Jackson, 1997), Lewis and Mosse (2006: 10) argue that the "encounter between developers and people is far more complex and nuanced than is allowed" in development practice and theory. As early as in 1983, the World Bank recognized some of this, noting, "[t]he Bank's experience indicates that when the 'psychological distance' between expatriates and their local counterparts is minimized, the value of technical cooperation is much enhanced" (World Bank, 1983: 133).

Likewise, the participatory approach repeatedly called for 'authentic partnerships,' based on mutuality and trust (Fowler, 1998: 147). However, not much of that appears to happen in practice, as demonstrated by a survey of aid recipients' views on donor effectiveness (Hedger et al., 2009). Respondents emphasized that givers "should behave in a respectful and receptive manner… should treat government staff as true and equal partners, recognising that there are opportunities for mutual learning and exchange of ideas" (p. 15).

Patronising attitudes towards counterparts, or a 'saviour' mentality of external consultants (Brinkerhoff, 2010) only foster the sense that they have nothing to learn from local counterparts, thus denying reciprocity in social exchange.

In the standard view of the dominant development theories, technical assistance is presented as a technical process of knowledge transmission onto passive and grateful recipients (Ellerman, 2000). This discussion has taken issue with this representation and argues that dispositions and power endowment of all those entangled in a development encounter matter for the outcome of the interaction. It also demonstrates that development effects are to an extent predetermined and intensified by the structuring structures of donor and recipient fields in contact. It is then hardly unexpected that the international development industry often fails to foster the positive attributes of the gift; in particular the trust, the spontaneity and the mutuality of the exchange (Kowalski, 2011).

Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter ranges from the grand paradigms of international development, to the mechanics of individual learning at work. This choice of topics is based on the belief that the microsociology of aid, e.g. its capacity development interventions, stems from its macrosociology, i.e. its worldviews and its institutions.

The practices of 'Western' aid rest on the assumption that engineered social change is possible, and on orthodoxies about the type of change necessary. The doxas (Bourdieu, 1977) of development – economic modernisation and later neoliberalism, claim the status of an objective, scientific truth that is applicable across all social spaces characterised by underdevelopment. What does not fit with it simply does not exist, exemplified by the limited influence of alternative paradigms, the reproduction of approaches proven ineffective, and the persistent disjuncture between development discourse and its practices.

According to critical analyses originating from within the field (Easterly, 2002; ICAI, 2015), 'Western' aid is designed and dispensed by 'Western' aid

bureaucracies under conditions which do not work well. The assumption that the social can be understood in terms of the economic has resulted in development agencies' intense focus on demonstrating results, oversimplification of complex problems and depersonalisation of development processes.

The very concept of capacity building, commanding a significant share of development spending, has remained nebulous (OED, 2005). All major aid organisations have sponsored their own interpretations, varying from a relatively narrow focus on training, to organisational development and ideas of holistic societal transformation (Venner, 2014). Individual learning is predominantly conceptualised as acquisition (Olsen, 2006), a model that conforms with the instrumentality of development bureaucracies and their imperatives for linear causation from intervention to change.

As described in the review of the learning literature, acquisitional perspectives do not bode well for the effectiveness of interventions that have individual learning as their objective. Although workplace learning still lacks an explanation that can fully deal with all its aspects (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004a), the theory is sufficiently established, and the evidence is sufficiently strong for the full complexity for individual workplace learning to begin to come into view.

Conceptualisations of workplace learning as unproblematic acquisition and transfer of content (Sfard, 1998) have been refuted by this literature because they obscure the situatedness of learning, and the identity transformations it brings about. Yet the participatory approaches advocated as effective alternatives in both development (Chambers, 1997) and workplace learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) studies have not taken hold in development practice, because they leave room for interpretation and experimentation, defy funders' management controls and produce unexpected results.

The conversation between the literatures in this review allows for an exploration into the processes of learning and development in ways that bring something new. While workplace learning theory has offered integrative accounts of the multitude of factors influencing learning in the West, it has not

yet been applied to workplace environments in developing settings. In contrast to the cases in the industrialised world, aid-funded learning is expected to occur in a contract between institutions and actors driven by distinctive organising rules and intentionalities. The very presence of aid constitutes a structural change in the recipient work environment, the characteristics of which have been shown to be significant enablers or inhibitors of learning. This gives rise to a supplementary question whether the factors identified in the 'Western' workplace environments are relevant to the context of aid.

Development practices have been rarely studied from the perspective of individual learning – the practice and theory of mainstream aid was shown to be generally inattentive to issues of agency (Grindle, 1999; World Bank, 2015). A number of participation and post-development theorists have raised critically issues related to power in development, but the effects of power on the dispositions and practices (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990) of the members of the learning dyad and the quality of their interaction is a problem that has received little attention in the literature. This is an additional question addressed in this research.

In this context adopting Bourdieu's theoretical framework is a pragmatic choice, as it offers a model of social practice that joins up contextual, subjective and power factors. To ensure theoretical and methodological unity, Bourdieu's theory has also informed the methodological approaches in this study, which will be discussed next.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodology employed for the study. First it describes the reasoning behind the methodological choices made by the researcher, and justification of the use of case study as a preferred research strategy. This is followed by a discussion of the approaches to data collection, analysis, and research rigour. Finally, it focuses on the role of the researcher and how the biases inherent in the position of the observing analyst are addressed.

Methodological approach

The research objective of this enquiry is to explore the factors influencing the effectiveness of technical assistance for individual workplace learning within the Afghan public sector. As outlined in Chapter Two, workplace learning is understood as cognitive change actualised in social practice (Billett, 2001). This conceptualisation of learning necessities attention to the characteristics of the learning site, the subjectivities of players interacting within this site, and the power and other relations characterising such interactions in accord with a Bourdieusian theoretical approach (Bourdieu, 1977).

This study is mindful of the fact that "different research methodologies have fairly strong affinities with particular conceptualisations of learning" (Hodkinson and Macleod, 2010: 185), and that quantitative approaches favour acquisitional perspectives characterised by weak contextuality (Hager, 2010). Furthermore, the subject of this study is under-theorised and the empirical work is sparse, which eliminates the possibility for testing probabilistically stated theories. For these reasons, this research seeks richness and depth of explanation, and it is therefore located within the qualitative tradition of research (Silverman, 1993).

The methodological consequences of the adopted theoretical approach are significant, inasmuch as it places specific demands on both data collection and data analysis, and calls for attention to three very different elements: context, subjectivities and their interaction. In order to transcend any 'epistemological

opposition' between theory and methodology (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), the strategy opted for here is case study, as it is considered an appropriate method for addressing explorative questions and evaluating interventions that have no clear outcomes (Yin, 2004, 2009), such as foreign aid interventions (Easterly, 2003).

The case study method is found highly pertinent to the examination of relational complexity (Flyvbjerg, 2001) characterising real-life phenomena "occurring in a bounded context" (Miles and Huberman, 1994: 25). Arguably, the specifics of the current research context favour the use of case studies over other empirical methods. This is because the Afghan public sector is characterised by the interaction of two very different and sometimes conflicting fields – those of donors and of the Afghan bureaucracy. In other methodological strategies such as surveys, the ability to study the context would be limited by the number of chosen variables; experimental designs and histories would also be inappropriate, since the investigator has no control over context, and the focus is on contemporary events (Yin, 2009). In contrast, the case study method allows exploration of processes, individuals, decisions and programmes in their current context (Pettigrew, 1973; Yin, 2004; Gibbert et al., 2008).

For its concern with individual learning, the research engages with an analysis of the lived experiences of the social agents involved in learning interactions. In particular, attention is paid to the ways the context structures individual dispositions to the practice of capacity building, and conversely, how individual dispositions structure responses to the practice of capacity building. As Radley and Chamberlain (2012) argue, the case study method is well-suited for addressing such subjective responses, exemplified by research of personal states, meaning-making and transitions in various social science disciplines.

Stake (1995) categorises case studies as 'intrinsic' or 'instrumental.' The former aim to understand a particular case comprehensively, as the latter are focused on issues that go beyond the specific case. This research is focused firmly on the bounded system of the Afghan public sector assisted by aid, and in this sense it bears the characteristics of an intrinsic enquiry. Yet, within the

boundaries of its generalisability, the study is related to the broader subject of the effectiveness of aid interventions, which are reproduced in different environments. It is therefore hoped that this research will contribute to understanding of issues to do with the delivery of technical cooperation that go beyond the case of Afghanistan.

Data collection

To reach a holistic understanding of the factors influencing the effectiveness of technical assistance for individual workplace learning within the Afghan public sector, the research makes use of multiple data sources, including policy and project documentation, media pieces and interviews. The ability to deal with a variety of evidence is one of the key strengths of case studies (Yin, 2008), leading to increased data credibility (Patton, 1990; Yin, 2009).

Publically available documentary and media evidence provided contextual information about the Afghan bureaucratic field and international technical assistance programmes. In this respect recent measures by donor agencies to increase aid transparency were particularly helpful, because intervention descriptions and formal project evaluations could be accessed online. Qualitative data such as the views, perceptions, opinions and experiences of Afghan recipients and international providers of aid were gathered mostly through face-to-face, semi-structured audio recorded interviews conducted in Kabul.

To engage participants dispersed over large geographical areas and to limit security risk, the research also involved four video-conferenced interviews via Skype recorded by using a separate digital audio recorder. Standard qualitative ethical practices were adhered to in order to protect the participants' rights of privacy and anonymity. Additionally, the interviewees were informed of Microsoft's privacy policy for Skype.

While research in online settings has received some attention (Exter et al., 2009; Miller, 2009), there is still little information on video-conferencing

platforms for conducting qualitative research. However, recent work by Salmons (2011), Glassmeyer (2012), and van Eeden-Moorefield et al. (2008) suggests that video interviewing over Skype is a superior alternative to telephone interviews allowing researchers to simulate face-to-face interviews without sacrificing the quality and trustworthiness of data gathered.

Sedgwick and Spiers (2009) note that the quality of video-conferencing interviews is influenced by issues such as time lag in transmission. Indeed, connectivity problems disrupted the flow of one of the interviews. Valuable data was still gathered, but the overall contribution of this participant was reduced. In the remaining cases respondents had access to high-bandwidth connection, and that ensured a natural conversational context. All participants were fully conversant with the use of the software.

In terms of building rapport, some authors note that the lack of the physical presence may have a negative influence on sharing of difficult personal accounts (Sedgwick and Spiers, 2009). In contrast, Cater (2011) and Schultze (2006) report that respondents feel more comfortable communicating from home than in a formal location. The experiences of this study were positive, as participants were entirely at ease and the levels of disclosure were high. A potential contributor to establishing a positive and trustful atmosphere was the fact that all these respondents had previously met the researcher personally. In one case distance allowed for the interview to be conducted in the early hours of the day, immediately after the participant had broken Ramadan fast and at a time when his energy levels were at their highest.

Sampling strategy

The case of the Afghan public sector is studied through participants from a number of local government organisations. The research started with purposeful, or theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1999) aiming to maximise in-case variations. The participants are associated with Afghan public sector organisations from seven different sectors: economic governance (2), health and social care (1), agriculture and rural development

(2), infrastructure and natural resources sector (2) and governance (1). All organisations are significant recipients of donor-provided technical assistance support, and represent some of the best and worst performers in the government: as a proxy measure of effectiveness, their development budget execution rates ranged between 40% and 70% in 2013, and 20%-70% in 2010 (GoIRA, 2014).

With the help of the researcher's network in country, the participants were drawn from eight public sector organisations in Afghanistan, and from donor-funded projects supporting them wherever possible. Due to practical conditions of data collection in a prevailing volatile security environment, field work was conducted in Kabul, and did not cover provincial government structures. The sample includes international and national advisers, as well as public sector managers, or what corresponds to civil service grades one to three in Afghanistan's public sector grading system. One of the participants was recently promoted from a managerial to a political position of deputy minister. In all, Afghan managers of these ranks are considerably exposed to donor funded capacity development programmes as learners and supervisors (see Appendix 1).

Efforts were made to recruit as many Afghan participants as possible, since the voices of recipients of technical assistance are significantly underrepresented in the literature. Access to Afghan participants was relatively unobstructed when they knew the researcher personally; introductions by others were moderately successful. To enhance sample recruitment, the initial purposeful sampling was dovetailed by snowball sampling (Franklin and Jordan, 1997). As a result, two donor representatives were also included in the sample, at the recommendation of research participants. A summary table of the research sample is presented in Table 1.

It is acknowledged that this use of the researcher's professional contacts as an entry point in country can have an effect on subsequent networks, both in reaching and excluding participants (Clammer, 1984). While it is not possible to address the issue during the sample recruitment process, the analysis of

research findings will take into consideration the fact that specific networks have been accessed for data collection.

Table 1: Research sample

Organi-sation	Public servant	Consultant		Donor		Total
		Afghan	Intl.	Afghan	Intl.	
O1	6	1	4			11
O2	2		2			4
O3	3	1	2			6
O4	1		2			3
O5	2					2
O6	1		1			2
O7	1[3]					1
O8	2	1				3
D1				1		1
D2					1[1]	1
Total	18	3	11	1	1	34

The researcher does not have sufficient language skills to conduct the interviews in Afghanistan's native languages. Since the use of translators creates complications in itself, lack of moderate fluency in English was originally considered as a cause for exclusion from the sample. However, the importance of including people who do not have a sufficient English proficiency far outweighed these concerns. Therefore, an interpreter was used for face-to-face interviews in six instances, where respondents did not have significant command of English, to ensure the quality of sample and variation of responses. Achieving methodological rigour in such cross-language qualitative

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[3] Two interviewed, one failed to confirm consent

research was given special consideration during data collection and interpretation, as discussed in the section below.

Implications of cross-language research

Bradby (2002: 843) points to "[s]ociology's lack of interest in language" due to the pervasive lack of attention to the methodological implications of conducting cross-language research in this discipline. However, it is increasingly being recognised that interviewing via translators is a complex task, both in terms of logistics but also procedures to ensure validity of data, and ultimately – analysis (e.g. Temple, 2005; Williamson et al., 2011).

Sensitivity to language in interpreter-facilitated interview situations is critical for conducting qualitative enquiries. Translation scholars such as Reiss and Vermeer (2013) stress that it is not possible to produce a target-language text that is fully equivalent to the original. Thus the interpreter is not a neutral "technician" producing texts in different languages but a co-producer of research data, as the source text holds many semantic possibilities (Venuti, 2008: 13). Moreover, just as the researcher is "located" by the participants (Goward et al., 1984), so is the interpreter, and the researcher is generally unaware of the particular connotations associated with their interpreter.

The strategies employed to ensure validity of data generated with the help of interpreters were informed by the researcher's professional experience as a consultant in multi-cultural settings, and by the literature on qualitative cross-language methodology. To start with, an adequately qualified interpreter who was *not* part of the professional community of the research participants was recruited, to ensure that the presence of the interpreter does not inhibit participants' openness during interviews.

Consistent with recommendations in the literature (Murray and Wynne, 2001; Squires, 2009), the interpreter was also briefed to ensure that he has an adequate understanding about the purpose and topic of research, key

concepts of discussion and the interview questionnaire. This was a key lesson learned in the Afghan consultancy practice of the researcher – the quality of translation always improved when the interpreters were conceptually prepared in advance and key terms elucidated. For instance, during years of work in Afghanistan, it became apparent that key concepts such as "capacity building", or "governance" have no equivalents in the official and most widely spoken languages of Afghanistan.

Likewise, it is vital that the interview process, the interpreters' role in it, and the expectations of the researcher be thoroughly clarified ahead of the actual interview. This was important for a number of reasons: to clarify that conceptual equivalence of questions and responses is more important than verbatim translations (Squires, 2009); to discuss interpreters' natural inclination towards sanitising information when confronted with difficult or sensitive responses (Temple, 2008); and to address potential situations of loss of control. Similar situations have been experienced by the researcher in past work meetings, and they chime in with the observations Sanderson (2013) makes in research settings.

All respondents had some exposure to the English language. It was interesting to note that on occasions they would opt out of the channel of interpretation and deliver key messages directly in the best version of English they could muster. Such transitions were marked in the transcription process, and inevitably highlighted content that was emotionally loaded or considered important.

To ensure the trustworthiness of data generated, some additional procedures were followed to maintain a conceptual equivalence of translations. Prior to interviewing, the interview questionnaire was translated into Dari, and then back-translated – an effective technique for the establishment of conceptual equivalence (Hult et al., 2008; Chen and Boore, 2010). After each interpreted interview, the researcher and interpreter informally debriefed each other, reflecting on interview dynamics and findings. These technical procedures ensured the validity of data and methodological rigour.

Interview process

The interviews took place in the period August 2013 – May 2014 and the majority were conducted in Kabul. A total of 36 interviews were carried out[4] lasting approximately 90 minutes.

The interview questions were broadly structured and open-ended, following the intent of the research objective. To facilitate the establishment of a rapport, the interviews were conducted as a dialogue and the participants are asked probing questions to stimulate the dialogue. This allowed the respondents to steer the conversation into areas they consider important. According to Holloway (1997: 8), this aspect of the qualitative enquiry empowers the participants, because they "have a voice and guide the study."

The interview instrument was reviewed after the first interviews in country. The questions to the recipients and providers of technical assistance differed slightly, as they are tailored to their respective positions in the field. However, the overall interview instrument was organised around five topical areas outlined below.

Each interview started with introductions and pleasantries, followed by a discussion of the research, the interview process. Upon grant of consent to continue, respondents were asked about their educational and professional background, and their role within or in relation to the organisation. Beginning with a familiar topic served the purpose of setting the respondent at ease about the interview process, and established trust and personal connection.

The interview then turned to the respondents' lived experiences with technical assistance. This allowed them to consider the concept of capacity building, since it is unclearly defined in development practice, and without an exact equivalent in Afghanistan's languages. Borrowing from the critical incident technique (Flanagan, 1954), participants were also requested to identify the most and/or least effective occasions of capacity building they have experienced, and to reflect on them. This approach is not only particularly useful in case studies (Chell, 2004), but it also serves as a springboard for the

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[4] Two failed to confirm consent

ensuing part of the interview, with prompts arising from the respondent's narrative.

Next, participants were asked to discuss whether the workplace they operate in is conducive to workplace learning. This question seeks to discover field-related factors influencing the effectiveness of technical assistance in these settings. Again, open questions were posed, so that the scope of the answers is not predetermined.

To be true to the adopted theoretical approach, the research also sought to explore respondents' dispositions to learning and development in general, and to donor-provided capacity-building in particular. This provided valuable information about personal epistemologies but also about how the practice of capacity building is assessed and considered by both providers and recipients of aid.

This leads to the final topical area, which concerns relationships between providers and recipients of technical assistance. These questions intended to reveal the factors that are important for achieving interactional quality conducive to learning. Despite making numerous relevant comments earlier in the conversations, Afghan respondents often had difficulties broaching the subject directly. Prompts to reflect on good and bad examples from practice facilitated exploration of this issue.

Each discussion was concluded with the opportunity for the respondents to ask questions or volunteer additional information. Some interviewees took the opportunity to elaborate on matters that they felt were omitted, or were of special significance to them. A few sent e-mails with additional thoughts and examples. In general, this strategy had the dual purpose of addressing unanticipated themes, but also of reducing the power differential inherent in an interview situation, and giving respondents the opportunity to question the researcher.

Analysis of source data

The key analytic method employed in this study is thematic analysis. It involves recognition of patterns within the data set, which become the basis for further analysis and reporting (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Although rarely explicitly acknowledged as the selected analytical method in research, thematic analysis is a widely used, foundational method in qualitative enquiries (Braun and Clarke, 2006). According to Holloway and Todres (2003: 347) 'thematizing meanings' is a cross-cutting approach employed in all qualitative studies.

Compared to other available methods of analysis, thematic analysis offers a number of advantages which make it suitable for this research. First, it is compatible with a range of theoretical paradigms, unlike methods such as grounded theory, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, or discourse analysis. Such "theoretical freedom" (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 78) allows the present study to generate a detailed and rich account of the individual and contextual factors affecting workplace learning in Afghanistan by applying Bourdieu's theory of practice.

Thematic analysis also allows for flexibility in the ways patterns are identified. For instance, Ryan and Bernard (2003) describe twelve techniques of theme identification, which are frequently combined in practice. As Braun and Clarke (2006) report, themes and their prevalence are determined in a number of ways, and individual researchers have to make judgement calls in the process. In contrast to methods such as content analysis, even single comments can be occasionally deemed as important as ones repeated frequently.

An advantage of thematic analysis is that it can be used with language forms produced by non-native English respondents (Guest et al., 2011), and across large volumes of textual data sets from different sources (Elo and Kyngäs, 2008). This is of benefit to the current research, as it seeks common patterns and themes across individual interviews of providers and recipients of capacity building interventions in Afghanistan, documentary evidence including project and organisational evaluations and policy statements, as well as media pieces.

In comparison, grounded theory would be logistically prohibitive for such large data sets (Guest et al., 2011) and geographically disbursed respondents.

The analytical approach of this research shares the inductive qualities of the grounded theory method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A 'bottom up' approach to pattern identification is recommended for the study of phenomena, which are understudied or where the existing knowledge is fragmented, as in the case of the present research question. In both grounded theory and thematic analysis, induction ensures that themes are strongly linked to raw data, and interpretation is congruent with them (Patton, 1990).

However, in departure from pure grounded theory, this study acknowledges that coding, pattern identification and analysis cannot be conducted in "an epistemological vacuum" (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Themes come from both the source material and the researcher's apriori theoretical commitments and interests (Ryan and Bernard, 2003); as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) note, the first themes are often encoded in the interview instrument. To claim that themes just emerge during analysis would be to deny the active role of the researcher in the process.

To ensure transparency of analytical method, the current research combines deductive coding based on Bourdieu's theoretical framework, with inductive coding emerging form the data (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Broad code categories sourcing from the theoretical framework were developed prior to in-depth data analysis and two interviews were used to test the applicability of the categories to the data. These broad categories were entered as parent nodes in NVivo, which was used to aid in managing and analysing data. However, pre-defined categories did not confine the coding and analytical process: in the process of coding, data-driven codes were generated as either sub-categories (child nodes), or as new parent nodes.

To maximise the potential for discovery of themes and concepts, the materials were coded in an order that allowed for maximum contrast between sources (Bazeley, 2007). Pattern identification and analysis included search for repetitions, comparisons of code frequencies, identification of code co-occurrences, as well as analysis of metaphors and analogies (Guest et al.,

2011). As in grounded theory, salient categories of meaning were continually compared (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). To ensure theoretical and methodological unity, the analysis was also mindful of Bourdieu's insistence on relational analysis (Everett, 2002), that is to say the attention to the interaction between the structures of the field and habitus, and the resultant practices (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). These techniques allowed for an iterative progression from description to interpretation, and coherent exploration of the case of workplace learning in Afghanistan's public sector.

While offering significant advantages to the researcher, thematic analysis raises questions in terms of its reliability and validity. Defining codes and themes involves judgement and interpretation on the side of the researcher, and as Dey (1993) observes, "[t]here are as many ways of 'seeing' the data as one can invent" (pp. 110–11).

To address these concerns and to ensure quality of research, a number of protocols were developed and applied at all stages of analysis. For instance, decisions how to transcribe translated text and latent content such as sighs and laughter were taken prior to the transcription process and applied systematically. Codes were given definitions and assigned rules of inclusion. Researcher's decisions related to theme identification were made explicit and reviewed for internal homogeneity and external heterogeneity (Patton, 1990).

As a number of scholars note, a useful technique for single researchers to assess the trustworthiness of their analysis is member checking (e.g. Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Saldaña, 2012). In keeping with this recommendation, preliminary findings were presented to one interviewee, for their confirmation or revision. To further strengthen robustness of findings, Yin (2004) suggests that it is essential to triangulate data and outline converging lines of evidence. This measure was applied by comparing themes and associations across interviews, and between documentary and interview source data.

In advancing the discussion on the validity, credibility and trustworthiness of research, the next and part of this chapter will turn to the analysing subject. As Sword (1999: 277) maintains, "no research is free of the biases, assumptions, and personality of the researcher", and this is especially true for

qualitative enquiries, where the researcher is closely involved in both the process and product of research.

The researcher

Over the last two decades self-scrutiny and reflexivity have become a prime strategy for quality control and for enhancing the ethics of a study in qualitative research (Finlay, 2002; Blaxter et al., 2006; Ahmed et al., 2010; Berger, 2013). In terms of its relevance to the case study method, Stake acknowledges that, "it may be the case's own story, but … the criteria of representation ultimately are decided by the researcher" (1994: 240).

In this respect, an important practical device offered by Bourdieu (2003) and adopted by this research is 'participant objectivation,' or subjecting the researcher to the same rigorous scientific examination as the object of study. This requires that the researcher consciously attempt to consider alternative explanations and perspectives, systematically interrogate the findings and practice 'radical doubt' against assumptions and pre-constructed categories (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) in the process of collecting and analysing the evidence. Such an approach demands from the researcher to exercise consistently heightened reflexivity, and involves methodical attempts to understand and overcome important researcher-induced biases in all stages of study (Everett, 2002).

First according to Bourdieu is the *social bias*, or the impact of the social origins and experiences of the analysing subject (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Factors to consider include gender, race, age, religious beliefs, ideological stances, personal experiences, linguistic tradition, and emotional responses to research. For instance, Reinharz (1997) identifies approximately 20 different 'selves' in her study of communal settlements in Israel, each having a potential impact on the production of knowledge.

The pertinence of social bias to the current study is significant for a number of reasons. The researcher is a Christian woman operating in a Muslim society,

which adheres to different standards for accepted female behaviour. This might have had an impact on the establishment of rapport with some Afghan male interviewees, although professional and research experience showed that attitudes to foreign women are more liberal than those to Afghan women.

Perhaps more importantly, through her past work as a development consultant and an advisor to an ex-minister in one of the research sites, the researcher is also a partial insider. Studying the familiar offers advantages of understanding the field and perhaps the nuanced reactions of participants (Kacen and Chaitin, 2006; Padgett, 2008) but it also introduces risks of projecting own perceptions and explanations, and overlooking aspects of respondent's experiences (Drake, 2010; Berger, 2013). Personal histories, such as the fact that the researcher is a national of a state which was itself a recipient of aid, might have as an effect heightened sensitivity to power differentials in international development.

The analyst is also prone to *field bias*. The research is directed at a particular audience within Western academia, in order to fulfil the requirements for acceptance of a thesis of this nature. The expected audience of this study will clearly have an impact on the representations it produces. Associated with this is also the *theoreticist or intellectualist* bias, or the tendency to ignore the gap between theory/observation and practice (Wacquant, 1989) and undermine practical logic at the expense of theoretical observation.

The researcher's presence cannot be eliminated. However, it can be turned into a resource if adequate strategies for "personal self-supervision" (Berger, 2013: 4) are employed throughout the research process. For instance, the researcher had prepared a list of her pre-suppositions, which was consulted during the data collection and analysis process. Member checking drew attention to potential biases and misinterpretations. Following techniques suggested by Schatzman and Strauss (1973), a journal was kept to track field notes during data collection but also to register emotional reactions and reasoning (Padgett, 2008). A sample of recorded interviews was listened to specifically to assess the researcher's performance as an interviewer. The data, transcribed verbatim and entered into a computerised data base, was

revisited a few weeks after the original analysis to ascertain the validity of findings, as per Berger's (2013) recommendation. Thus the consistent process of self-analysis served as "accountable reflexivity" (Gill, 1995), supporting a meaningful and rigorous construction of research claims.

Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations ran through all phases of the project, and in that the researcher was guided by the University of Leicester's Research Ethics Code of Conduct.

Consent to participate was gained formally, with interviewees asked to read and sign a written consent form and an information sheet, retaining a copy for themselves. To accommodate Afghan respondents, the consent form and the information sheet were translated into Dari ahead of the interviews. Where an interpreter was necessary, participants were asked for their agreement, and the interpreter co-signed the consent form guaranteeing anonymity and confidentiality. In the majority of the cases the availability of a Dari version was taken favourably, with a couple of exceptions when the respondents felt slightly nervous, because the process was too reminiscent of government bureaucratic procedures.

In a few cases consent was granted verbally and confirmed in writing by e-mail after the discussion, either due to time limitations or where the interviews were conducted via Skype. Despite stated intentions to the contrary, two of the interviewees failed to confirm their consent, and their data was destroyed. One respondent did not feel comfortable with having the conversation recorded, so detailed notes were taken by the researcher. The notes were then sent to them for review and comments.

All reported data was anonymised, and any information that could be used to identify a certain individual participant was disguised. The participants in this research are referred to by interview codes, with the following prefixes for simplicity: '*Af*' denoting Afghan civil servants, '*AfCo*' Afghan consultants, '*Fo*' foreign respondents, and '*Do*' respondents working for donor agencies. Three particular cases were given more prominence in the discussion, and

pseudonyms chosen by the researcher were used for more clarity. Where contextually relevant, brief biographies or personal stories are provided within the text, and an anonymised profile of each interviewee is provided in Appendix 1.

The researcher complied with relevant legal and ethical standards for data protection and data storage. Digital data was stored on a secure server, it was password protected and encrypted. Hard copy records were kept in a locked cabinet at a secure location. Upon completion of the research, all data in digital and hard format was destroyed.

In addition to interviews, this study uses data from publicly available documentation, on occasions referring to interventions that are still ongoing. While participants' anonymity is fully protected, it was considered that triangulation with public data might point at the practices of a particular development agency. The research was therefore deemed somewhat politically sensitive. A partial embargo was requested, reasoning that by the time it is lifted all discussed project interventions would have come to an end.

Finally, the research considered the security risks associated with undertaking research in Afghanistan. A set of proposed risk mitigation measures was endorsed by the University of Leicester, and subsequently applied to reduce the risk faced by the researcher to acceptable levels.

Chapter 4: Field-related factors, findings and discussion

This Chapter considers the key contextual factors that influence the effectiveness of donor-funded workplace learning interventions within the Afghan public sector.

As highlighted in the review of the literature, the characteristics of the environments where learning occurs exert an influence on workers' engagement with learning, and on its application in daily work practices (Fuller and Unwin, 2004; Felstead et al., 2009; Manuti et al., 2015). In this respect Afghan public sector organisations present a specific challenge, because the way they operate is modified by the pervasive presence of aid (e.g. Bebbington, 2004). It was flagged earlier that Afghanistan is heavily reliant on overseas donor agencies for direct budgetary support, technical assistance in the daily work of government, and provision of developmental opportunities for local staff (Poole, 2014).

The co-habitation of structures of aid and government, and its potential impact on learning have not yet been the prime focus of attention in either development or workplace learning studies. In line with the adopted theoretical framework, the analysis of the contextual factors that afford or inhibit workplace learning in Afghanistan will be aided by Bourdieu's concept of *field.* He suggests that the field is a pragmatic epistemic tool for analysis of complexity, as it is operationalised as a

> "system of relations among selected, abstracted, and simplified properties which is deliberately constructed for purposes of description, exposition and prediction and which is therefore kept under full control" (Bourdieu et al., 1991: 52).

The field is delimited by field-specific rules and forms of capital (Bourdieu, 1994). For the purposes of this study, the concept is operationalised as a heuristic device denoting the Afghan bureaucracy, and the international development industry. The Chapter begins by outlining the key particularities of

the Afghan bureaucratic field after the fall of the Taliban in 2001. This provides a useful backdrop for the ensuing analysis of specific field-related factors, comprising discussions of the work environment and intervention design as key identified influencers for learning and transfer.

Particularities of the Afghan bureaucratic field

According to Bourdieu et al. (1991) and Hilgers and Mangez (2015), understanding the "specific logic of the field" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 108) involves turning an analytical lens on three core elements: 1) the field's relative autonomy, 2) the structure of positions within it, and 3) its symbolic order.

In analysing the genesis and structure of the bureaucratic field, Bourdieu maintains that "the state is the culmination of a process of concentration of different species of capital… which enables the state to exercise power over the different fields" (Bourdieu et al., 1994: 4). The Afghan state clearly diverges from the cases analysed by Bourdieu, as it has experienced acute aid dependency since 2002. While economic dependency is not the only measure of lack of autonomy, it is a fundamental one: as the current president of Afghanistan observed, "the ratio of domestic revenue to foreign assistance in a state's budget … provides a straightforward measurement of the degree of a state's sovereignty" (Ghani et al., 2005: 7).

The deficit of autonomy in the Afghan bureaucratic field can be detected in its highest level policy and strategy making post-2001. Most significantly, the country subscribed to a neoliberal economic development model (IRoA, 2004) despite misgivings amongst the Afghan elite about its applicability and desirability (OTF, 2005). An insider analysis of the influencing factors and challenges in the formulation of Afghanistan's National Development Strategy (IRoA, 2008a) concludes that the adoption of neoliberalism as doxa (Bourdieu, 1977) was largely due to the conditionalities and imperatives of external fields – those of 'Western' financiers:

"[This was] written primarily by foreign experts and manifests the vision of international funding organisations rather than representing a purely indigenous development and poverty reduction plan for Afghanistan. The Afghan Government remained under immense pressure from the IMF, the World Bank, USAID and other major funding organisations to adopt specific policies" (Shah, 2009: 27).

This is just one example of the numerous "doxic battles" (Esteves and Assunção, 2014: 1781) that take place in the subordinated Afghan bureaucratic field, ranging from high level policy-setting to defining the role, objectives and way of working of individual government departments. Battle lines are fluid, as competition over development visions characterises not only the donor-recipient dyad, but it also occurs amongst donors espousing different traditions of governance.

As shown later, this situation has a profound effect on the work environment in which learning is supposed to occur, as 'doxic battles' translate into conflicting strategies for development espoused by the agents in the field. Furthermore, donor-funded capacity development programmes are developed by various donors in line with diverse donor understandings of the sequencing and objectives of Afghan workplace learning, which introduces challenges in terms of intervention design and implementation.

A deficit of field autonomy is also manifested when other fields exert an effect on the structure of positions in the field under question. As Wacquant observes, a bureaucratic field is customarily made up of "'higher state nobility'" of policy-makers such as the President, ministers and deputy ministers, and "'lower state nobility' of executants attached to the traditional missions of government" (Wacquant, 2009: 289). In an effort to compensate for the lack of Afghan government capacity, donor agencies have supported a succession of programmes providing salary top-ups to what are considered more important job categories (World Bank, 2011). As a result, incumbents of the same grade position within the same ministry might receive salaries with tenfold difference, creating various classes of civil servants.

Furthermore, donor programmes aimed at supporting the government are mostly delivered by means of projects (Kadirova, 2014), which are nested in public sector institutions. Projects are implemented by local and international consultants and consultancies, which according to a World Bank's review of Afghanistan's public service has created a "second civil service," an army of non-state actors, "externally-funded consultants and advisers" (World Bank, 2008: 22).

In relation to this last point, it is important to note that in Afghanistan there are no firm organising principles that link or hierarchize the project in relation to other positions in the field. Projects and consultants operate simultaneously in the recipient and donor fields. Depending on their objectives, they can work simultaneously with one or more parts of the same ministry, and with representatives of the 'higher' and/or 'lower state nobility' within the field. They also interact with other projects, as some of the participating ministries had close to ten projects funded by different funding agencies and running in parallel. Thus aid has created new positions in the Afghan public sector field by supplementing the bureaucracy with external, non-state actors and by splintering the 'state nobility' (Wacquant, 2009) by means of salary top-ups.

As Figure 5 illustrates, Afghan government agencies supported by aid are characterised by a complex field geography with multiplicity of players and rules originating from the imperatives of different fields – that of the host Afghan government and those of the various donors: "*ADB have one procurement process, World Bank has another procurement process, the Government of Afghanistan has another, DFID another. We are lost*" (Af2). The fluidity of field positions and lack of alignment of systems and rules only accentuates the challenges recipients face when attempting to manage projects within their own field, and make sense of the ever changing environment in which they operate: "*you do not know when they* [projects] *have come, and when they have gone. Even the report is not with us*" (Af2).

Figure 5: Interaction of recipient and donor fields in Afghanistan
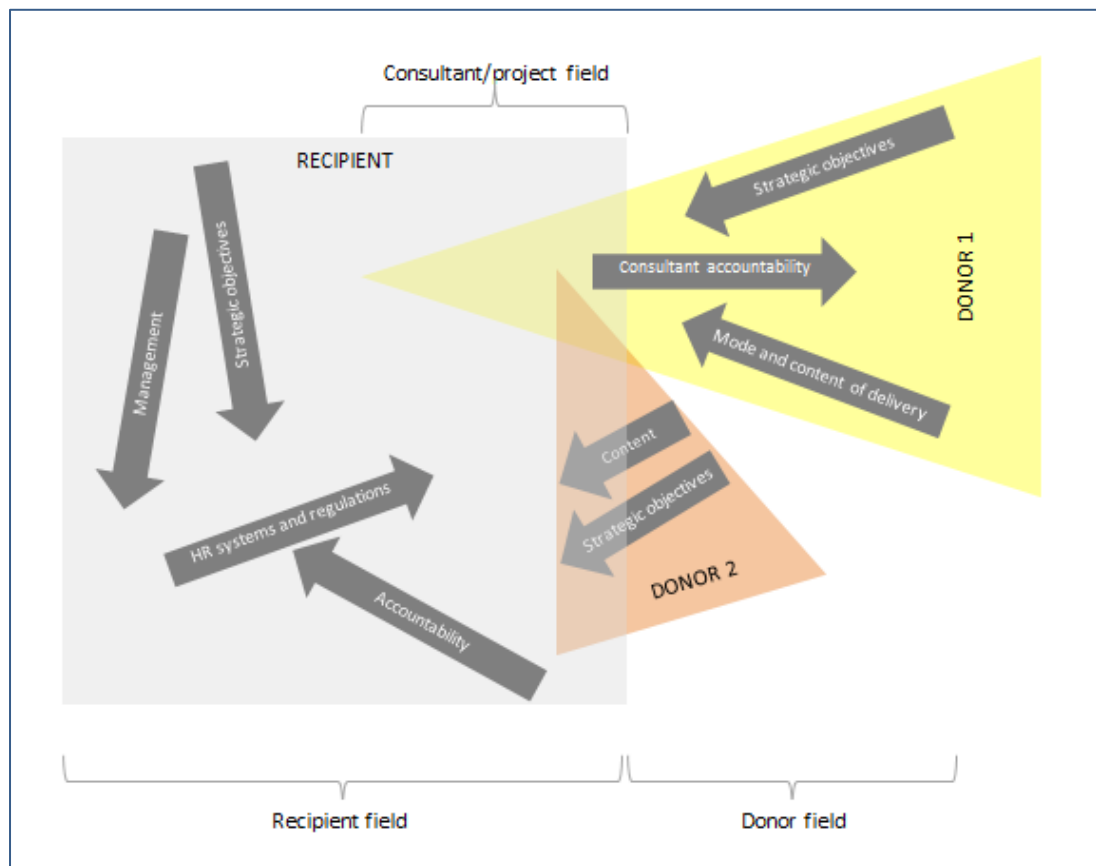
Walking down the corridors of Afghan ministries, one can often spot the blast-proof, reinforced doors of the offices occupied by projects which stand out from the rest. While this picture indicates the pervasiveness of the project model, it also points at something else – the potential changes in the symbolic order that aid has effected in these organisations. Hilgers and Mangez (2014) note that the symbolic order needs to be distinguished from the social order, as it is constructed cognitively at the level of meaning, rather than on the objective structuring of the positions within a field.

The issue of the symbolic order in the public sector organisations is interesting, as the Afghan bureaucratic field is objectively endowed with democratic legitimacy (or specific statist capital), which is clearly not attainable to donors and non-state players. As the review of the mainstream development literature demonstrated, in the past development attempted to bypass the developing

states outright (e.g. Bauer, 1969) but for two and a half decades now strengthening recipient state institutions has been seen as a necessary factor for development (Kahler, 1990). It was highlighted earlier that the concepts of recipient ownership, participation and partnership have become part of the mainstream discursive practices of international aid institutions (UN, 1991).

Thus the language of ownership lends legitimacy to donor interventions. The largest bilateral donor in the country states that it "supports Afghan-led development and the capacity of institutions to advocate for and implement society-led reforms" (USAID, 2015). Yet, as Kothari (2005) notes, such donor discourses often mask a symbolic order of dominance over recipients of aid. This is exemplified by AfCo2, who described the practices of a project funded by the very same donor as follows: "*Our Minister wanted to go over there, and visit the* [project] *building. He was not allowed. Within his own Ministry, he is the Minister, and he is not allowed to visit his office!*"

An effect of the symbolic order in the field is that it complicates the internal systems of accountability. As Af2 remarked, "*they say,' it is government of Afghanistan money', but when you're coming to buy a cup of coffee, they will say,' take approval from* [donor capital]*"*. More poignantly, capacity building interventions are designed and funded by donors, and consultants are contractually bound to report to them but not necessarily to the recipient agencies. As the World Bank analysis of the Afghan public service notes, the 'second civil service' is "only loosely supervised if at all by the government" (World Bank, 2008), which will be shown to have a significant effect on learning outcomes. Meanwhile aid agencies are subject to accountability relationships belonging to an entirely external governance system, as they are held responsible for the use of their taxpayers' money.

This brief outline shows that the internal logic of the Afghan bureaucratic field - its relative autonomy, its symbolic order and its positions, has been considerably modified by the imperatives of other, more dominant fields. As Hilgers and Mangez (2014) suggest, once such particularities are identified, one needs to examine how they "affect the 'internal' characteristics of the goods produced and consumed" (Hilgers and Mangez, 2015: 19) within the

field. It is therefore to the field factors that affect the production of workplace learning that the discussion turns next.

Work environment

Afghan and overseas research participants identified an array of issues influencing the effectiveness of technical assistance for workplace learning but the majority of responses pointed at themes associated with the characteristics of the field. There was a convergence in the views expressed, in that all groups talked about two categories of contextual factors – those pertaining to the workplace, and those related to the way learning interventions are designed and delivered. As discussed in the literature review, this broad classification of influencing variables is consistent with extant research on learning and transfer (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; De Rijdt et al., 2013).

The first of the two broad categories of factors – the work environment, is considered to be amongst the most complex contextual influencers of learning (Lancaster et al., 2013). It refers to the broader characteristics of the field, and whether they create a conducive environment for learning and application of learning on the job. As discussed earlier, the importance of the organisation as a site for learning has received a great deal of attention in the workplace learning literature, for instance Fuller and Unwin (2004) talk about expansive and restrictive learning environments, and Billett (2002) writes about the importance of workplace affordances.

Work environment factors identified by the participants in this research were consistent with the established findings of the transfer literature (Baldwin and Ford, 1988; Burke and Saks, 2009) – many mentioned the availability of supervisory support, opportunity to perform, and accountability to use new skills and knowledge. Yet these factors were overshadowed by themes that are either understudied in the learning literature originating in the West, or emanate entirely from the specific logic of the donor-funded Afghan bureaucratic field.

For instance, the alignment of learning interventions with organisational strategies has been hypothesized as a learning and transfer influencer but

considered in need of more rigorous research (Burke and Hutchins, 2007). This study found that links between learning and strategy was of high importance in development settings. In addition, research participants highlighted the role of the organisational top management for authoritative coordination of development players and learning interventions, a factor, which has received limited attention in the learning literature. Donor oversight and the quality of project management were factors sourcing from the particularities of the field.

The vast majority of work environment factors were experienced as inhibitors to learning but there were also some cases in which workplace characteristics have afforded substantial learning outcomes. Analysis of these success stories is particularly illuminating, as not only do they indicate the importance of isolated factors but also allow analysing those factors relationally. For that reason this discussion will be aided by the positive experiences shared by Mahmood (elsewhere Af15), whose story is summarised below. A significant part of his observations was endorsed by AfCo3, who leads a technical assistance project in the same organisation.

Box 1: Mahmood

Mahmood is an Afghan male in his 30s. He has worked for one of the key ministries in the health and social care sector for more than 10 years now. His work was only interrupted by a period when he attained a second Master's degree on a scholarship in the UK. He is a fluent English-speaker, who comes across as a confident individual proud of his work.

Mahmood started his career at the Ministry on a project, becoming fully familiar with the systems of various donor agencies. Soon afterwards he was appointed as an employee of the Ministry on a top-up salary. Since then Mahmood has held three successive director's positions, based on a decision by the Ministry's top management to rotate its most successful directors, so they can build capacity internally and strengthen different directorates. This is a strategy not observed in any of the other organisations included in the research.

The interview took place in Mahmood's office, which is very different from other managers' offices visited by the researcher in Afghanistan. Most surprising is

that this is an open plan, shared space, lacking the usual TV set running muted in the background. When queried, Mahmood reminisced about his early days as a director, changing the office furniture provided by the Ministry, throwing out the status symbols and inviting in his colleagues, because "*I believe, you know, if you are among your staff*". This people-orientation indicates dispositions to supervisory support to subordinate staff. It is somewhat unusual in the hierarchised Afghan public sector, where managers are described by a participant as "*little warlords. Each one of them*" (Fo6).

Mahmood has headed his current directorate since its establishment six years ago. Its mandate is to undertake complex policy analyses of a type, which is entirely new to the Government of Afghanistan. As a measure of the Directorate achievements, AfCo3 notes that "*they worked on some of the* [sector] *analysis already… they did it themselves. If this was done by internationals, it would cost millions*".

To get to this point, Mahmood realised he needed a tailored staff development programme – "*we did not have even one* [expert] *in the country. The first action was, you know, to develop a capacity building plan.*" With the blessing of his top management, Mahmood formulated a proposal for long-term support to a major bilateral donor. His awareness of donor workings allowed him to negotiate their systems, and secure a much needed technical assistance package to the Directorate.

The elements of Mahmood's capacity development programme were agreed jointly by the Ministry and the donor: "[donor] *liked the idea and they helped us to make a plan as comprehensive as possible*". It includes a variety of learning interventions, from staff enrolment into a part-time degree course with a customised curriculum, alignment of job tasks with university assignments, and short- and long-term on-the-job training and coaching provided by consultants. Currently his directorate is considered "*strong and capable*" (AfCo3), and his model was emulated by other Ministry directors: "*some other units, they were inspired by this model*" (Mahmood).

Strategic link

When discussing the factors for this success, Mahmood was inattentive to his own role in it, and largely ignored issues of inter-personal interaction with donors and consultants. He considered the wide ministerial environment the main enabler in his work. He emphasized time and again that in the early 2000s his organisation formulated a strategy for the sector, which was endorsed by the donors, and which has been implemented ever since. He considered the availability of a government vision as a foundational factor, because "*if you don't have a plan, then you have the plan of donors*". Having an indigenous plan has thus become key in maintaining his field's relative autonomy.

Moreover, Mamood directly associated the effectiveness of technical assistance programmes for workplace learning with the availability of a strategic direction, and the degree to which interventions support articulated organisational goals:

> *Sometimes when I see that capacity is not existing in a specific unit, I don't blame the donors. I always blame our strategies, our plans, that we were not able to bring donors on board to support that specific area. To get the maximum level of productivity from their contribution.*

As discussed in Chapter Two, the strategic link, or the extent to which interventions support organisational goals and strategies, has been identified as a factor for learning in need of further research (Burke and Hutchins, 2008; De Rijdt et al., 2013). While the importance of strategic direction remains a relatively understudied area of learning research in the developed world, it was a very prominent factor featured in the responses of all categories of participants in this research.

The importance of this factor emanates from the particularities of the aid-supported Afghan bureaucratic field, and in particular the subordinated position of the government and the multiplicity of external players promoting agendas of different strategic intent (see Figure 5). Table 2 below provides some

illustrative quotes from participants in different ministries organised by respondent group.

Table 2: Illustrative quotes: learning and strategic link

Afghan civil servants	Internationals	National advisors
Af13: *Those ministries where we have strong leaders, visionary leaders, they can envision their own skills, and they can develop their own skills. But those ministries with the very traditional leaders, they don't have the vision...* Af4: *It was really hard to get everybody's agreement on it* [policy] *because all the donors, even the big five donors had their own strategies.* Af7: *Unfortunately the ministries, they have not done any analysis of the situation themselves. But projects they have their own targets, to spend their own money, and to show their result… It is not aligned with the priorities of the Ministry.* Af16: *In some ministries, no system. There is the boss, the system belongs to that person…if you have two systems and build from both systems...* Af18: *They* [foreigners] *are*	Fo9: *Everybody was working towards their own objectives, and in fact there were huge ideological disagreements between the donors…there was no strength of leadership from the Ministry itself.* Fo8: *First of all you have to have a vision, you have to visualize what this structure will look like and then slowly, slowly you prepare a blueprint, then you see how this blueprint is to be structured, then you put in resources and you arrange resources.* Fo5: *… the ground is not fertile you know, so donor effort we put in, we don't find the motivated managements that can actually transform the organisation, cannot be done from the donor side I guess, you know, it must*	AfCo1*: But then at the leadership level, there should be a plan laid out, to say, here is the template, here is the speed at which we are going to go. And I think that wasn't there.* AfCo_2: *[C]apacity building is not aligned with the Ministry's mission or core objectives. They are not.*

fencing a huge area and putting their flag, a soldier and no one knows what they're doing. The international community should have created a developmental committee comprising of Afghans and experts from abroad, to identify the priority needs of the Afghans.	*come from inside.* Fo11*: … I kinda likened it to being in an emergency room as a battlefield doctor, you deal with what is in front of you and you don't have a time to think strategy.*	

The respondents' feedback suggests that the degree to which a recipient organisation has a direction of its own, and the degree of donors' buy-in into that direction (conversely, the absence of "doxic battles" (Esteves and Assunção, 2014: 1781), is an indicator of the relative autonomy of the organisational field where learning takes place. More autonomous fields, such as Mahmood's, exert a positive influence on the whole learning chain, from project design, to project implementation and utilisation of new skills.

Recipient top management

In his account, Mahmood associated the success of his organisational strategy with the commitment and engagement of his top managers, or the organisational 'higher state nobility'(Wacquant, 2009) .

For instance, Mahmood explained that his organisation maintains a high-level consultative mechanism with donor agencies, where "*a Minister or a Deputy Minister was attending the meetings*" and "*the Ministry was, you know pushing this idea that we need x, y, z.*" In this forum the Afghan recipients articulated demands for learning and support, and influenced the design and objectives of the various capacity building interventions they receive. According to the respondent, this process was supported by internal ministerial policy setting out "*certain criteria, when departments can ask for technical assistance. To justify and certify the presence of consultants.*"

The availability of effective systems for engagement with donor agencies, and the commitment of the organisational top management to the engagement process, has made it possible for Mahmood's organisation to steer aid in line with its vision. This practice, however, is in stark contrast with the experiences of the majority of Afghan respondents, reflected in the following comment made by Af11:

> *Most of the time you get a project that is already designed, you know. Somewhere someone had an idea about how this Ministry needed to be fixed… There were times when I was introduced to a project team leader, who was supposed to work with my department, without me even knowing that. That the project is coming. Without even knowing if I need that sort of support or not. (Af11)*

Many Afghan respondents attributed the misalignment of capacity building objectives and organisational strategies to failures in host government management systems. Af8's statement represents the gist of the comments provided by other participants: "*The donors are donors. Their own laws and principles. But we have to be ready to receive. To organise, to guide this, the negotiation, conversation, relationship*" (Af8).

Indeed, the role of managers has been identified as an important influencer in the literature (e.g. Grossman and Salas, 2011). However, it has been analysed chiefly with a view of the supervisor, the figure of authority proximal to where the learning intervention occurs and engaged with pre- and post-training goal setting (Taylor et al., 2005; Burke and Hutchins, 2007). Rather, the research participants referred to the more distal *role of the top managers in the Afghan public administration*.

This theme was particularly prominent among the Afghan civil servants, the majority of whom supported Af6's contention that "*the Afghan side was absolutely responsible for this failure* [of capacity building].*"* They spoke at length about the inability of the 'higher state nobility' to articulate a compelling strategy, or to steer technical assistance in line with an existing strategy and encourage utilisation of learning opportunities provided by donors. According to

Af7, one of the most significant challenges in this respect was top managers' lack of understanding of how donors operate:

"There is a minister, he doesn't know what is technical assistance... How to work with donors. How to ask them. How to monitor what they're doing" (Af2).

Research participants identified a range of symptoms of top management failure that have had a negative influence on the outcomes of capacity building projects. The more salient and recurring themes include lack of oversight of project activities and plans, exemplified by Af11's reflections of what she considered a failing technical assistance project with a budget exceeding USD40 million: *"there is not a single person in the whole Ministry who is following what is happening with this massive project". (Af11).* Others pointed at the absence of cross-government institutional mechanisms and policies to manage aid, a mechanism widely used in other developing jurisdictions*: "In Nepal they have a policy as a country how to manage this assistance. The Civil Service Commission doesn't have it, ministries too"* (Af7).

Perhaps the most significant factor associated with recipient top management failure was inability to coordinate the activities of donor-funded projects. If managing one donor intervention is challenging enough, it does not begin to compare with the complexities of a situation in which numerous projects funded by a variety of donors set out to develop recipient capacities simultaneously. It is important to remember that in this melting pot, the host government is the only player endowed with democratic legitimacy and therefore with the authority to coordinate and guide various overseas actors.

Moreover, the non-state actors occupy positions that are not clearly organised and defined in relation to the established hierarchy. This has created challenging organisational environments that are difficult to make sense of:

The problem we've got at the Ministry is you have maybe seven change management or institutional development projects which are not well aligned … And everybody wants to align their processes with the

[Ministry] *but they really just want to make sure that they can pick the bits of the* [Ministry] *process that align with their own and then they can just add the additional things...(Fo1)*

Mahmood provided the only contrasting account across the sample, indicating that his organisational practices were fairly atypical. According to this respondent, "*the success point for the Ministry was that it defined the positions and roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.*" Higher field autonomy has enabled his Ministry to exercise effective authoritative coordination of project and consultants in his organisational field, which yielded better learning outcomes:

So everybody, <u>everybody</u> knew why they are there, what they are doing, what are the expectations, what are the targets. So in this way the Ministry was able to, you know, convince donors, to build the capacity of the Ministry. (Mahmood)

Overseas and Afghan respondents shared Af1's view that the more usual lack of coordination amongst projects "*had an immense and negative impact on the effectiveness of capacity building*". As indicated in Figure 5, this has created situations, in which projects duplicate their efforts: "You *have a ton of projects, different donors in the Ministry, and many times like five of them are doing the same thing and you never know" (Fo7).*

Lack of coordination also means that different projects, conceived in different donor capitals may impart conflicting views of how things should be done to the same recipients. Fo9 evoked his experiences in an economic management ministry, where American and British consultants were developing in parallel policy development and implementation capacities in accord with their rather different understanding of how this process occurs in respectively a presidential system and in a parliamentary government: *"USAID has done USAID development. DFID has done DFID development. Germans have done German development. They've all done their own development".*

Donor oversight

It is expected that the absence of Afghan top management commitment would be somewhat compensated by adequate donor oversight mechanisms over their capacity building interventions. Yet both Afghan and overseas participants talked about lack of donor attention to the learning processes they fund. For instance, reflecting on his experiences with an abundant number of projects and advisors funded by multiple donors, Af13 made a general observation that they had "*no strategy how to transfer their skills and competencies to the* [Ministry]." The broader point on the absence of donors' strategic intent was attributed to unrealistic expectations and lack of cohesive understanding of what it means to develop capacity in a challenging environment such Afghanistan.

Reminiscing about his first engagement with Afghanistan in 2002, Fo9 described funding agencies' perceptions of the country in those early days as a land of opportunity for wide-sweeping transformation: "*It was all seen as a blank piece of paper that donors can write upon. This open prairie, this wide horizon that looked so blank and flat, turned out it was actually full of obstacles and problems*". Similarly, AfCo1 commented "*I am not sure of the international community went in with some really specific goals of what it means to raise capacity…I think it was just, OK, let's just throw some money and, erm develop capacity, whatever that means*".

At present there is little evidence that the capacity building approach of international aid agencies has evolved significantly since the start of the post-Taliban development efforts in Afghanistan some 14 years ago. This perspective was particularly highlighted by overseas advisors with longer-term exposure to development work in the country, reflecting observations made over time and across government institutions and donor agencies. For example, Fo8 remarked, "*I don't see any thinking in the capacity building programmes even today which is different from what it was in 2005 or 2006*".

Publicly available documentary evidence also indicates insufficient donor efforts to translate accumulated country experience into more effective capacity building work. As an illustration, an umbrella programme for public

administration reform of a major bilateral donor started in 2010 with a key stated objective to develop and adopt an evidence-based strategy for a more sustainable approach to capacity development in Afghanistan. A 2013 completion review of the programme shows that in the course of its implementation, this objective was downgraded and its impact weighting slumped from 25% to 5%. In the end, the output was dropped altogether, as it was decided that this activity would suit better a different donor[5].

This example directs attention to the gap between donor discursive practices (capacity building as a key developmental priority) and actual practices (capacity building as a slogan), noted by research participants across the sample. For instance, Fo9's comment below suggests a long lineage of learning interventions, which have not been designed, thought out and monitored effectively:

> *There is a lot of rhetoric about capacity building but the reality is, if it were really so important to us, then we would have a means to measure what we are achieving, we would have a process that have been thought through, we would have qualifications, we would have assessment, we would have proper accountability structures and all the rest of it. Those are the signals of something being important.*

The contradiction between rhetoric and practice is largely driven by the structure of the foreign aid bureaucratic field. A key factor militating against adequate attention to the complex process and uncertain outputs of capacity building efforts is the pressure on aid officials to disburse money fast: as Easterly (2002) reminds us, this is a central measure of their performance metrics. Based on technical assistance work in two ministries, Fo3 made a similar observation of the Afghan context: "*The donors wanna look good for the capitals, and they just want to spend money, even though… the sustainability may not be so clear*".

Moreover, to maintain political viability before their principals (electorate and legislature of donor country) and to secure future budgets, aid administrations

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[5] Source withheld, available on request

need to 'move money' in a demonstrably efficient and successful manner (Hout, 2012). Given this incentive structure, the emphasis is placed not only on easily observable outputs, but also on outputs that can mitigate the risk of visible failure: *"the donors, in my opinion, just are compliance oriented. They wanna meet certain metrics and they cheat to get those metrics"* (Fo3). Thus the complex, time-consuming and uncertain endeavour of capacity building is accommodated by proxies guaranteeing positive outputs, such as number of trainees or instructional sessions held. This explains the all-round limited attention to, and the lack of in-house expertise to understand critical issues such as intervention design for workplace learning to be discussed shortly.

All of these ingredients have made capacity building one of the most pervasive but ill-defined and least judiciously accounted for donor-funded project activities. Both Afghan and overseas participants were in a general agreement with this assertion. For instance, Fo2 noted that capacity building has become one of the easiest ways to burn resources. He described how a project running out of time to utilise its budget "*suddenly got an urge*" to invest heavily in capacity building activities: "*There's two million dollars in a pot to spend, and so they've changed emphasis… and* (laughs) *they've got a really intensive training program*".

In practice development agencies are mostly equipped and incentivised to focus on the hard metrics of financial and project management. As a recent review of UK aid states, donor drive to produce measurable results and demonstrate cost-effectiveness has skewed their attention towards quantity of results over their quality, and away from the overarching objective of "achieving genuine and lasting impact" (ICAI, 2015: i). In this sense, otherwise positive commitments like UK's newly adopted law (2015) to spend 0.7% of its gross national income on aid annually are more than likely to increase the push to spend, and deteriorate the marginal quality of aid and capacity building services delivered. As Fo9 commented, "*In discussion with* [aid officer] *about the 0.7% spending commitment, she described it as a 'poisoned chalice' that* [donor] *'would live to regret.'*"

Project management

This brings the analysis to another prominent management-related influencer of the effectiveness of technical assistance for workplace learning in the Afghan bureaucratic field, namely the leadership of in-country consultancy teams providing these services.

This factor is clearly specific to the complex circumstances of aid delivery, and therefore it does not feature in the workplace learning literature. At the same time, results from Kadirova's (2014) recent empirical study into the drivers of success in development aid projects in Afghanistan establish that the quality of international project leadership consistently influences project outcomes. Interview data supports this argument and suggests that team leaders of embedded technical assistance projects in Afghanistan have leeway to address learning inhibitors and imprint higher capacity building standards onto their teams.

As Figure 5 indicates, aid projects function at the intersection of the donor and recipient fields, and thus they acquire characteristics that significantly differentiate them from commercial projects (Ika et al., 2010). Team leaders of capacity building projects have to deal with a range of stakeholders, all of whom have an impact on the effectiveness of capacity building interventions, and may pose diverse and sometimes contradicting requirements. This long and complex chain of relationships includes the donor agency, the consultancy company, Afghan 'higher' and 'lower state nobility', and finally the consultants/project members themselves.

Team leaders are typically excluded from the early design and planning stages of a project. Over time, they acquire contextual sensitivity, better understanding of recipient needs and awareness of project shortfalls. Team leaders' position of relative authority and their superior field awareness allows them (at least theoretically) to leverage relationships with key actors, and address weaknesses sourcing from project design.

Discussions with research participants revealed instances when team leaders did just that. Fo1 described managing a technical assistance project as a

process, which involves constant interaction with her multiple donors, re-negotiating speed of delivery and priorities: "*So we work with at least three donors and for them it's to give them something against the output and to give them a reason why it's taking a long time.*" She also described instances of joint Ministry-project work planning, which contributed to achieving the "high degree of fit between program design, beneficiary needs, and the capacities of the assisting organisation" (Korten, 1980: 496) recommended for successful development interventions.

The importance of project management for successful capacity building was also suggested by some of the recipients of aid. Discussing what she considered a highly effective learning intervention, Af11 commented on her interactions with the respective project team leader in her organisation: "[Team leader] *understood what I was trying to say. Really. Even though the project had nothing* [planned], [team leader] *still gave me that time, gave me* [consultant] *who developed that training.*" In this case, responsiveness to recipient needs and adaptability in project delivery ensured the timeliness and content relevance of the learning opportunities provided by aid, a strategy that accrued positive learning outcomes.

The majority of overseas respondents described their projects taking a different route, namely to "*keep your head down*" (Fo2) and carry on as originally planned. For example, Fo2 talked about how his project's activities are strongly driven by the work-plan endorsed by the donor, and how they are carried out even when they are not in line with the needs of the beneficiary organisation: "*there is flexibility and flexibility, but if you got like I have a huge amount of deliverables, all linked to payments…*"

Furthermore, revisiting project design is considered by consultants a complicated endeavour, challenging the very precursors of project existence – its success metrics and results chain assumptions endorsed by the aid administration. As Fo3 observes, even a failing project can maintain representations that ensure its survival and continuation: "*good data is hard to come by and basically the data can be massaged.*" This is especially true in the

cases where objectives and deliverables are less tangible, such as learning and improved work performance.

In the absence of effective oversight, projects' risk aversion combined with donors' craving for positive results creates powerful incentives for not disturbing the status quo – Fo9 termed this alignment of interests "*a conspiracy of success.*" Judging from the recipients' overwhelming perception of projects as supply-driven, this seems to be the projects' default position in the Afghan bureaucratic field. Unfortunately it is a strategy that neither facilitates effective workplace learning for aid beneficiaries, nor developmental learning for aid bureaucracies.

Project team leaders are also instrumental in enlisting the support of Afghan top managers and direct supervisors, a key factor associated with work environment factors (De Rijdt et al., 2013). A number of respondents stressed the importance of setting up project systems for communication and consultation between recipients and providers of aid. Fo5, a team leader in an agency in the infrastructure and natural resource management sector identified lack of communication as one of the reasons for the limited learning results his project has facilitated: "*We have realised that we haven't really put our efforts into communicating properly, regularly with our client*".

Af8, who is a senior manager at the same agency contrasted Fo5's capacity building services with an earlier project, which he described as "*very committed … and they were all the time involved in consultation with us.*" Many Afghan participants associated effective project-recipient communication with various influencers of learning success, e.g. content relevance and accountability to use newly acquired knowledge. This chimes in with Kadirova's (2014) observation of general project effectiveness in Afghanistan that "the national government's support is often reciprocal in nature, and its intensity and quality also depends on the quality of input by the international project team into this circular interaction" (p.897).

Perhaps most importantly, team leaders can prevent the most significant failing attributed to capacity building projects in Afghanistan – consultants doing (part

of) the job of public servants, rather than transferring knowledge to them. Capacity building projects are rarely designed with that objective in mind, and exemplified by an aid officer's reflections on his portfolio of capacity building projects: "*the more interesting dichotomy I've come across is whether our technical assistance teams have been trying to do things, or trying to train people to do things*" (Do2).

Discussions with research participants strongly suggest that in a number of projects Afghan government capacity substitution has led to unhealthy dependencies, and on occasions has reduced government performance. Af13 described a period after a project pulled out of his Ministry as follows: "*It was a 100% collapse. There was nothing in* [sector]. [Project] *was the real capacity here.*"

Yet there are significant field forces that can lead to this outcome – the donors' unrealistic expectations of what can be achieved within a project lifetime, the donor and consultancy appetite for perceived success, and the resultant lack of attention to how learning interventions are implemented. Ghani et al. (2005) have suggested an additional perverse incentive to consultancies and consultants: "*Technical assistance providers make more money by providing ongoing in-line substitution of state functions than by making themselves redundant by engaging in skills transfer and capacity building*" (p.16)*.*

Consultant dispositions to substitute capacity (see Chapter Six), can be moderated by capable managers – be it Afghan recipients or team leaders. This was demonstrated by Af13 who implemented a benchmarked capacity transition and pairing strategy detailing how consultants "*will transfer their skills to us.*" In the absence of recipient management pressure, team leaders can be major influencers of the quality of aid-provided capacity building services. For instance, Fo1 managed to reorient the practices of an existing project team towards a sustainable model of technical assistance, one based on participation and focused on counterpart learning. In that she led by example but also introduced project management systems incentivising interaction and communication. As a result of her efforts, the project was considered highly successful at the time of data collection.

Strategic link and the quality of recipient, donor and project management were the broader work environment factors found to have pronounced effects on the outcomes of capacity building interventions in Afghanistan. The next section of this analysis will turn to the set of factors that are more closely associated with the mechanics of guided learning, namely intervention design.

Intervention design

Intervention design is a subset of the field-related factors for guided learning and transfer identified in the literature (Baldwin and Ford, 1988). Intervention design comprises the influence of inputs such as needs analyses, learning goals, content relevance, and instructional methods on the effectiveness of learning interactions (Grossman and Salas, 2011; De Rijdt et al., 2013). It has received considerable research attention in the workplace learning literature, for the most part in a 'First World' private sector context. In particular, the transfer literature has placed a strong empirical focus on improving training methods and techniques, and on the incorporation of learning principles into delivery (e.g. Blume et al. 2010).

Consistent with the transfer literature, all groups of respondents identified features associated with intervention design as significant influencers of the effectiveness of technical assistance for workplace learning in the Afghan bureaucratic field. Primary amongst them were 1) the availability and quality of needs analyses, which was associated with 2) the content relevance of interventions. Another prominent factor concerned 3) the availability of instructional strategies. While these variables are well recognised in extant research on training and learning transfer (De Rijdt et al., 2013), their specifics transpired to be strongly influenced by the internal logic of the Afghan bureaucratic field.

Needs analysis and content relevance

Needs analysis was the design factor that was by far most frequently invoked by the Afghan public servants interviewed. The importance and quality of up-front diagnostic and documentation of workplace expertise was considered fundamental for the effectiveness of workplace learning. It was also strongly associated with the *relevance of learning interventions* provided by donor-funded projects in Afghanistan, hence the discussion of these two factors in conjunction.

Many participants, including on the providers' side, shared the view of Af17, a manager with over ten years' experience in Government, who pointed out that:

> *Some donors, they ignored the needs assessment and situational analysis. And they bring some copy of some programs, and they implement in some departments, directorates and ministries. At that time, the capacity building is negative.* (Af17)

It is somewhat surprising that the long-standing principle of pre-intervention diagnostics (e.g. McGehee and Thayer, 1961), which is also supported by vast amounts of literature to guide appropriate identification of needs (Swanson, 2003), was so frequently experienced as a stumbling block to capacity building outcomes. The research data indicated an array of reasons why needs analyses were so often deemed inadequate: from issues to do with the processes and mechanics of aid, to those to do with the players' individual dispositions, both flagged in the ensuing discussion.

Technical assistance activities are directed by project documents, which in turn reflect the funding agencies' preliminary assessments of the causes of a performance situation. Once projects are launched, consultants are typically given short-term inception periods to undertake additional research, formulate plans, timelines and performance targets. As Fo9 observed, inception periods are being gradually curtailed by donors, "*because the general assumption is that inception periods are a necessary evil at best – not a productive part of the 'real project'*". Once defined, project parameters are firmed up in project log-

frames (Carlsson and Wohlgemuth, 2000), an approach that insists on identifying linear causation from project intervention to social change.

Achievement of specific project outputs has been increasingly linked to consultancy payments. Commenting on the growing use of payment by results by international aid agencies, Fo9 noted that under these circumstances "*the logframe becomes, you know, this divine document.*" Thus the periods of donor pre-assessments and consultant inception planning become important pre-determinants of what learning interventions and learning objectives are deemed relevant, as room for further adaptation is limited.

Authors such as Saks and Belcourt (2006) and Burke and Hutchins (2007) suggest that trainee involvement and input in the needs assessment process, and in the design of the learning intervention support learning and transfer of learning to job performance. Similar observations were articulated by some of the participants in this research. For instance, reflecting on what qualities an 'ideal adviser' should have, Af2 recommended that first of all they should "*do a need assessment with the Ministry to see how they are working, they may identify the gaps together. With <u>them</u>.*" Yet data suggest that the practices of aid experienced in Afghanistan do not facilitate such collaboration effectively.

It was already noted that technical assistance projects are mostly designed away from the recipient field. Furthermore, interviews with Afghan participants indicate that the consultative processes undertaken at the pre-project and inception phases tend to be predominantly informed by feedback from the 'higher state nobility' (Wacquant, 2009: 289) in recipient institutions. This observation is also supported by Kadirova's (2014) recent account of development aid initiatives in Afghanistan: "the top management at the national counterpart agencies (usually ministers and their deputies) are often the first point of contact… with whom the international aid and development project teams have very close working relationships" (p.895).

Arthur Jr. et al.'s (2003) meta-analysis of design features for effective training in organisations maintains that pre-intervention diagnostics should cover organisational analysis (e.g. where and to what end training is needed), task analysis (what should be learned) and person analysis (who should learn and

what). The needs assessment process described by the majority of participants in this study largely excludes key parties in the learning interaction – the learners and their line managers. This theme came across very strongly in the responses provided by the Afghan managers, as exemplified by Af8: "*This is really the biggest problem. These donors come just to the leadership level, they do not do consultations with the medium level, executive level.*"

The responses of the research participants indicate that in the Afghan environment needs assessments are typically based on limited information provided by the top leadership, and are at best focused on determining where learning interventions are needed in the organisation. This leads to lack of understanding and insufficient clarity on the other important dimensions identified above – learner and task analysis: "*One problem was that they* [projects] *did not recognise and identify the potential, the expertise of those who are sitting in there as trainees. To build on this.*" (Af14)

Similar observations on lack of adequate consultations were shared by some of the overseas consultants. For instance, Fo5 notes that "*when we are putting up our projects in our proposals, we are dealing with* [donor] *team and not so much with* [recipient] *team.*" These quotes, on the opposite sides of the provider-recipient nexus, indicate that factors from both fields have an impact on the centrally important diagnostics of learning needs.

Firstly, the quality of the needs assessments can be negatively affected by a top-down management style within the recipient organisations: "*Everything is centred at the top. Whatever the orders, that's it*" (Af1). On the rare occasions where Afghan mid-level managers were empowered and trusted to guide technical assistance support, the effectiveness of capacity building interventions was perceived to be markedly increased. This was demonstrated by the case of Mahmood referred to earlier, as well as by Af3 who described a well thought-out process for intra-departmental needs identification, because he believed that "*the priorities and details should come from Afghan technical experts*".

Lack of delegation within the Afghan government organisations can be addressed if providers set up systems and strategies to enlist feedback and

participation in the needs assessment/design process from all key stakeholders in the learning interaction. Yet the response by Fo5, and similarly by other providers of capacity building services, highlights the fact that technical assistance projects are not necessarily incentivised to leave room for radical discovery and for development of alternative approaches based on local needs: *"we have our terms of reference on capacity building, which are quite strict and we realize every time in meetings with* [recipient]*, [recipient] wants this and that, and sometimes it doesn't fit into our terms of reference."* It is chiefly because projects' outward accountability discourages challenging funders' assumptions, and consequently biases the diagnostics process towards the metrics and objectives pre-set by the donor agency.

This highlights the fact that the donor field exerts structuring effects on the behaviour of projects/consultants, which are detrimental to the quality of diagnostics and design of learning interventions. But as flagged earlier, individual and contextual dimensions are mutually constitutive. The data indicate that the situation is further exacerbated by providers' paternalistic attitudes and dispositions to undermine recipients' inputs, aptly summarised by Fo8's comment: "*Both* [provider and recipient] *have to identify where the capacity is needed and the assumption here is that Government doesn't have wisdom. This wisdom has to come from donors.*"

Crewe and Harrison (1998: 92) observe of development that "[t]he division between indigenous and Western or scientific knowledge is, however, based on ideas about people rather than on objective differences in knowledge or expertise". Indeed, the statements above resonate with the post-development argument that aid tends to devalue local systems of knowledge, and that fundamentally, the notion of expertise is experienced as culturally, socially and geographically bound. Such an attitudinal and structural unison clearly works against established principles of designing effective learning interventions, and reasserts a symbolic order of dominance (Bourdieu et al., 1991).

This ties up with another critique put forward by authors such as Kothari (2005), namely the valorisation of 'Western' technical know-how and the resultant de-contextualisation of technical assistance. The point was echoed by

a number of Afghan respondents, who insisted on the need for a broader and in-depth understanding of the recipient environment, to include additional dimensions such as Afghanistan's socio-economic conditions: "*they can't be effective because they don't know about the situation of the country*" (Af17); its culture: "*…you will not know the culture of the people, and they do not listen. This is an obstacle*" (Af8); and national psychology: "*But Afghanistan, like, in the past - war. The people have special, old character... We have to know that counterpart.*" (Af9).

This shared understanding reflects the fact that the Afghan bureaucratic field is a "space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other" (Pratt, 1992: 6), and the managerialist terms of international development's engagement in this contact - as an entirely technical problem calling for standard technical solutions. The feedback by Afghan respondents indicates their general dissatisfaction with an engagement that produces "such strikingly parallel local talk in such distant and dissimilar locales" (Townsend, 1999: 613). Their consistent recommendations for a collaborative process of understanding, diagnosing and prescribing solutions to performance problems are in fact more sophisticated and better aligned with the findings of the learning literature (e.g. Arthur Jr. et al., 2003) than the interventionist approaches of the development industry they usually experience.

While in-depth diagnostics place heavy demands on the pre-intervention stage of a project, it is the contention of this study that the effort is worth it, because a thoughtful programme design can stimulate the uptake and effectiveness of donor-provided learning interventions. This argument is supported by the case of SUCCESS, a donor-funded but government-run programme for provision of international technical assistance across the public service, which markedly deviates from the standard case in a number of ways.

Box 2: SUCCESS

SUCCESS was amongst the few capacity building programmes referred to as valuable and effective by a number of Afghan participants.

Independent donor evaluations[6] have termed SUCCESS' model of technical assistance 'innovative' and 'surprisingly unique'. In contrast to all other participating providers of capacity development services, SUCCESS had an explicitly formulated approach to capacity development. Written programme documentation included advisor notes and introduction to the approach, and indicated that the programme views learning interventions as a process, and more importantly a process that can be structured in ways that improve its effectiveness.

A core principle espoused by the programme is that learning must be demand-driven, a feature that one donor evaluation considered "unique compared with traditional donor-funded capacity building models"[2]. For instance, consultancy terms of reference (ToR) are proposed by the recipient organisations, who also take part in the selection of technical advisers. Furthermore, the programme methodology emphasized the need for a collaborative design, one where recipients "*should be presented with design choices and where possible be allowed to make those design choices*"[3].

Do1, who has worked for the programme for three years, explained that in the diagnostics and design phase of their interventions, SUCCESS insists on consultants enlisting recipients' input and buy-in: "*We have an assessment of their capacity gaps, with them.*" Compared to standard practice, longer periods are allocated to a detailed inception analysis, and the programme had an added requirement for formulating instructional methodologies. Once diagnostics are completed, consultants employed by SUCCESS are also actively encouraged to review their ToRs together with the recipient, to ensure they adequately respond to the needs and situation on the ground: "*So there is always an opportunity for the technical advisor to change, adjust the ToR. We are very flexible on that*" (Do1).

A further point of divergence from the typical donor and project practices is that all technical advisors employed by SUCCESS undergo a week long orientation.

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[6] Sources withheld, available on request

This prepares them for work in the Afghan bureaucratic field, and introduces them to the principles and approaches to workplace learning embraced by the programme: "[W]e *also give them a cultural orientation… Then we, we introduce them to our approach to capacity building*" (Do1). The fact that none of the representatives from other technical assistance projects spoke about any process of planned introduction is symptomatic of the mainstream approaches to development described in Chapter Two, namely the view that development offers technical solutions that are as universally applicable and desirable (Malik, 2002).

Interestingly, a related point is brought to light by Kothari's (2005) comparison of the approaches employed to prepare colonial officers in the past with the practices of aid today. According to the author, colonial officers used to undergo 12-month country training in a broad range of subjects, with a purpose to create area experts and instil the correct attitudes to work. In contrast, Do2 described his donor agency's systems for procuring advisors as follows:

> *…we will ask the consulting firm also to tell us about their experience and their skills, and if they've got a good track record in a particular area then that is going to provide us with some comfort that they are not going to pick some sociopath.* (Do2)

Conversely, the centrality of in-depth understanding of the host environment as a factor for the effectiveness of capacity building was emphasized by most overseas participants. Many of them spoke about their own learning and periods of readjustments to the context, which lasted much longer than a typical inception. For example, Fo6 described how his project's initial lack of contextual understanding led to what he considered to be a failed two-year capacity building programme. In his view, a longer pre-intervention and analytical period would have markedly increased the effectiveness of the learning interventions: "*If we'd take that three months and learned what is it that they do, how they do it, what's happening in the country, it would have been far more beneficial*".

Under the circumstances, the learning content of Fo6's programme was based on donors' and consultants' rudimentary understanding of the host situation: *"we've come with some pre-conceived ideas,"* which later turned out to be *"totally the wrong approach."* Fo6 identified a number of points of misalignment between the learning intervention offered by the project and the situation of the ground. These included: the state of development of the sector their counterparts were supposed to regulate, *"you are coming thinking these guys have got a system going... And there is no* [industry] *to talk about;* the assumptions about learners' cognitive abilities and learning needs, *"it was a <u>real</u> struggle. Coz these guys had no mathematical sense, whatsoever";* and consequently the extent to which the capacity development content, goals and materials were closely relevant to the learners and their job functions: *"So much of that technical curriculum that we had, that's just pie in the sky."*

As a result Fo6's project could not adequately engage with the Afghan counterparts and by his own admission, did not realise significant learning outcomes: *"We tried to put knowledge into them that they don't need".* Upon completion of this learning programme, Fo6's project had an opportunity to apply the lessons learned over a 2-year period, and devise new approaches for a second cohort of trainees from the same organisation. In contrast to his earlier experience, he described the follow-on intervention as *"[m]uch, much more successful."* However, projects are rarely structured in a way that allows consultants time or opportunity to learn and apply their learning about context in which they operate.

The observations by these overseas consultants were echoed by virtually all Afghan participants in the study. The perceived content validity (Grohmann et al., 2014) of technical assistance programmes was judged overwhelmingly low by the recipients of aid, as summarised by Af1:

> *One important reason why these capacity building programmes were not effective was that that their training programmes and the content of the training was from the countries where conditions, and geographical and political and all reasons it was not applicable to our country.*

Thus both providers' and recipients' feedback suggests that aid in Afghanistan has often undermined the factors of diagnostics and content relevance, steps that are not only common sense but, as outlined earlier, strongly correlated with successful learning (e.g. Lancaster et al. 2013).

Instructional strategies

Needs assessments can also indicate instructional strategies and methods adequate to the learning content to be mastered and the profile of learners involved. For instance, authors such as Arthur Jr. et al. (2003) maintain that the development of cognitive, interpersonal, or psychomotor skills can be boosted by selection of delivery methods specifically designed for these learning objectives. Others (e.g. Spitzer, 1984) have distinguished between learning for situations similar or identical to the job task, and learning for tasks or settings different from the instructional context. Likewise, Hutchins et al. (2010) highlights trainers' knowledge of transfer practices as an important influencer in the learning and transfer process.

These insights from the learning literature suggest that the effectiveness of guided workplace learning can be increased through appropriate pedagogic strategies. Overall, this principle was supported by the Afghan respondents interviewed, who discussed the merits and demerits of learning that is short- and long-term, in and out of country, formal and informal, active or passive. While they expressed a preference for long-term active interventions and for on-the-job coaching relationships, these managers generally concurred with Af6's view that "*Every approach has its own place. Its own importance,*" depending on the skills to be mastered and the needs of the learner.

However, research data suggests that capacity development projects in Afghanistan do not give thought to instructional strategies and methods routinely. A number of overseas consultants, mostly those involved with Afghan work over a longer term, attributed this to donors' naïve expectations that individual and organisational performance would be improved "*by some process of intellectual osmosis*" (Fo9), through mere proximity of providers and recipients of aid.

Participants provided examples of how the lack of instructional methods has had an impact on the actual implementation of capacity building interventions. For example, Fo9 summarised the objective of a long-term capacity building project he led as turning "*somebody whose job was to weigh stones[7] in the market into the head of* [sector] *policy.*" The approach his project took to achieve that complex task was described in the following terms: "*So we made it up as we went along, I think. And did our best.*" While his project was deemed successful for carrying through administrative reform, the respondent was doubtful whether it made any substantive and lasting changes in terms of recipient learning. To illustrate that, Fo9 referred to the fact that the project was recently retendered with terms of reference which "*could have been word for word our ToR when we started the project,*" nine years earlier.

On a related note, Fo6 attributed the lack of success of his first training programme not only to inadequate diagnostics, but also to an inappropriate instructional methodology. Evidence has demonstrated that adult attention span is better maintained by active rather than passive instructional methods (e.g. Lim and Johnson, 2002). As the only project team member with training experience and background, he talked of his frustration with the adopted project strategy exclusively focused on classroom training:

> *And the idea of putting them through two years of theoretical classroom training… does not work. Because for two years you were speaking a language that they couldn't visualise. The pictures that you put on the screen, that's flat.*

Fo6 compares this experience with the approach he was enabled to take with a second cohort of trainees. This included setting up a ground/centre for practical training, and starting the programme with an exposure tour, so that from the outset learners can "*get into* [industrial operation]*, see it, smell it, hear it, know what it looks like, and then we can go into the classroom*". This methodology allowed trainees to relate experiential to theoretical components and in Fo6's view, markedly increased the effectiveness of delivered training.

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[7] Stones are used as market weights

The fortuitous combination of country, technical and training experience that Fo6 possesses is exceptionally rare. As mentioned earlier, donor agencies prize technical over pedagogical qualifications and Fo9's statement that "*nobody trained me to be a capacity builder*" applies to a significant majority of the consultants interviewed (and in country). It must also be noted there are considerable and practical difficulties in attracting consultants with the right mix of skills to a hardship posting such as Afghanistan: "*sometimes it's difficult to find those people, who are experts in their own field, and also equally capable of developing capacity*" (Do1).

Yet SUCCESS was the only provider of capacity building services that had any systems or approaches in place to compensate for the lack of consultant instructional experience. In addition to the induction process mentioned earlier, Do1 spoke about availability of advisor notes and guidelines outlining the programme's approach to capacity building; the requirement to prepare comprehensive instructional plans and approaches; and a quarterly reporting system capturing the process of skills transfer as a mandatory reporting element. In contrast, other projects' metrics would typically include easily observable, low-return outputs like number of people trained or instructional sessions held.

As Do1 notes, the satisfaction rates with SUCCESS' capacity development services are generally higher than average: "*I was told: 'We thought your technical advisors would be just like others but they are very different. And that's how we want technical advisors to be'*". Considering the fact that the programme sources advisors from the same epistemic community of development professionals as other projects, the case of SUCCESS is a stark demonstration that a learner-focused, careful project design, attention to pedagogic practices and adequate oversight mechanisms can substantially increase the effectiveness of learning outcomes provided by aid.

Conclusion

This Chapter demonstrates that a number of factors emanating from the specifics and the interaction of two very different fields have an impact on

effectiveness of donor-funded learning interventions. The presence of an indigenous vision, which is associated with the relative autonomy of Afghan organisations vis-à-vis their donors, enables recipients to influence strategically the design, content and implementation of donor-funded learning interventions. The strength of recipient top management systems to withstand the influx of projects and coordinate various external players is equally critical for learning success.

So is it that capacity can only be developed where there is already capacity, as Burnside and Dollar (1997) posited almost two decades ago? This discussion suggests that some of the weaknesses in the recipient system can be moderated by donor oversight and by the availability of project managers who have an aptitude to negotiate complexity, willingness to embrace participatory approaches, and understanding of the basics of a learning interaction.

This Chapter also reveals that conventional and well established wisdom about effective intervention design has been rarely applied into the capacity building practices in Afghanistan. Pressures emanating from both the recipient and donor fields have militated against conducting comprehensive pre-intervention diagnostics, which are an important precondition for ensuring the relevance of learning content (Arthur Jr. et al., 2003). Furthermore, attention to instructional strategies and robust oversight of capacity building processes has been shunned by risk-averse and results-hungry projects and aid bureaucracies to the detriment of good workplace learning pedagogy.

Chapter 5: Habitus-related factors, findings and discussion

As outlined in Chapter Two, the socio-cultural accounts of workplace learning maintain that individual engagement with learning is determined by both context and subjectivities (Billett, 2001). Having explored the characteristics of the learning environment, the analysis will now turn to the views, beliefs and attitudes of Afghan aid recipients towards the practice of capacity building. It will also inquire into the impact such subjective factors have on the effectiveness of technical assistance interventions.

In contrast to the learning literature, the dominant theories of development have consistently downplayed the issue of individual agency (Grindle, 1999). Development practice has been equally inattentive to the human dimensions of learning and the latest World Development Report states that "*development policy is due for its own redesign based on careful consideration of human factors*" (World Bank, 2015: 2).

In line with this study's theoretical framework, the analysis of the subjective factors that influence workplace learning in development settings employs Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1994). Habitus is understood as a battery of stable yet malleable dispositions, or "*structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways*", which guide practice (Wacquant, 2005: 316). More recent research (Riveros et al., 2012; Entwistle and McCune, 2013) has found dispositions of educational relevance, as they affect the willingness and effort to engage with learning and apply acquired knowledge.

Dispositions include both value judgements and conceptions of learning, e.g. how individuals assess and understand learning and themselves as learners (Howard and Slack, 2009). As these themes are relevant to the recipients of aid, the discussion draws mainly on a subset of the wider dataset of the research, namely the reported lived experiences of the Afghan government employees. The sampling strategy described in Chapter Two ensured that these respondents have had direct and sustained engagements with capacity

building projects and that they occupy positions that require them to receive and/or manage capacity building support.

The analysis also benefits from the opinions of the Afghan participants whose professional paths have involved working within Afghan government organisations and for donor-funded projects as national consultants. Their insights were often different from those provided by the civil servants, as they are able to switch between different structures and translate development engagements.

The section starts with a brief outline of the respondents' overall evaluation of the effectiveness of capacity development efforts, which frames the discussion. This is followed by an inquiry into the general dispositions to learning of Afghan public servants. The analysis then turns to Afghan attitudes to modernisation and neoliberal reform underpinning donor investments in learning. The section concludes with an overview of the classificatory judgements that Afghan recipients of aid make about the expertise of donor-funded consultants.

Participant evaluation of capacity building efforts

The Afghan respondents interviewed demonstrated significant interest in the research topic and the issue of donor effectiveness, with one noting that "*this is currently the hot discussion among the public, whether this billion dollars that was spent on capacity was effective or not*" (Af1). Highlighting the importance of this subject in Afghan society is the fact that the outcomes of more than a decade of capacity building efforts were also a topic of the presidential campaign in 2014, with a leading candidate stating that "we relied fully of borrowed capacity from the outside, either from foreign experts, or Afghans who were abroad… when the time comes they take the capacity [away] with them" (Dugan, 2014)

Reflections on the donor legacy were likely intensified by what Bijlert (2014) calls the '2014 syndrome,' meaning the uncertainties associated with the withdrawal of foreign troops that year, and the expected reduction in civilian aid henceforth. These concerns were particularly acute at the time of data

collection. Overall, this contextual factor functioned as a positive in the current study, because the civil servants taking part in the research have necessarily thought about the effectiveness of capacity development interventions, which enabled them to engage critically with the research topics.

The macro-assessment of donor-funded capacity development efforts and outcomes since 2001 articulated by research respondents was overwhelmingly negative. This opinion was espoused not only by recipients but also by providers of capacity development services. Table 3 provides quotes organised by respondent group, with the most negative comments placed on top.

Table 3: Illustrative quotes: effectiveness of capacity building interventions

Afghan civil servants (recipients)	International advisors (providers)	National advisors
Af9: *Waste of time, waste of money.* Af6*: Q: What is left behind? A: Nothing.* Af14: *I would say that generally most of aid was wasted.* Af12: *13 years with that big money… it is a pity that we are not successful at it.* Af1: *So the general perception is that somehow it had a negative impact in the end.* Af16: *No change unfortunately. No change in their [staff] mind. Change - just for the computer use. Because we are not here just to work with routine and daily work. We should think about some creativity. Unfortunately there isn't any here. Creativity.* Af5: *The ratio of effectiveness*	Fo5*: …close to complete failure for a number of reasons.* Fo3*: So what's the relationship between [improved] capacity and the efforts of the donors and capacity development… I would say zero.* Fo8*: Very poor value.* Fo2*: There is a huge amount of money being spent in Afghanistan capacity building, not very*	AfCo1*: I think the answer is pretty clear - that it hasn't achieved a significant outcome.* AfCo2*: There is no permanent capacity building…. So how will we stand on our feet?* AfCo3*: If you see the last decade, I would say that a lot, a lot has been wasted on capacity building. Without the value that was expected*

between the aid and the result is very low.	*successfully …a lot of this stuff is self-defeating.*	*from it…*
Af7: It is better than 10 years ago but it is not as good as it should be.		*Do1: A lot of money was put in that area without, little outcome really.*
Af2: There is some progress but there is a lot of wastage as well.		

The quotes organised in the table above reveal that participants' dissatisfaction was mostly related to disappointing learning outcomes, poor value for money of technical assistance, and the opportunity costs this inflicts on Afghanistan's developmental path. Effective capacity building was associated with 1) extensive and deep cognitive change (e.g. Af16) that results in 2) meaningful changes in on-the-job behaviour (e.g. AfCo2) and 3) is delivered efficiently (e.g. Af9).

A similar concern with the limited impact of capacity building is also expressed in a number of donor assessments and evaluation reports. More recently, an analysis of a decade of World Bank programmes (IEG, 2013b) states that "the Bank and its development partners have not been able to address … capacity constraints in line ministries" (p.35) and "actual changes in behavior have been slow to take hold" (p.40). A January 2014 report to the US Congress by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR, 2014) advised against provision of direct, government-to-government assistance based on unsatisfactory capability assessments of a sample of more than half of the Afghan ministries.

Despite the overall negative evaluation of donor-provided workplace learning, all Afghan respondents were able to provide some examples of donor interventions that have had positive learning outcomes for them individually, or for their organisations. Against this backdrop, explorative discussions of what worked and what did not were used as a springboard to expose the dispositional factors that moderate learning in this particular research context. It is to those issues that the analysis turns next.

Afghan dispositions to (workplace) learning

Socio-cultural accounts of workplace learning (e.g. Hodkinson and Hodkinson 2004), maintain that the habitus of individuals, including their dispositions towards work and learning, influence the ways in which they construct and take advantage of opportunities for learning at work.

In particular, epistemic beliefs about the value and importance of learning have been found to affect individual motivation to learn (Baert and Kyndt, 2013), and to moderate learning outcomes (Schulz and Roßnagel, 2010). Some (Collin, 2002; Pillay et al., 2003) have also suggested that individuals who see work and learning as disconnected concepts would not engage with workplace learning.

Thus one possible contributor to the disappointing track record of capacity building efforts in Afghanistan is that the Afghan civil servants as a whole do not value learning in general, or learning through and for work in particular. Such a collective indisposition might be generated by shared historical experiences, culture or religion (Golsorkhi et al., 2009). It is interesting that despite sizeable investments in capacity building interventions, the existing academic and practitioners' literature focusing on Afghanistan has remained entirely silent on the subject of Afghan dispositions to learning. This study will thus make an original contribution to this field of knowledge.

Before probing into the Afghan dispositions to learning, it is essential to outline the socio-demographic characteristics of the sub-sample, and establish their potential effects on the validity of results. First, all interviewed Afghan public servants are university degree holders. Research (Albert et al., 2010; Baert and Kyndt, 2013) suggests that higher levels of education are positively related to engagement with both formal and informal work-related learning, and this would indicate sample bias towards participation in learning. Yet capacity building interventions are typically targeted at holders of technical and managerial positions in the Afghan civil service, the majority of which require post-secondary education (IRoA, 2008b). The educational profile of the sample thus reinforces, rather than undermines the validity of the findings.

Secondly, the research sub-sample of civil servants is split generationally into groups with very different paths of life. Figure 6 presents a schematic illustration of the ontogenesis of younger and more mature respondents against the timeline of Afghanistan's historic events in living memory[8].

Figure 6: Afghan respondents, ontogenesis
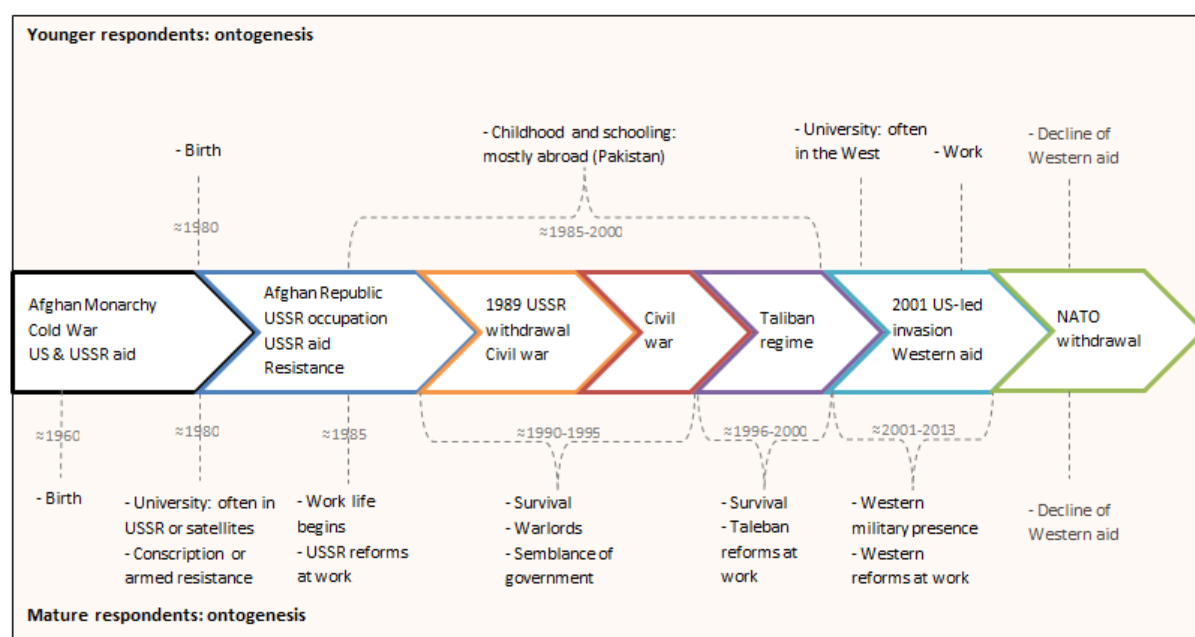
At one end of the spectrum are interviewees in their mid-30s or so, whose educational and professional choices were less influenced by Afghanistan's turbulent past. Many of them were out of country during the civil war and the Taliban regime, and have much greater connectivity with the rest of the world through media, mastery of technology, educational opportunities and knowledge of the English language. Due to this cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) and ability to communicate with donor-funded organisations, their careers in government are often fast-tracked. For instance, Af11 a holder of a post-graduate degree from a Western university in her 30s, was appointed as a director in the first years of her career: "*I was just, I was exactly out of school. I had no managerial experience*" (Af11).

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[8] Afghanistan's life expectancy at birth is 50.49 years in 2014 (CIA, 2015)

On the other end of the spectrum are those who lived through regime changes, civil wars and on more than one occasion held weapons themselves. Their public service careers often started when a socialist approach to governance had a strong influence in the central government of the country. Typically educated in Afghanistan or the Soviet Union and its satellites, the majority are Russian speakers with some English-language proficiency acquired during or after the Taliban regime. Their experiences are succinctly summarised by Af6, an engineer with over 20 years of work experience and recently promoted to director:

> *Af6 (*in English*): I seen 14 ministers.*
>
> *I: Have you seen Russian advisers?*
>
> *Af6: Yeah.* (laughs)
>
> *I: And American advisors?*
>
> *A: Yeah. Then, then, all kinds. I also had Mujahedeen, Taleban.* (laughs)

A recent report analysing the national system of public administration describes "*two generations of civil servants torn apart by huge differences in salary scales, access to information, capacity to reach out, communicate and connect with outside stakeholders*" (Nijat, 2014: 48). The divergence of generational experiences captured by the research thus largely reflects the current composition of Afghanistan's public service, and strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of this case study.

On a related note, some comments were made by younger Afghan respondents and overseas advisors about the resistant attitudes of more mature workers to capacity building interventions. This observation is generally supported by the literature, for instance Kyndt and Baert's (2013) systematic review of employees' involvement in work-related formal and informal learning surmises that "*older employees participate less in learning activities than do their younger colleagues*" but it also maintains that it is "*difficult to explain the identified differences*" (p.305).

It is possible that the implied dispositional barriers of Afghan mature workers to learning are a cohort effect resulting from shared historical experiences. As

Figure 6 indicates, these respondents have had an interrupted work life, and have lived through a series of sweeping and traumatic societal changes that can orient the habitus towards survival and short-termism, and devalue investment in future-oriented activities such as learning.

Contrary to these assumptions, the interviews revealed a strong and open-ended commitment to learning that was not confined to a particular age group, in spite of differences in ontogenies. Respondents of different demographics recalled with pride learning experiences in life and through work, whether they were informal, formal, intentional or vicarious. For instance, Af8, who has served for 35 years at the same government organisation, insisted on sharing a personal story in English in an otherwise translator-mediated interview:

> *At the time of Taleban I started to read English, and it was for me very, very bad time, because there wasn't any work, I haven't any shop to work in bazaar* [market]*, so I thought what to do in this time. Many tasks come to my brain, so I started to know English…. it was self-testing and self-teaching and like this.* (Af8)

Examples of learning as an identity preservation and survival strategy in difficult times were provided by a host of other participants, often to illustrate development of valuable skills that enabled their professional advancement later in life, post-2001.

Younger respondents also demonstrated a substantial commitment to learning. To start with, some 70% of the respondents under the age of 35 had secured a scholarship and attained a post-graduate degree from a 'Western' university. The account of Af16, a director in his early 40s and a part-time lecturer at a higher education institution in Kabul, described a rather different path but it illustrates well the tenacity some Afghans invested to overcome the vagaries of war and complete their education:

> *I was in my 3rd semester. The Mujahedin came, they closed the door, the University was closed for 3 years. I was in Iran and Turkey. When I came back here, I restarted my education, to 7th semester. Unfortunately the Taleban came here. Again I*

> *left Afghanistan and I was in Russia for 5 years. When I came back here… I finished my education.* (Af16)

Furthermore, Af16 reflected on the valuable skills he acquired outside the formal educational system, through and for work. This prompted him to seek actively opportunities for "*practical training*" of his subordinate staff from donors and Ministry superiors. His belief that work-related learning occurs only when people observe, participate and apply knowledge and skills, featured very prominently in the responses of all other Afghan interviewees. For instance, Af13, Deputy Minister in the governance sector in his 30s, described a cross-government policy-making process he recently led in the following terms:

> *Every week we were discussing and we were drafting the paragraphs, at the end of the week we were revising the draft. You know what, that was the real capacity building. Oh my God, I learned a lot during the process!* (Af13).

This experience echoes Lave's (1993) argument that where one encounters practice, they also identify learning. In the case described by Af13, active engagement with goal-oriented activities resulted not only in cognitive legacy – learning, but also in remaking of his organisation's practice of policy formulation. As Billett and Somerville (2004) observe, transformation of work practices is more likely to be achieved where workers are invited to participate in the change process, as their participation also legitimises and reinforces the learning associated with that change.

A considerable group of respondents also held the view that capacity development requires more than an experiential, immersion process. It was strongly suggested that structured formal educational courses, where the outcome is intentional and aligned with the needs of the workplace, is a desired and beneficial approach to learning in the Afghan public sector. For instance Af15 held the view that effective work-related learning combines on-the-job and formal educational opportunities. He described the approach he took with his staff, later emulated by other units of his Ministry:

> *We negotiated with one of the universities to make a tailor-made programme. Master's degree for 1 year. We asked them if they could make it for 2 years, so the students could go for two to three months, come back and practise it for three to four months, in rotation.*

Overall, the understanding of learning as a multipronged and important lifelong process was emphatically shared by the majority of public sector workers who contributed to this study. This view was encapsulated by Af18, director in the social and healthcare sector with over 25 years of experience:

> *Afghanistan experienced a lot of war, and during the war, there were not many opportunities for us to learn. Fortunately after the fall of Taleban the situation changed. And some opportunities for capacity building came and we like other Afghans, joined and tried to learn something. That's why I'm still a student. Actually during your lifetime you are a student. You are a student to learn something, and you are a teacher to teach others.* (Af18)

While looking back with regret to the lack of opportunities in his younger years, this participant also articulated an innate need for continuous development. In accord with Maurer et al.'s (2003) finding that self-need for improvement is positively associated with participation in formal and informal learning activities, at the time of data collection Af18 was pursuing part-time a second Master's degree with an international university.

The conception of learning as a continuous lifelong process is also encapsulated as a group value in the Afghan proverb "*one needs to study from cradle to grave*" shared by Af1. Such sayings have an important role in a country with a predominantly oral culture and rich traditions of storytelling such as Afghanistan (Claus et al., 2002). Moreover, Islam, the religion of Afghanistan, also attaches a great importance to learning, as an event in the life of the Prophet (ﷺ) demonstrates: at the battle of Badr, he declared that if each of his literate prisoners teaches ten Muslims how to read and write, they would be set free (Mogra, 2010).

A few of the respondents also talked explicitly about learning as an identity changing process, which resonates with Lave and Wenger's finding that "*one way to think of learning is as the historical production, transformation, and change of persons*" (1991: 51). Af12, a director who once fought in the civil war, reflected on the personal changes he came to through work and learning, which can be fully understood only in the context of the historical changes which he experienced (Hodkinson et al., 2007):

> *My father was a farmer and he enrolled me in school, and then I became an engineer. Before we were living in the bottom of the social status and now we're living in the top. And now I am advising families, because now they listen to me.* (Af12)

Later on he added:

> *Because I assure you, I will never go back to this previous, to have a gun in my hand and go to the mountains and fight.* (Af12)

Af12's account demonstrates how aspirations, values and beliefs transform through learning and occupation. This respondent made a direct link between his active engagement with learning and his upward mobility and capacity to negotiate a more favourable position in the ever-changing field. It is perhaps not surprising that a society in which less than 30% of the population under the age of 15 can read and write – against a world average of 84%, assigns high value to learning and qualifications. As Bourdieu notes "any given cultural competence (e.g., being able to read in a world of illiterates) derives a scarcity value from its position in the distribution of cultural capital and yields profits of distinction for its owner" (1986: 245).

Furthermore, in this and other cases, the participant's positive individual dispositions to workplace learning have translated into positive dispositions to empowerment of his subordinates: on a number of occasions Af12 emphasized the conscious efforts he has made to develop the potential and self-esteem of his staff, and he describes himself as "*a mirror for them*". This resonates with the argument that "the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in

turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences… and so on, from restructuring to restructuring" (Bourdieu, 1977: 87).

The respondents' conceptions of workplace learning sketched here are largely consistent with the findings of similar studies undertaken in 'Western' work context. For instance research in Australian organisations by Pillay et al. (2003) establishes a hierarchical system of five conceptions of learning at work, namely 1) acquiring skills to survive, 2) onsite observing and experiencing, 3) taking formal courses, 4) continuous lifelong process, and 5) changing as a person. As discussed above, Afghan interviewees interpreted and assessed workplace learning through all these lenses, often expressing more than one conception at a time.

However, a few of the participants referred to one additional perspective, which does not appear in existing research of 'Western' organisations, namely workplace learning as *national development and sovereignty*. This view was expressed by Af11, a director in her 30s who reflected on what she considered an effective capacity building intervention at her directorate:

> *We have to look into long term, more structured view into what is going to happen to this country. And that is where learning is very, very important. Look, now we are reviewing our policies, and some will be amended. But now I don't need* [consultant] *to come and do that for me. And that's the biggest achievement that I have had in this department. (Af11)*

The understanding of learning as a path to development was strongly associated with a sense of public service ethos, which manifests itself through responsibility, emotional investment in the game and caring about how one's work affects the nation, or what Bourdieu terms illusio (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Similar commitment to the collective interest was also expressed by mature respondents: recalling the occasion when he and his colleagues saved a national scientific archive from burning and looting by taking it through battle lines with a risk to life and limb, Af8 said "*It was natural, you know. Duty. National duty.*"

The respondents' public service ethos is an important motivator for learning, as it is underpinned by a group realisation of the need for improvement: "*We are like 30 or 40 years behind the world, we cannot compete even with our neighbours, we need new technology, new concepts and new learning"* (Af12). Furthermore, the aspiration for national development was often associated with the concepts of national sovereignty and self-sufficiency, as in Af11's reflections above.

This theme was particularly pronounced in responses by younger participants, whose careers developed in a professional field characterised by ubiquitous and continuous presence of 'Western' aid (Figure 6). Af13 exemplified this when he spoke of the need for sustainable donor approaches to capacity development:

> *A strategy should be developed how they will transfer their skills to us, and it will be how we are confident that we can do this task without any support from the international community.*

His remarks allude to the Afghans' historically sedimented dispositional unwillingness to accept prolonged foreign rule discussed in the Introduction to this thesis. They also point at the effects described in the section on field, where dominant fields "pervade and curtail the autonomy of subordinate fields" (Colley, 2012: 331).

It is important to remember that the Afghan bureaucratic field is the arena in which the Afghan participants hold positions of seniority. The field's subordination orients their habitus towards consolidating and concentrating statist and cultural capital to legitimise the state and their positions in it: as Bourdieu (2010: 438) observes, "the determinations which agents undergo throughout their existence constitute a system in which a predominant weight belongs to factors such as the capital possessed…" This constitutes yet another example of how the interplay and co-dependency between field, habitus and capital can influence particular dispositions to workplace learning.

In their study of the hierarchical system of conceptions of learning at work, Pillay et al. (2003) argue that the highest level conceptions of learning (in their

case 'continuous lifelong process' and 'changing as a person') are more conducive to learning for and through work, and are related to critical thinking, creativity and innovation. The understanding of workplace learning as *national development and sovereignty* revealed by this research is all-encompassing and focused on the collective good, it is not confined to particular learning sites or approaches to learning, and it caters for the individual realisation in the field. In that sense, it subsumes all previous conceptions, and should act (at least theoretically) as a strong dispositional enabler to individual learning.

Given the positive individual dispositions to workplace learning and the high returns on investments in cultural capital in Afghanistan, one would assume a fertile ground for engagement with donor-funded learning in the Afghan bureaucratic field. Yet the assessment of capacity development efforts since 2001 has indicated unsatisfying outcomes. The next section will therefore address additional dispositional factors that have an impact on the effectiveness of aid interventions.

Afghan attitudes to development and neoliberalism

Afghanistan's historical experience is replete with wars and violent conflicts, foreign occupations and insurgency. Country experts such as Byrd (2012) observe that the national identity in this country was in fact formed and defined by resistance against foreign invaders, which also took on a religious dimension as a means of collective identity preservation.

This has led many to assert that Afghans have radical doubts about the very concept of modernisation, as it may lead to *'moral confusion'* in the words of the prominent Islamic scholar Sheikh Muhammad Abduh (Soage, 2009). Such a position also echoes the charge of the post-developmental school that development views traditional cultures as an impediment to modernisation, and thus aims to replace them with imported cultural forms.

As discussed in Chapter Two, modernisation is at the very heart of the 'Western' development project (Kowalski, 2010) and it supplies the ideological undercurrent in learning content and capacity building approaches provided by

aid. Thus the right question to pose might be not 'whether', but 'to what ends' Afghans are motivated to learn.

The suggestion that the society of Afghanistan collectively rejects the very concept of modernisation is refuted by country analysis. For instance, Clark (2012) notes that the popularity of the 2001 "*Western military intervention in a Muslim country with a historical antipathy to invaders was extraordinary*". A recent nationwide public opinion poll of Afghan citizens (Warren, 2014) providing longitudinal data over ten years shows an overall increase in the perception of Afghans that their country is moving in the right direction.

The sample of the Afghan participants lent strong support to the concept of modernisation. In relation to this point, it is worth mentioning Roy's (1988: 10) observation that the Afghan public service has traditionally been perceived to be "*the place of innovation… all 'intellectuals' and 'bare-heads'*". Moreover, the stark contrast between the destruction effected by the years of civil war and the intensive development work in the country since 2001 was invoked in many of the interviews. This has constituted a positive and tangible encounter with development work:

> *…many bad holes on the top of this building, the building was burnt, everything was destroyed. So our building was after one and a half years renovated, and there was a ceremony for opening. (Af8)*

The respondents did not consider any alternatives to modernisation, indicating that it has attained a status of doxa within the Afghan public service, "of that which is beyond question" (Bourdieu, 1977: 169). Indeed the national Constitution talks about the development objectives of the state, and sets as an objective the attainment of "a prosperous life and sound living environment for all inhabitants of this land" (IRoA, 2004: 4).

On the other hand, how modernisation and development are to be achieved is a much more controversial subject than a cursory look at Afghanistan's key policy documents formulated after 2001 would indicate. Article Ten of the Constitution of Afghanistan commits the country to the principles of market economy, and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (IRoA, 2008: i)

reaffirms a country vision for "prosperity based on a strong, private-sector led market economy".

Despite these high-level commitments, neoliberalism has not established itself as the dominant and non-questioned national vision across Afghan social space. For instance, a survey of Afghanistan's leadership mental models and their attitudes towards economic policy (OTF, 2005) finds that the majority strongly believe in interventionism, in the form of state ownership of enterprises and direct redistribution of wealth. This undercurrent of ideological resistance was reaffirmed by the Afghan research participants:

> *Af6: Before we experienced this communist regime, a group of people came and started implementing that regime. And then another group came and said, open market system...The situation of Afghanistan not agree with this system.*

As the earlier discussion on the autonomy of the Afghan bureaucratic field indicated, neoliberalism is a worldview that Afghanistan has had to subscribe to in order to unlock the coffers of 'Western' donor institutions. Yet, lessons from the country's past demonstrate that Afghanistan's financial indebtedness does not guarantee loyalty to a foreign agenda associated with the source of the external funding (Byrd, 2012).

However, aid in recent years is significantly larger than ever before. Its sheer magnitude appears to have incurred impacts to the extent of ideological mimicry, or creating the illusion of adopting the outward forms of a market economy (policies, strategies), with little impact on their actual implementation. Af4 exemplified this when she described a recent process of government-wide policy formulation she took part in:

> *Our concept of* [policy] *at the beginning was really different from what we produced at the end, only because it was like, your economy is donor-driven, so if you want money, you have to comply with certain conditions. We produced something for which we could get a reward in terms of donor funding.*

Later on she added:

> *If you are introducing a policy, you have to make sure that everybody agrees to it…they don't really buy the idea and they still believe in, like old-fashioned ideas.* (Af4)

No matter how reluctant, the formal policy commitments made by the Government of Afghanistan have allowed donors to mobilise the discourse of partnership and mutuality, a requirement in mainstream development policies since the Paris Declaration of 2005. Consequently, neoliberalism as donors' doxa (Bourdieu, 1998) has informed the areas of intervention and learning objectives of capacity building projects in Afghanistan in the last decade. For instance, a general thrust of reform and associated capacity building in a number of the case ministries has been reorienting the Government from direct intervention into the economy, to a role of a regulator and facilitator of market forces.

As discussed in the review of the literature, when presented with information inconsistent with their knowledge or beliefs, individuals experience tension that affects their volition and investment in social practice (Dechawatanapaisal and Siengthai, 2006). In this regard, the literature has drawn attention to the learning outcomes where there is disjuncture between workers' habitus and the dominant doxa: (Colley, 2012) discusses the negative impact of UK government austerity policies on engagement with learning in public service work, while Whetten and Cameron (2011) describe how learners activate various defence mechanisms to preserve the stability of their self-concept.

The research data indicates that capacity building for neoliberal reforms has often been incongruent with aspects of the identities of Afghan learners, in particular those exposed to a socialist approach to governance in their youth. These "*long-held beliefs that were hard to penetrate*" (AfCo1), rather than general dispositions to learning, explain the more resistant attitudes of mature workers to capacity building interventions flagged above: "*People like training. But the system should be based on their own*" (Af6).

This 'hysteresis effect' (Bourdieu, 1977), or the discordance between the habitus and the social context, was best captured by the national consultants participating in this research. This group of respondents is well placed to provide valuable insights of nuanced behaviour, because they share mental schemes and premises with both providers and recipients of aid, established respectively through 'Western' education, and common history and experiences.

One such case is AfCo3, an Afghan team leader of a bilaterally-funded technical assistance project to an Afghan ministry. Providing an example of a critical capacity building intervention undertaken by his project, he ascribed the initial resistance of the Afghan public servants to engage with learning and reform for sector liberalisation to ideological disjuncture:

> *[T]his idea of market economy, I would say that the majority in the Government don't understand what it is. They are against it… They have just heard, maybe from previous times, that you know, OK, this capitalism, this is private sector, this is sucking the blood of, you know, the poor.* (AfCo3)

To realise positive learning outcomes, AfCo3's project facilitated tailored discussions about the concept of market economy and the role of Government in it. They engaged both international and local systems of knowledge in an effort to negotiate meanings and relations between recipients and providers:

> [I]*t was an international… we also had some local economists, commentators you know, university professors. And you see, you know, how people think. They said that Government should set prices for the* [sector]*. So that's a common belief. That's when you bring them on, and you talk to them, and locals talk to them, and we started a debate, and asking questions, and receiving answers, and by the end you see that they somehow get it, start thinking about it.*

The respondent went on to explain how as a result, a policy reform was eventually taken on board by the Ministry. His project had thus performed translation in the sense described by (Bhabha, 1990: 210), "as a way of

imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense – imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it can be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed". This approach facilitated critical assessment and gradual adaptation of individual dispositions. It allowed Afghan recipients to exercise agency in their encounter with new and challenging ideas, and to interpret them and integrate them into their existing frameworks. As Hodkinson et al. (2008) contend, such processes of ongoing construction and reconstruction of the habitus constitutes learning.

Yet as noted by both AfCo3 and AfCo1, such a gradual management of the anxieties provoked by changes in the sector, the government and own professional roles in it, is an exception: "[*We] probably didn't do it on a national level, and we certainly didn't do it on a Ministry level. Say like, this is how the model was in the past, this is who we are now"* (AfCo1)*.* Many more respondents spoke about experiencing the so-called blueprint approach to development, or being offered a single model that has worked elsewhere to be applied without adaptation to the local context. An example can be seen in the answer given by Af5, who described his brief interaction with a consultant offering support to restructure a government ministry in line with the principles of market economy:

> *A consultant from one of the embassies came introducing to us a sample of structures, saying 'If you want to accept this structure, then I'm here to help you in whatever capacity. If not, I will just say goodbye'. (Af5)*

In this case the Afghan participants elected to withdraw from engagement with the consultant and the learning opportunities it entails, and rejected implementation of reform based on a blueprint approach. They did not consider themselves at the receiving end of a transmission process but insisted on constructing their own knowledge.

Other examples in the research data pointed at instances of superficial compliance, where Afghan civil servants purport to engage with learning opportunities inconsistent with their values and beliefs. In this way they 'outsmart' the controlling manner of development and the potential violence it

conceals (Bourdieu, 1992) by denigrating it from an opportunity to learn to an economic resource to be used, while it lasts: "*… they turn to workshop or seminar, and they are there just for the meal and 200, 300, 500 Afs. This is the inside story*" (AfCo2).

What unites these cases is the assertion, be it open or subdued, of the veracity of a different perspective, and of the need of Afghan recipients of aid of equity and of their own, alternative version of development (Pigg, 1992; Brigg, 2002). Donor-funded approaches that overlook this need are likely to cause resistance and to reaffirm unintentionally "*the presence of the past*" in individuals' cognitive schemata (Bourdieu, 2000: 210). As Bourdieu (1977) maintains, such hysteresis of the habitus is "*the cause of missed opportunities*" (p. 83), and it certainly goes contrary to the objectives of learning and development.

As the preceding section on field effects shows, even when there is learning, the effectiveness of technical assistance can be reduced by obstacles to its application. Some Afghan public servants described situations where the dispositions to neoliberalism of the country "higher state nobility" (Wacquant, 2009: 289) significantly hindered change in work practices by the "lower state nobility". This effect was particularly pronounced in the cases discussing policy and legislative reform informed by neoliberal doxa.

For instance, Af18 reflected on his positive engagement with a donor-funded technical assistance project, his growing understanding of sector policy issues, and the ensuing reforms his directorate was trying to implement. The participants' frustration was palpable when he spoke about the resistance he faced from the political decision-makers within the administration: "*I told him* [Minister]*, in front of our Ministers, 'why did you accept this market economy? If you accepted it, now you should observe the principles'...*"

The deeply political nature of development aid has the potential to fuel suspicion and mistrust of donor motivations, which ultimately has an impact on the effectiveness of workplace learning in the context of Afghanistan. For example, Af10 recalled the cold welcome to a presentation she delivered to a group of government ministers, advocating specific approaches to sector

liberalisation she worked on for months with the support of dedicated foreign technical advisers:

> *Af10: [A]nd he* (Minister) *says, "You have no clue. These advisors, God knows with what agendas they come here, give you this advice, you give it to me. Two years later, you're not here, I'm going to be here, I'm signing this paper... How can I accept that?"*

Technical assistance programmes to government ministries are typically formally endorsed by the very same leadership that is shown to block their outputs. This situation can be elucidated by employing Bigo's (2011) concept of *acts of piracy.* It refers to situations in which agents from weaker fields, such as the Afghan bureaucracy are temporarily submitted to rules coming from other fields, such as the international donors. It is abundantly clear to all players that the agents of other fields (donors and consultants) would impose their game only for a short period of time, and that they have no ambitions to become permanent agents of this field.

Aware of the transient nature of the *acts of piracy*, the agents with strong interests at stake (such as the Afghan leadership) employ a waiting game and strategies of ideological mimicry to reap the benefits the situation presents without giving in to hostile doxa: they would endorse reform projects but reject substantial changes in work practices. AfCo2 captures some of these motivations in the following comment:

> *'[T] here will be some chairs for us, some desks will be provided to us'. They believe this, and some of the donors pay the deputy ministers, directors secretly. In order to let them operate. (AfCo2)*

This pragmatic, transactional approach to aid is an example of the inventiveness of the habitus: in line with its dispositions, it acts in the present towards a future, which is anticipated based on historical knowledge of the field (Bourdieu, 2000). As mentioned earlier, Afghanistan's financial dependencies have never secured submission to a foreign agenda. However, this game creates a disconnect within the Afghan bureaucratic field, not along generational lines but along the horizons of action afforded to players within it:

"How can you train a minister? How can you train a president? (laughs)" (Af2)*.* Even when Afghan public servants' participating dispositions to learning are enlisted, the actualisation of learning in the work place can be rejected by their political masters.

Such situations test learners' motivation and commitment to the game, or 'illusio' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Af11 exemplified this when she talked about a failed attempt to legislate policy changes already agreed by Cabinet. These policies were developed by her and her team after receiving an intensive training programme provided by a technical assistance project:

> *You know, that is what hurts me. Working for the government these issues exist but unfortunately the more you become senior, these problems increase manifolds. We have a term like* [in Dari]*, means 'I don't care'. That's how everyone feels right now. I really don't care. It is none of my business. I look into my own.* (Af11)

Af11's account reveals how her subjectivity is constituted in the workplace (Billett and Somerville, 2004), and how field dynamics can negate aspects of the habitus, transformed and changed by learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). A very successful learner, she faced the paradoxical situation of being more like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 127) at work, where the newly developed knowledge and beliefs she had internalised clashed with the knowledge and beliefs of influential others.

The futility of effort and the emotional suffering that that provokes has affected Af11's dispositions to use her abilities, and eroded her interest in further engagement with learning opportunities for and through the workplace. The case resonates with Corley and Gioia (2004) description of the occurrence of 'temporal identity discrepancies' and the resultant loss of motivation, where there is inconsistency between what they term organisational and individual identities.

Advisor credibility

Another prominent theme that emerged in the research concerns recipients' attitudes to advisers and the value of cultural capital they espouse.

In Distinction, Bourdieu (2010) maintains that the habitus produces "classificatory judgements… of other agents' practices and their own" (p.165), which are then inscribed within the dispositions of the habitus. Such classifications affect individuals' propensities to act in certain ways, and research data indicate that they can moderate their engagement with learning.

The presence of development consultants in the Government of Afghanistan is pervasive. Waldman (2008) estimates that 40% of aid to Afghanistan goes back to donor countries in the form of corporate profits and consultant salaries. According to the World Bank, consultants have in fact formed a parallel layer of public administration (World Bank, 2008). As AfCo2 observes, in the minds of aid recipients they are strongly associated with the practice of capacity building: "*Because when capacity building comes to our mind then international advisers directly come to our mind.*"

As the earlier discussion on dispositions to learning revealed, the symbolic economy of the Afghan bureaucratic field valorises ownership of cultural capital, as it yields profits of distinction to those who possess it. Yet consultants' possession of advanced knowledge is often contested. When asked about the most preferred approaches to learning, a great number of Afghan respondents echoed the position of Af1, who said, "*it would have had a better effect if part-time they were given the chance to study within Afghanistan in the private universities… they improve their level and get credentials at the end of the day.*"

Discussing the value of consultant-mediated learning, *all* Afghan public servants who contributed to the research made comments about the competencies of advisers they have encountered. Their position was that on average, consultants sent to Afghanistan are mediocre experts. This understanding is encapsulated in the answer given by Af18, who noted that

[S]ome organisations just hired some low qualified people as consultants. Because in Afghanistan the situation was not good from security point of view… qualified people are not willing to come to Afghanistan.

The most common charges were outright lack of expertise, "*the problem is that in Afghanistan you provide a plumber as a [sector] advisor*" (Af16), or a mismatch between advisory role and advisor's skills: "*the people that are coming as consultants or trainers are not really experts in that particular area*" (Af12). Similar views were shared by other groups of respondents. For instance, Fo2, who works as an embedded overseas advisor within an Afghan ministry for over a year notes that "*the calibre of a lot of consultants in this field is low.*"

Over 12 years of interaction with consultants, stereotypes about them abound. Towards the end of the interview with Af15, when trust and personal connection were established, he volunteered an Afghan joke about consultants. The gist of it is that an international development adviser is outsmarted by a local illiterate shepherd, who correctly guessed the consultant's occupation because "*first, you told me something that I already knew. Second, you are not invited but you are here. Lastly, you don't know the difference between a sheep and a dog*" (Af15).

As noted by Bourdieu (2010), people adapt to their environment through cognitive categorization and stereotyping, and these classificatory systems orient individual action. Relatedly, the Afghan public servants in the sample associated their negative assessments of the expertise of consultants with the low effectiveness of donor-funded workplace learning in Afghanistan, and with reduced motivation to learn from them:

Definitely a very negative impact, when a person is coming as junior person from abroad, deliver training and these people [Afghans] *really have good knowledge. They feel bored and they become very sceptical about all these training programs. (Af5)*

Responses of overseas participants also indicated that recipient readiness and motivation to engage in a learning relationship was premised on recipient perception of advisor credibility. In the majority of cases advisor credibility was associated with educational qualifications and expertise relevant to the sector and the problematic situation.

For instance, Fo1 mentions how she "*got instant respect*" for having a specialised technical degree, while Fo7 reports an ineffective relationship with her Ministry counterpart, because he considered her far too young to be adequately experienced. This influenced his receptiveness to advice: "*he didn't trust me like I was a new girl like… I just turned 27, he is looking at me, 'what does she know.'*" On a related note, Fo6 described that during his first project experience in country it took "*close to nine months of interaction with the Afghans before we felt that they were starting to accept that we can deliver something.*" He attributed recipients' scepticism to past experience with ineffective consultants.

The abundance of supply of consultants to the Afghan bureaucratic field, and the variance in their expertise has depreciated perceptions of the symbolic value of consultants' cultural capital. In some instances, historically formed dispositions of recipients of aid have been re-confirmed and solidified: "*Most aid was wasted because quality was not taken care of... The Russians also had the same approach, focusing on quantity not quality.*" (Af14).

The forms and value of capital are field-specific, and where particular forms of cultural capital are neither recognised as valuable to the learner, nor experienced as a means to an end, interest in taking up learning opportunities is low (Hodkinson and Hodkinson, 2004b). Although many respondents commented on the value of practical over academic learning, participants' responses reveal that formal educational qualifications often trump the certificates issued by capacity building projects in terms of their desirability. A key reason for this is the unsatisfactory conversion rate of consultant-provided learning into other types of capital, or its limited perceived utility (Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008). Afghan public servants see formal qualifications as stronger enablers of further development and their responses are clearly informed by "a

strategic calculation tending to carry on quasi-consciously… an estimation of chances which assumes the transformation of the past effect into the expected objective" (Bourdieu, 1977: 76).

All in all, the findings from this research support the suggestion that learners' perceptions of instructor value moderate learners' receptiveness to learning and advice (Owen, 2009; Brad Harris, Chung, L. Frye, et al., 2014). This highlights the importance of being mindful of the attitudinal qualities of the learner in the workplace, so that strategies (e.g. priming) can be devised for raising awareness of the value of consultant cultural capital.

However, as indicated in the analysis of the field, aid does not facilitate such attention to detail. Advisors typically arrive without prior orientation and they are likely to be unaware of the tacit expectation to demonstrate expertise and build credibility (e.g. Fo6's first project). Furthermore, a number of Afghan managers talked about the occasions when they have not been consulted about recruitment of advisors, and respectively not being aware of their qualifications: "*One day I am coming from home, and he is standing in the corridor. I told him, 'who are you?' He said, 'I'm hired here'. For what?"* (Af17)

Furthermore, Afghan public servants are fundamentally disadvantaged by the symbolic order in the field. Their need for capacity building implies an inferiority/superiority relationship with consultants. This may conflict with values of self-reliance and independence (Fisher et al., 1982), and reduce learner self-efficacy (Grossman and Salas, 2011). The cognitive categorisation and stereotyping of consultants as 'low value' or incompetent is a mechanism allowing recipients of aid to reject the legitimacy of the dominant classifications of *developed* vs *undeveloped*, of *knowledgeable* vs *ignorant*. Younger respondents, often endowed with more political and cultural capital in the field, tend to discard such classifications outright. This type of reaction is revealed in the reported conversation with a high level Afghan public servant:

> *He was saying, how he was in his office, that these foreign women came out of the blue from some project, and saying are we are here to help you build your capacity. And he said, "I am thinking, what do <u>you</u> want to teach <u>me</u>?"* (Af10)

A number of more mature respondents maintained equity by talking about consultants plagiarising ideas and work from aid recipients, and presenting them as their own to ministry leadership or donor organisations.

> *And we give them explanations, we're doing this and we're doing that, 'can you give us a copy', and then they translate it in English, and give report to the World Bank, and they say this is what we have done* (laughs)*. (Af5)

Overall, the perspectives shared by research participants echo some of the assumptions that have long been maintained by social psychology: that people aspire to maintain equity in their interpersonal relations; that inequitable relations cause discomfort; and that discomfort is a motivating factor for individuals to either restore actual equity, or to achieve psychological equity through means such as cognitive distortion of inputs/outputs of self or other (Fisher et al., 1982).

Conclusion

As discussed in the review of the literature, development practice has largely followed a modernisation approach based on the argument that subjective psychological factors can be safely ignored. Critical studies of practice from within (e.g. Eyben and Leon, 2005; Mosse, 2005) have demonstrated that official representations of development differ substantially from the ways things are actually done. This 'double reality' has obscured an all-round understanding the enablers and barriers to capacity building, one of the most pervasive arenas for professional development of hundreds of thousands of employees of public sector organisations in the developing world.

It is significant that development agencies are starting to recognise the fact that "psychological, social, and cultural influences" may have a causal impact on development outcomes (World Bank, 2015). The findings of this research confirm this contention. They suggest that the Afghan bureaucratic field is rife with identity tensions, triggered by ideological disjuncture and by the very

concept of capacity building premised on an unsettling categorisation of inequality in human social relations. Furthermore, the analysis revealed the importance of individual dispositions to learning, modernisation and advisors, which guide strategies to uptake and transfer of donor-provided learning into the workplace. How these tensions play out in practical interactions with advisors that occur within the structuring confines of the field will be discussed next.

Chapter 6: Interaction-related factors, findings and discussion

This Chapter explores whether and how the interaction between providers and recipients of technical assistance supports or inhibits workplace learning outcomes in the Afghan bureaucratic field. Such interactions are a constitutive part of the practice of capacity building, which is based on the premise of consultant-guided learning through everyday collaborative practices and structured interventions.

In keeping with Bourdieu's (1977) theoretical framework, interaction is understood to be in part the product of objective, contextual factors. These include the properties of the field where interaction takes place and the relative positions of the groups to which the interacting agents belong. Therefore the relationship between providers and recipients of capacity building programmes cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the pressures and trajectories that the donor and the Afghan bureaucratic fields exert on the respective interacting agents, and the relative positions of dominance and subordination allocated to the group of aid recipients vis-à-vis the group of aid providers.

Interactions are also conditioned by the embedded systems of dispositions of all relating agents. These are ontogenically and historically accumulated propensities to act in ways that one believes sustain or promote one's position in the field. From that perspective, it is through the process of interaction that relations of domination entailed in the possession of cultural or economic or other forms of capital can be maintained or challenged (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Acknowledging the complexity of analysing interpersonal relations, Bourdieu asserts that they are "never, except in appearance, individual-to-individual relationships" (Bourdieu, 1977: 81). In an attempt to provide a fine-grained analysis of the relationship factors that affect learning, this part of the analysis refers to relevant findings from earlier analytical sections on field and habitus and includes the voices of all groups of participants. Respondents were

requested to reflect on the relational factors that play out in all types of learning-oriented situations they have experienced or observed.

The section starts with a discussion of the power and political dynamics that surround the learning interaction in the Afghan bureaucratic field, and the effects they have on the quality of the relationship between providers and recipients of capacity building services. The analysis then turns to the dispositional qualities of donor-funded consultants that were found to moderate more significantly the outcomes of learning interactions.

Power and political dynamics

In general, Afghan and overseas respondents supported the suggestion that relationship micro-processes can be an important enabling or inhibiting factor for workplace learning in the development settings of Afghanistan.

The underlying assumption of a non-problematic relationship between the interacting agents contained in much of the workplace learning literature (e.g. Lave and Wenger, 1991) was not confirmed by this study. Participants' views on the consultant-recipient relationships in the field provided a diversity of perspectives, but there were points of agreement: dyad dynamics can be openly or surreptitiously conflictual, and intervention style and attitudinal qualities in the relationship can yield or inhibit learning. The issue of power was recurrent and prominent.

The power dynamic inherent in development is not a discovery of this research. The post-development literature reviewed in Chapter Two considers power dynamics central to development: Escobar (1995a: 10) maintains that development is a "domain of thought and action" based on systems of knowledge and power. Correspondingly, the earlier section describing the peculiarities of the Afghan bureaucratic field highlighted that deficit of autonomy characterises Afghan government organisations, detected in their highest level policy- and strategy-making.

Issues of dominance were specifically invoked in discussions focused on the micro-processes of capacity building practice, and clearly associated with its outcomes. They permeated descriptions of workplace learning interactions provided by Afghan participants across the sample of organisations. A host of themes associated with the uneasy position of being 'developed' manifested themselves time and again in conversations probing into learning successes and failures, reflections on personal experiences, participants' recommendations for future actions, and deliberations on what makes a good consultant for capacity building.

An example of the tone of the answers can be seen in the account of Af16. At the beginning of the interview, this participant insisted on sharing an experience that clearly made a significant impression on him. He described his first contact with a capacity building advisor some ten years ago, who interrupted the Director's introductory team meeting "*the same like a minister*" and summoned one of Af16's subordinates out. Af16 remarked: "*And that was very interesting for me. Because I was in charge of this department.*" This situational vignette illustrates a major theme that was raised in a number of interviews. It concerns the tension between two species of symbolic capital (Bourdieu et al., 1994): the statist capital that government officials are endowed with, and the cultural/political capital conferred onto consultants by virtue of supposed superior knowledge and association with foreign donors.

Bourdieu et al. (1994: 4) define statist capital as the "concentration of different species of capital." Theoretically, such statist capital would enable the local state nobility to exercise decision-making authority and power over the different particular fields that make up the Afghan society. Practically, in the objective situation of acute aid dependency the Afghan statist capital has been devalued and contested. The position of symbolic subordination is indicated by the outgoing president of the country who became increasingly vocal and critical of "the interference of foreigners" and called for "Afghanising government institutions" (Crilly, 2011) in his last term (2010-2014).

Yet Afghan civil servants have limited instruments to resist a position of subordination. A number of Afghan participants made comments along the

lines of Af12's opinion that "*the Minister and other people like to have foreigners in their offices*". Some of the overseas respondents also observed that being considered worthy of donor investment adds to the political capital of the higher state nobility (Wacquant, 2009: 289): *"It is like a prestige thing, 'Yeah, I have ten consultants'"* (Fo8).

Thus consultants can have direct access to both organisational leadership and donor agencies. This allows consultants to exert a degree of influence onto both parties – in terms of evaluating counterpart competence, and assessing organisational worthiness of future support. A simplified representation of the possible power and political dynamics surrounding the intra-personal relations between consultants and civil servants is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Power and political dynamics between aid recipients and providers
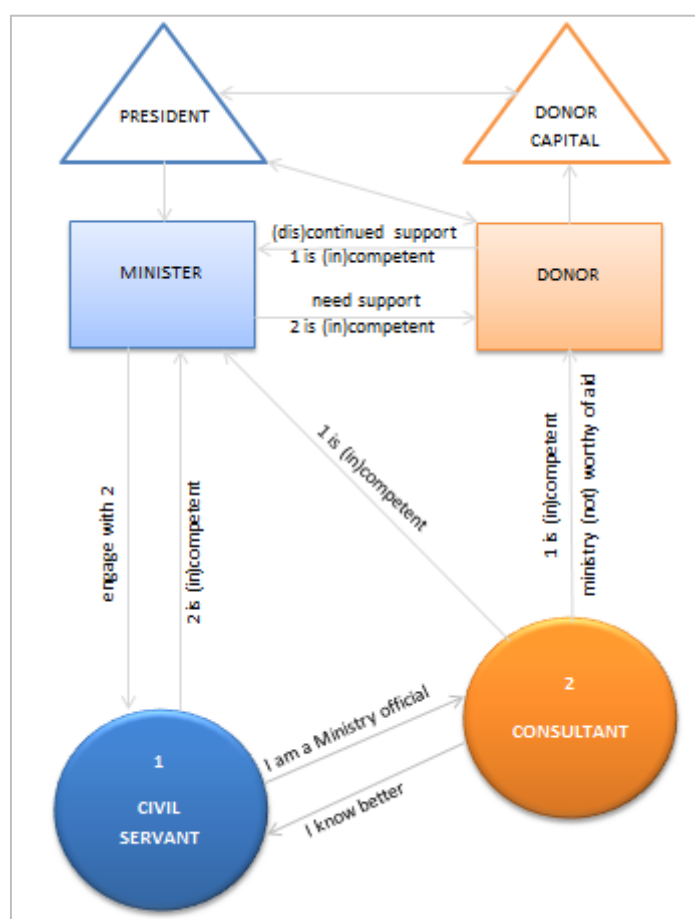
To understand the dynamics in Figure 7, it is necessary to recall that consultants are also players (albeit temporarily) in the field. Just like their Afghan counterparts, they benefit from the recognition of the 'higher state

nobility': a consultant preferred and needed by Ministers and Deputy Ministers is likely to enjoy the approval of donors, and secure recurrent gainful employment. As Bourdieu (1977, 1986) notes, players in the field constantly vie to secure more favourable positions in it, and they use capital, the "energy of social physics" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) to promote themselves.

So what ideally should be a supportive and beneficial learning relationship can turn into an outright contestation: "*they* [civil servants] *start seeing these foreigners as competitors especially in the eyes of the ministers or big people*" (Fo8). Such power and political dynamics place the 'end consumers' of capacity building services – the lower state nobility and ordinary Afghan public servants, in a precarious game that can negatively affect their position in the field. This clearly can erode learners' trust that consultants have their best interests at heart and have a negative impact on the interactional dynamics. Recent research has highlighted learner's trust in a more knowledgeable other as "a pivotal mediator in bridging relationship quality" (Son and Kim, 2012: 312) and a gatekeeper to commitment and increasing engagement with learning (Hauer et al., 2014).

As Collin (2008) argues, the complex interactions between instructors and learners may influence learning in ways that are benign or malign. Fo1, whose case will be discussed in more detail later (pseudonym Vera) was one of the few overseas participants who provided an example of how intricate power dynamics can be steered to establish interpersonal comfort and trust conducive to learning.

The participant recollected an occasion when she was unexpectedly summoned to a meeting with the Minister, and the anxieties this provoked in her Afghan counterpart: "*was I going to inform on him, what was I going to say.*" She went on to describe that messages to the Minister were formulated together with the directorate, that members of the directorate accompanied her to the meeting, and how at the end of it all her counterparts "*were over the moon … they just felt recognised and they felt really supported*".

As Fo1's account demonstrates, the commitment and depth of the interaction is clearly correlated to the recipients' assessment of its benefits (measured in

accrued political and cultural capital) and resultant levels of trust. Yet the perspective supported by the majority of Afghan participants was that the relationship between providers and recipients of aid is more often perilous. Some Afghan participants described instances when interactions with consultants outright harmed their careers. For example, Af6 ascribed his recent demotion to the fact that he challenged the performance of a capacity building project: "*I had some tough time with them* [consultants]*… and then they complained to the Minister, and that's why I was removed" (Af6).*

Others talked about more subtle ways of eroding the learning relationship. A number of participants – both Afghan and foreign, registered the potential of aid to devalue Afghan public servants' cultural capital as experts. AfCo2 shared his observations of how consultants, in performing their technical and reform tasks, can inadvertently reduce the professional credibility of their counterparts: "*If I am a director, and you are with minister and telling in front of me: in your directorate, this is not good, this, this - obviously I will defend. Obviously. Then I will not respect you. And I will not give time for you*". This argument resonates with the findings of Boud and Solomon (2003), who note the tensions surrounding the label of 'learner' in the workplace, and its negative effects on engagement with learning.

The effects of power and politics are often understood to reduce access to unequally distributed learning opportunities in the workplace (Billett, 2002). Paradoxically, power and politics in the Afghan bureaucratic field also appear to have truncated possibilities to *reject* learning opportunities. For instance, Af16 described a situation in which he was told in no uncertain terms that he '*should*' cooperate with a capacity building consultant he deemed unsuitable:

> *'Should' is a final decision. As I am working here, for me this is unacceptable. 'Should' is not for me, 'should' for the right things, which I can't do - of course I will accept. But force, I never accept the force. Maybe sometimes I accept.*

Af16's begrudging acceptance of this learning interaction is a self-protective tactic but is also reveals practices operating to re-enforce aid recipients' submission to domination. In discussing similar instances in which otherwise

arbitrary power relations (such as those between advisors and recipients of aid) are accepted and reproduced in everyday life, Bourdieu uses the concept of symbolic violence. It is defined as "violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity" (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) and it clearly characterises some of the interpersonal interactions discussed in relation to the Afghan bureaucratic field. The fear of negative consequences explains why, despite consistent criticisms of unsatisfactory capacity building results (Table 3), there were only limited examples of any attempts at consultant management by recipients of aid. As Af9 noted,

> *… consultants can easily reach the Minister or high authority people. To complain. If I complain, tell him, 'please your work is not good, your idea not good, please do like that', he complain to high authority.*

This indicates that complex power and political dynamics characterise the relational micro-processes between providers and recipients of aid in Afghanistan's bureaucratic field. The practice of capacity building is clearly associated with some degree of anxiety and political risk, which creates psychological discomfort for those at the receiving end of development interventions. This is exemplified by Fo8, whose Afghan counterpart admitted that "*I feel very insecure when you and these other people* [consultants] *are around*".

The participants' feedback suggests that relations of dominance and subordination, and the exercise of symbolic violence complicate the formation of the positive relationships associated with optimal learning (Allen and Eby, 2003; Cornelius-White, 2007). The next section will demonstrate how these field effects can be exacerbated or moderated by consultants' dispositional qualities, and how this affects the relationship quality between providers and recipients of aid.

Consultant dispositional qualities

The significance of consultant dispositions for the quality of interpersonal interactions is well illustrated by the case of Vera (elsewhere Fo1) whose

positive account differed markedly from the majority of reported negative experiences. As Leftwich (2010) notes, success stories that run against the general patterns of aid ineffectiveness are important to analyse, as they provide a rare and valuable opportunity to study a multiplicity of factors relationally. A summary of Vera's story is presented below, and her experiences are woven into the discussion that ensues.

Box 3: Vera

Vera is a British female in her late 30s. She holds a post-graduate degree. Before coming to Afghanistan she worked for some ten years as a trainer in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Central America. This instructional experience in international development had strengthened her dispositions to a way of work that is '*participatory*,' a term she used frequently.

Vera was brought to Afghanistan by a consultancy company to replace the project manager of an onging capacity building project. Her key task was to turn the project around, as it was having difficulties with its ministry client: "*a letter was sent from the Minister to say we don't want that consultant to be in that position on that project*" (Fo1).

This moment can be characterised as a critical incident in the life of the project, because it "*occur(red) in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects*" (Flanagan, 1954: 327). As Vera observes, the letter was "*a shock to people*," not least because Afghan counterparts generally refrain from open confrontation.

The Ministry discontent had little to do with the field factors often invoked by Afghan participants, such as inadequate learning content (Blume et al., 2010): "*the functions that we work on are exactly the same as the functions in the directorate.*" There was no ideological disjuncture and lack of strategic link (Burke and Hutchins, 2007) as described earlier, because the project was entirely focused on technical processes. Vera's understanding is that the complaint was triggered by personality factors: "*it wasn't a shock in terms of the communication skills of that consultant because maybe they weren't as*

diplomatic, or maybe they didn't take as long to try and help people to understand things."

When she stepped into the job, Vera found that the relationship between the project and the Ministry was "*poor*" and transactional: "*our project was paying people to work with us*". Soon after her arrival Vera decided to organise the first of what later became a series of participatory work planning workshops. It was resisted by consultants and Afghan civil servants alike, who "*sat there not looking very happy.*" As part of the ice breaking exercise, the Afghan participants were requested to say two positive things about the project "*and it was just 'the project doesn't do this, the project doesn't do that, this is rubbish, that's rubbish' and by the end I was ready to cancel. To cry and to cancel.*"

In less than two years, Vera had stopped the payments to Afghan counterparts and despite fears to the contrary, this did not lead to a complete breakdown of the relationship. What is more, she transformed the project into one of the most highly regarded technical assistance projects that the Ministry has been receiving, "*now seen to be one of the best* [sector] *projects in the Ministry and have real positive results*".

Vera's self-assessment was confirmed independently by Afghan participants, who referred to the way she conducts business as a successful capacity building practice, and contrasted that approach with negative experiences of other consultants and projects:

> [Vera] *always shared her idea with the directorate, with related people. Always. She came, we sit here with her, and says, 'What is your idea about this? What is your idea? How to do?' But before that some consultants, others, say…'good or not, I choose that, please do that'. It was very bad. No progress, if there's progress - on paper.* (Af9)

It is pertinent to note that the interviews with these Afghan respondents were had a few months after Vera had left the country and the project.

To achieve this project transition, Vera described a multi-pronged approach, which evolved with her growing understanding of the context in which she operated. A significant part of her efforts was directed towards changing the way of working of her own team of consultants: "*I also had to capacity build or help mentor my team to be able to provide better capacity building advice to their government counterparts.*"

The participant quickly realised that her overseas colleagues did not share her propensity to engage Afghan counterparts in everyday collaborative practices, the type of participation that allows learners to build skills, demonstrate competence and develop autonomy (Lave and Wenger, 1991). She spoke about the natural inclination of her team of consultants to be "*just doing things*" and that "*they did not do anything in a participatory manner.*" The consultants' energies had been focused on producing outputs required by the donor, not on the learners.

The majority of consultants are reaching the end of their professional careers, and they are used to being in the driver's seat, taking decisions and implementing directly. Vera, a trainer herself, also highlighted the lack of facilitatory and pedagogic qualities of her colleagues, who are typically recruited by virtue of technical, not pedagogical expertise (Brinkerhoff, 2010). Similar observations were made by some of the other participants, e.g. Fo6 suggested it as one of the reasons for the failure of his capacity building programme: "*I think part of the problem… is I was the only one in a group with real training experience.*" Many Afghan participants maintained that patience and the innate ability to mentor and coach is an essential but often missing ingredient in capacity building interactions: "*This is a skill. I mean, you need to be patient, to wait and hand some training and to be with them, and sit with them, have working groups, and try to do work by them*" (Af2) .

But the supremacy of the technical output over human learning outcomes is also reinforced by the logic of the donor field (Easterly, 2003). As discussed in the section on field, it is the quality of the technical output, not the process of its production that typically "*yields profits of distinction*" (Bourdieu et al., 1991) for consultants. This objective order in the field only reinforces non-participatory

dispositions, and discourages consultants from adjusting expectations, objectives and pace of work with those of their counterparts.

Vera's change programme fundamentally altered the order of project priorities, in a way that counterpart learning was allotted much higher value. She acknowledged that that was only possible, because she worked with a like-minded donor supervising officer, who "*has a similar approach to the way I do things.*" She later reflected how a future rotation on donor personnel could undo some of this work, acknowledging this as a key field-related influencer on the learning interaction (Bourdieu, 1977).

Vera further flattened symbolic hierarchies by introducing participatory elements in the way the project was administered. For instance, she engaged Afghan civil servants in the recruitment and performance evaluation of new consultants, and in project work planning. Project reports, which were typically locked in the domain between donor and implementing project, started being translated and distributed to Afghan managers and their seniors. Moreover, these reports now highlighted the achievements and positive contributions of Afghan counterparts. In this way "*the government staff are feeling recognised,*" and as a result they were markedly more engaged with the learning opportunities that Vera's project presented.

To moderate her teams' propensity to non-participatory work, and to improve the quality of the relationship with Afghan counterparts, Vera employed a project management style grounded on an uncompromising insistence on a collaborating and enabling manner of working. She recollected an interaction with a newly recruited project consultant who prepared sophisticated work plans, as "*he was wanting to show me that he was a very good consultant, and I kept saying to him, 'Well no, we need to do this in a participatory manner*". Most team members made adjustments to the way they work but on a few occasions personnel changes were made. As noted by Bourdieu (1977: 78), the habitus adjusts "*to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation,*" so that players can maintain their positions within the field.

Yet the adjustment of consultant habitus was the most difficult and time-consuming part of Vera's change programme. She referred once and again to

her teams' dispositional qualities and value judgements, to a range of factors coming from "*within ourselves as consultants*" that, in her view, got in the way of achieving positive capacity building outcomes. One such quality was consultants having little confidence in Afghan public servants' cognitive abilities or motivation to learn, key factors for individual uptake of learning (Burke and Hutchins, 2007). For example, a colleague of hers explained his difficulties with capacity building work with the assertion that "*the staff are lazy, the staff is stupid*" (Vera).

This resonates with the contention of the most recent World Development Report (World Bank, 2015: 18) that "development professionals may assume that poor individuals may be less autonomous, less responsible, less hopeful, and less knowledgeable than they in fact are". The remark by the Af14 that "*Russian consultants were the same, they thought that Afghans have no knowledge at all*" indicates that these consultants' preconceptions were not necessarily the product of history or ontogeny – they are readily adapted by Western, Russian and other advisors.

They are not necessarily the product of an objective assessment of Afghan learners either – Chapter 5 demonstrated the strong interest in learning by Afghan participants. It is the relative positions of the groups that the interacting agents belong to that inculcate the cognitive categorizations (Bourdieu, 1977) of Afghan learners as undeveloped, ignorant or incapable. As Escobar (1995a: 10) maintains, development fosters subjectivities such as "those through which people come to recognise themselves as developed or underdeveloped". This is why the development practitioners interviewed were so often unaware of their own attitudes and the ways they affect practice (O'Leary and Nee, 2001).

The responses by a number of Afghan participants across the sample implied that such patronising attitudes and preconceptions are widely registered by them. They seep into the learning interaction and reduce the quality of the relationship between providers and recipients of aid. Af6 exemplified this by saying, "*they consider Afghanistan as a newly born child that has no idea about anything, starting from a, b, c… you consider us a kid that knows nothing. So this is a problem*".

As outlined in the review of the literature, instructor lack of confidence in the capacity of the learner has a negative impact on individual engagement with learning (Rogers, 1969), reducing motivation and self-efficacy and hampering the creation of an acceptant and empathic learning climate. This assumption was strongly confirmed by the participants in this research. For instance, Vera strongly associated her colleague's condescending attitudes with the low effectiveness of his capacity building work. In contrast, she provided the example of this consultant's successor "*who made massive changes. We've now got staff who come in and tell me, 'Oh, I am doing a training course now, I've learnt how to do this type of* [activity] *and I am doing it by myself.'*

Consultant doubt in the abilities and expertise of aid recipients have also resulted in Afghan civil servants' marginalisation from the domain of their own work (Hauer et al., 2014). This effect was particularly pronounced where there was evidence of strong field pressures from the donor or the Afghan senior management for prompt production of outputs.

For instance Af13's Ministry regulates a sector, which was considered of primary political importance by major development agencies. Investments in capacity building were sizeable, and expectations for results ran high. Within the organisation, Af13 depicted a succession of projects, which gradually marginalised Afghans public servants and allocated them the role of side observers: "*And we were sitting there, watching them* [consultants]. *Wow, they are strange people. They were developing their own documents and we were watching them.*"

This approach clearly reduced possibilities for substantial learning through guided participation. The participant maintained that at the end of these projects there was little positive change, it was "*the same unskilled Ministry like we had before.*" Af13 and a number of other Afghan respondents also noted the low rates of learning transfer into actual work practices in the absence of participation, e.g. "*If we sit together, develop something, and whether my contribution is 5-15, whatever percent, then I feel this is <u>mine</u>. Then I will go for implementation. You give me the sense of belonging*" (AfCo2).

The non-participatory approaches in Af13's organisation markedly reduced the relationship quality between providers and recipients of aid. The participant's account became permeated by intense negative emotions when he described the phase when the presence of Afghan government officials was only required to legitimise consultant outputs as joint government/donor deliverables: *"In the end we were only signing the documents!"* The symbolic violence (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992) Af13 and his colleagues were subjected to was doubly emasculating – in their role as individual experts, and as government officials endowed with statist capital (Bourdieu et al., 1994).

Development practitioners' attitudes are vital not only because they can put learners off or refuse them participation, but also because they can prevent the developers from learning themselves. As outlined in Chapter Two, being open to learn from each other, and being willing to be changed are also amongst the hallmarks of both the person-centred educational framework (Cornelius-White, 2007) and the participatory approaches to development (Chambers, 1995a). Discussing the factors that hamper capacity building outcomes, Fo4 highlighted the importance of consultants recognising local systems of knowledge and acknowledging the learner's cultural and social capital: *"imposing and not respecting the status and the capacity and the knowledge and the technical ability of people that you are supposedly helping is critical".*

Afghan public servants consistently expressed a desire for open and equitable relationships with development partners who value their input and who strive to understand the local context. As Af18's response exemplifies, readiness for mutual learning and ability to adapt advice to the circumstances of Afghanistan were consultant qualities that they considered highly effective:

> *The consultant should have that ability to adapt his knowledge or skill, to be in the context of the target country, target organisation. Because developing countries, they still have some knowledge, capacity and some experience which would be useful for the supporter.*

This recommendation resonates with the observation of Engeström (2004: 163) related to workplace learning in the West. The author maintains that the

complexities of changing workplaces require a new type of "collaborative and transformative expertise" that is based on "transparency and reciprocity" and on the ability to improvise, negotiate and cross boundaries: "[e]xperts must face, diagnose, and resolve novel situations for which they have little or no directly applicable practice" (p.146).

Such transformative expertise in development can be achieved through the approach recommended by Chambers, where "outsiders [have] to step off their pedestals, sit down, 'hand over the stick', and listen and learn" (Chambers, 1994: 1438). While Chambers' model was developed for rural settings, his messages resonated strongly in the very different settings of Afghan public sector organisations: Afghan respondents repeatedly emphasized the importance of experiential and collaborative approaches to capacity building and problem solving.

One of the positive examples referred to was Vera's direct capacity building work. In her account, the participant described a style of instruction, which is collaborative, less directive and more iterative (Hennissen et al., 2008). She understood her role as helping Afghan public servants to develop an understanding of a problem, tease out their own answers to problems, and reinforce their autonomy in the decision-making process: "*they say to me 'What is your idea?' and I say, 'Well, I am not going to give you <u>my</u> idea but I am going to help you with <u>your</u> ideas'.*" This came with an understanding that learning in development is not unidirectional, and that there is much to learn from recipients of aid: "*Afghan counterparts have greater knowledge of Afghanistan than the internationals".* As mentioned earlier, the approach she took yielded significant learning outcomes "by motivating, engaging, or reducing anxiety and increasing confidence" (Frego, 2006: 50).

Vera's story is in a stark contrast with the stories of non-participatory, non-reciprocal learning interactions that abounded in the accounts of both Afghan and foreign participants. According to some respondents, 'handing over the stick' has proven difficult because of the consultants' cognitive self-categorization (Bourdieu, 1977) as superior. This echoes Kothari's (2005) contention that overseas consultants are subconsiously involved in the

reproduction of the unequal power relations of development, and Bourdieu's broader argument that the default outcome of social practices is unconscious reproduction of the established order (Bourdieu, 1977).

In relation to this last point, Fo4 remarked that the "*superiority thing… unfortunately tends to be the norm.*" She described consultants as people who "*have to tell the host country what they know, and why they know more than they do and what is the answer.*" When reflecting on consultant attitudes, Fo6 referred to the instructional style of a "*highly degreed and pedigreed*" consultant he worked with. He summarised his approach as follows: "'*I am the greatest, 'Robert Mugabe' style, I know what I am doing, sit back and listen, dude*'". Both respondents maintained that these dispositional qualities were counterproductive to capacity building.

Superiority, lack of confidence in Afghan capabilities and indifference to local systems of knowledge were often experienced as a sign of profound disrespect by recipients of aid – to them personally, and to their position as government representatives. Engendered by the tension between statist (Bourdieu et al., 1994) and consultant capitals discussed earlier, perceived lack of respect produces psychological discomfort and disengagement, as illustrated by Af9's recollection of an interaction with a consultant:

> "*I always told him* [advisor]*, 'Please advise me. But please don't order. I am doing here governmental work, please respect our government policy.' In this case capacity building was not so good*". (Af9)

The importance of mutual respect as a strong moderator of the relationship quality was highlighted by a significant number of Afghan participants, and by some of the overseas respondents associated with positive capacity building outcomes. The practices of a consultant who used to "*launch marking pens at anybody who is not paying attention*" (Fo6) were frequently referred to in one of the participating ministries, and Fo6 described the disruptive effects this individual's approach had on the capacity building activities of the project: "*If you belittle people in a group like that, they shut down*". These accounts resonate with findings in the literature that a climate of trust and respect

strengthen learner motivation (Kochan and Pascarelli, 2003; Kreber and Klampfleitner, 2013).

AfCo1, an Afghan-American expert who worked within a Ministry first as a consultant and then as an employee, explained the importance of mutual respect as a deep-rooted and central norm that regulates societal interactions in Afghanistan:

> I think [respect] *is paramount. And I think it has something to do with the Afghan culture, really. Even in our poetry, in our literature, people who are arrogant are really scoffed at. And people with humility are really, really praised.* (AfCo1)

Vera and others also spoke about the positive returns on being respectful and polite, as a way of showing attention to issues of structural disadvantage, and of maintaining symbolic equity between Afghan counterparts and their consultants. This was one important way of establishing the intrapersonal comfort (Allen et al., 2000; Turban et al., 2002) necessary to mitigate the anxieties provoked by change, learning and dominance associated with development practice and discussed in this and the earlier analytical sections.

According to the participants, another route to the formation and maintenance of a positive developmental relationship is by establishing interpersonal closeness. In particular the mentorship literature has demonstrated the importance of demographic similarity, and perceived similarity in values, personalities, and attitudes for relationship quality (Turban and Lee, 2007; Eby et al., 2013).

The majority of cases suggested that surface-level similarities such as race and gender (Huang and Iun, 2006) were not critical for relationship quality – for instance Vera worked in an environment dominated by older men. Rather deeper-level similarities, which take longer to form, had stronger effects in workplace relationships. AfCo2 reflected on a year-long mentoring relationship with an overseas consultant, who was "*acting like a brother, teacher, mentor, in a way that you don't feel. Then you can share everything with him, then there is*

a sense of permanent capacity building." The quality of this relationship engendered trust, support and encouragement, which enabled learning.

Vera's intuitional understanding that relationships are facilitated by similarity and interpersonal comfort (Turban et al., 2002; Wanberg et al., 2007) is demonstrated by the importance she assigned to her communication capabilities and demeanour: "*I took some Dari lessons before I came and I wear long clothes or wear a head scarf… and I always have my head down a little bit.*" Afghanistan has seen many consultants but few of them speak local languages; as some of the other respondents noted (e.g. Fo9), having some language proficiency and complying with the local norms of behaviour is a sign of effortful personal investment in the relationship, which Afghans typically reciprocate with warmth and approval.

Conclusion

As elaborated in Chapter Two, research into the intra-personal dynamics of the "*implementation black box*" (Mosse, 2004: 5) of development practice has been scarce. Similarly, guided learning in the workplace has been rarely probed in a way that includes interactional qualities, power dynamics, conflicts and contradictions (Owen, 2009). This research contributes to both the literatures on workplace learning and on development by demonstrating that provider-recipient relational variables can have a significant impact on the effectiveness of investments in workplace learning by aid. The importance of such interactions is maintained by the people-centered literatures in development (Chambers, 1997) and education (Cornelius-White, 2007), but generally disregarded in mainstream development studies and workplace learning research.

The findings of this study also suggest that power permeates and affects learning interactions. Admittedly, power imbalance is an integral part of any form of instruction, but in the research context of Afghanistan's bureaucratic field, power can turn into a "disability" (Chambers, 1997: 76). The complicity of objective structures of financial dependence and consultant possession of

advanced knowledge were shown to inculcate in instructors value judgements and propensities to act in ways that erode the quality of the developmental relationships. Many of the intrapersonal relationships discussed here posed awkward questions about the attitudes of consultants, and perhaps this is why "formal development discourses and institutions tend to be anxious, silent, or even hostile on the subject" (Mawdsley et al., 2005: 77).

The research also demonstrated that Afghan learners are ready to embrace a different quality relationship, one of equity, trust and respect. The embedded case study of Vera established that learner-oriented instructional dispositions (Chambers, 1983, 1995b) can moderate the disabling effects of power. It is thus largely within the developers to enlist the participating and learning dispositions of the developed, and increase the impact of much needed technical assistance in the Afghan public sector.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The primary research question this study posed is 'What are the key factors that influence the effectiveness of technical assistance in individual workplace learning within the Afghan public sector in the period 2002-2014?' Guided by a Bourdieusian theoretical approach, this research explored the key factors related to: the field where learning occurs, the habitus of learners, and the interactional dynamics between providers and recipients of aid.

This final chapter weaves together the findings of the research and draws conclusions in light of the research questions. It also discusses the study's theoretical contributions and emergent recommendations for improving the effectiveness of capacity building practice. The limitations inherent in the current study alongside suggestions for further research are outlined. Finally, the chapter briefly considers the experiences of the analysing subject.

Field-related factors

This study concurs with socio-cultural perspectives of workplace learning discussed in Chapter Two, which highlight the importance of the context in which learning is set for its outcomes. Overseas and Afghan participants consistently identified contextual factors as highly influential modifiers of the effectiveness of learning interventions they have been involved in.

The research includes respondents from eight different Afghan public sector organisations, who established that affordances for learning emanate not only from the nature of their individual organisations, but also from the imperatives of external fields, those of the aid bureaucracies. Furthermore, the presence of embedded donor-funded technical assistance projects within recipient agencies has changed the particularities of these agencies. In all, the workings of the Afghan bureaucracy in the period 2002-2014 cannot be adequately abstracted, described and analysed without accommodating aid and its actors.

Overseas development agencies have historically espoused strong and consensual groupthink of the socio-economic changes that developing

countries need. Advancing those changes in 'faraway lands' in a controlled, timely, efficient and demonstrable manner predicates their continued existence. Their accountability is oriented towards constituencies providing funding for aid, not receiving it; their vision is legitimised by the power of the purse and the political capital of the advanced societies they represent.

Afghan and in particular overseas research respondents noted the resultant tendency of donor agencies to 'discipline,' depersonalise and oversimplify complex developmental processes such as learning. As one of the participants aptly remarked, managerial instruments such as project logframes and terms of reference have been symbolically elevated to a 'divine' (Fo9) status, reducing flexibility, appetite for experimentation and learning from mistakes. Thus the distal bureaucratic field of aid has exerted double pressures – at a doxic level, and at the level of incentives and approaches afforded to its agents providing capacity building services.

As far as the individual organisational fields are concerned, the positions that normatively should be occupied by government officials have been shared with scores of overseas consultants and national advisors. They have been tasked with advancing foreign funders' objectives and worldviews by various means including workplace learning interventions. This has created organisational environments that are characterised by acute complexity, and in which aid has been shown to stress-test and exacerbate weaknesses in host management systems.

The presence of donor-funded agents has also affected the power dynamics inside the field. Most obvious is the presence of a salient foreigner vision for an Afghan future. Furthermore, power changes have occurred by reconfiguring the relative weight of capitals engaged in the field structure: foreign knowledge, policies and procedures have trumped contextual understanding and lessons from the past; English language proficiency has become more valuable than mastery of Russian; and 'Western' education has outplayed years of work experience.

The features of the Afghan bureaucratic field clearly diverge from the typical sites studied in the workplace literature in the West. The in-principle

importance of environmental factors is endorsed but their detail is somewhat different in the context of Afghanistan. In this sense, socio-cultural conceptual models of workplace learning are valid but not comprehensive enough to cover the field specifics influencing learning in development settings. A modified model, based on Billett's (2001) conceptualisation of workplace learning (Figure 4) is proposed in Figure 8 below. It suggests that workplace affordances are the product of the organising principles, rules and practices emanating from both the donor and recipient fields. The adapted model proposes a novel way of analysing capacity building interventions, and it constitutes a theoretical contribution to the study of workplace learning in development settings.

Figure 8: Social and personal suggestions for learning in development, adapted model (Billett, 2001)
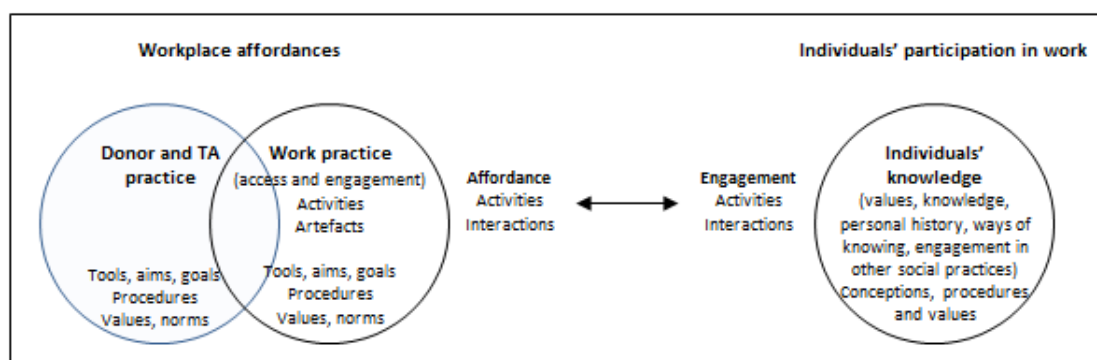
In terms of the specific contextual factors influencing the effectiveness of learning interventions, research participants and documentary/media analysis indicated the importance of factors related to the broad work environment, as well as to those associated with intervention design for learning success. Such categorisation of non-subjective factors is maintained in dominant models of learning and transfer, and has proven adequate to the circumstances of consultant-guided instruction subject to this research.

The particular logic of the Afghan bureaucratic field explains why while many of the field-related factors were broadly consistent with findings from other locales, some were specific to the circumstances of international development,

and others allotted much higher relative importance than suggested in 'Western'-oriented research. A summary of the key field-related factors identified through this research is presented in Table 4 below. By no means is this an exhaustive list of influencers, rather it represents the themes most often referred to, or most clearly associated with the outcomes of capacity building interventions. The table also indicates the points of congruence and divergence with the learning and transfer literature, and points at relevant themes discussed in relation to development practice in general.

The field-related factors were predominantly experienced as inhibitors to individual workplace learning in the public sector of Afghanistan. The comparison with the learning literature suggests that well-established insights about the contextual influencers on individual learning at work are routinely ignored in implementation of capacity building interventions. Most overseas participants ascribed this to development agencies' rationalist results orientation, exemplified by the fact that producing a tangible output receives greater priority than realising the learning potential of its production. Many Afghan participants explained the consistent lack of learning outcomes through donor-funded interventions as a ploy, either to maintain Afghanistan's dominated position, or to keep recycling 'Western' aid into 'Western' pockets.

Two atypical cases of effective capacity building efforts within the Afghan public sector were discussed in detail, as they demonstrate field conditions that can produce different results. On the recipient side, a ministry espousing a strategic indigenous vision was able to recalibrate learning interventions to its own needs, objectives and pace, to demonstrably positive results. On the providers' side, a capacity development programme that had an explicit learner-focused design generated high satisfaction rates with its services. This demonstrates that learning can be independently facilitated by each party in the development interaction, and that capacity interventions need to be constructed in different ways, in accordance with the specifics of the environment where learning takes place.

Table 4: Key field-related factors

	Factor	Afghan-specific findings	Learning literature	Relevant themes from the development literature
Work environment	**Strategic link**, or the alignment of learning interventions with organisational goals and strategies	Predominantly lacking	Identified but not prominent (e.g. Burke and Hutchins, 2008)	Supply-drivenness of aid (Fukuda-Parr et al., 2002); aid as domination (e.g. Escobar, 1995a)
	Recipient top management, or engagement and ability to manage learning processes	Predominantly lacking or unsuccessful; where effective, it influences other factors and leads to a marked increase in learning outcomes	Identified but not prominent (e.g. Chiaburu et al., 2010)	Challenges of aid coordination (e.g. Easterly, 2002); resistance to aid (e.g. Tamas, 2007)
	Donor oversight over interventions for individual learning	Reduced to low-return observable outputs	Aid specific	Aid bureaucracies' lack of interest in people (e.g. Chambers, 1997)
	Project management of learning interventions in the field	Predominantly oriented towards producing low-return observable outputs required by donors; prohibitive of participation and collaboration	Aid specific	Donor constraints on consultants (e.g. Bebbington, 2004); lack of pedagogic qualities in consultants (e.g. Kothari, 2005);

Intervention design	**Needs analysis**, or adequate pre-intervention diagnostics	Undertaken regularly but to a low standard of quality due to time constraints and limited consultations	Widely recognised (e.g. Swanson, 2003)	Recognised at a systems level (Grindle, 1997)
	Content relevance, or learning relevant to the job	Often reported of low or no relevance	Widely recognised (e.g. Baldwin and Ford, 1988)	Aid's supply-drivenness
	Instructional strategies, or use of appropriate pedagogic methods	General disregard to instructional strategies	Widely recognised (e.g. Grossman and Salas, 2011)	Aid bureaucracies' lack of interest in people; lack of pedagogic qualities in the development expert

Habitus-related factors

This thesis contributes to development debates by considering aid recipients' perspectives of capacity building, which are typically underrepresented in the academic or practitioner literature on development assistance. Responding to Billett's (2009) call for more detailed research into the complex interpsychological processes related to learning, this study focused on Afghan aid recipients' value judgements, epistemic beliefs and attitudes to the key ingredients that underpin capacity building – the concept of (workplace) learning, the objective of modernisation/development, the ideology of neoliberalism, and their assessment of consultant-mediated learning.

A summary of the key habitus-related factors and their precursors is presented in Table 5. As the practice and theory of mainstream aid was shown to be generally inattentive to issues of agency (Grindle, 1999; World Bank, 2015), the summary does not include contributions from this literature.

Table 5: Key habitus-related factors

	Factor	Afghan-specific findings	Learning literature
Learner characteristics	**Motivation to learn,** or the intensity and persistence of efforts that learners apply	Positive dispositions to learning: - Afghans' enabling and open-ended commitment to learning, acceptance of a variety of learning modalities - Personal experiences of learning as identity preservation (war) and positive transformation - Group cultural/religious values (Islam and learning)	Widely recognised in both socio-cultural accounts (e.g. Billett, 2010b) and transfer research (e.g. Grohmann et al., 2014)
		Positive dispositions to modernisation: - Strong support to the concept of modernisation underpinned by acceptance of the need for improvement - Understanding of learning as a group value and path to national development and sovereignty	

		Negative attitudes to donors' imposition of neoliberal doxa (field) leading to: - Destabilised habitus/hysteresis - Strategies of resistance and transactional approach to aid, based on lessons from the past and awareness of the transience of development assistance	
		Negative interactions with consultants (prompted by interaction): - Interactional quality often eroded by consultant dispositions to non-collaborative work, attitudes of superiority and lack of respect to recipients	
	Perceived utility, or the perceived value associated with learning interventions	Positive assessment of learning in general (prompted by capital configuration in the field): - Cultural capital (expertise, certificates) is highly desirable as it derives a high scarcity value in the Afghan bureaucratic field and the broader society	Recognised in both socio-cultural accounts (e.g. Boud and Solomon, 2003) and transfer research (e.g. Chiaburu and Lindsay, 2008)
		Negative for learning from consultants (prompted by field characteristics, capital reconfigurations and interaction with consultants): - Negative perceptions of advisor credibility based on experiences since 2001 - Unsatisfactory conversion rate of consultant-provided learning into other types of capital due to low content relevance/lack of strategic link - Potential loss of own capital as expert due to label as 'learner,' psychological discomfort - Political risk due to competition with consultants in the field, lack of trust	
	Self-efficacy, or belief in own capacities to	Positive, based on personal histories and past accomplishments	Recognised in socio-cultural accounts
		Destabilised (field and interaction with consultants)	

	learn	- Lack of equity in categorisation as underdeveloped - Donor/consultant disregard of local systems of knowledge and local understanding of the context - Consultant lack of confidence in the capacity of the Afghan learners	(Billett, 2009) and transfer research (Grossman and Salas, 2011)

As Table 5 demonstrates, the most salient subjective factors identified in this research fall within the categories established in the transfer literature. Yet transfer variables such as 'learner motivation' were found too broad to capture the various prompts individuals receive from the work environment, and the processes of interpretation sourcing from their unique dispositions. Individual uptake of learning was found to be the result of a complex decision-making process undertaken quasi-consciously, and amalgamating 1) influences from the field, 2) individual dispositions, beliefs and value judgements accumulated in life, and 3) the manner of instructional interaction.

As Bourdieu (1977) notes, the workings of the habitus are accompanied by strategic calculations, weighing up potential gains and losses of capital, and thus possible changes in one's position in the field. In this symbolic balance sheet, cultural capital is highly prized by Afghan recipients of aid. Furthermore, workplace learning is viewed as a path to national development and sovereignty, and Afghan dispositions to learning at work are overwhelmingly positive. Yet capacity building providers have often failed to enlist their effortful engagement with learning.

By drawing attention to the strong influences that development tenets and practice may have onto recipients' motivation to learn, this study contributes important insights into the study of capacity development. Most importantly, the research indicates that imposition of neoliberal doxa can destabilise recipients' ontological security and thus unlock various modes of resistance. Neoliberal reform has underpinned the areas of intervention and learning content of capacity building projects in Afghanistan in the last decade. Inconsistency with the knowledge or beliefs of a significant share of participants has affected negatively their volition and investment in learning. Results-oriented donors and projects have typically

demonstrated lack of attention to such psychological processes, and ignored the lag between opportunities and recipients' willingness to grasp them (Bourdieu, 1977). This is an unfortunate case of many missed opportunities, because rarely attempted strategies for gradual adjustment of the habitus have proven effective (e.g. AfCo3).

Furthermore, the abundance of supply of consultants to the Afghan bureaucratic field for over more than a decade, and the variance in their expertise has depreciated perceptions of the value of consultants' expertise. The findings from this research support the suggestion that learners' perceptions of instructor value strongly moderate learners' receptiveness to learning and advice (Brad Harris, Chung, L. Frye, et al., 2014).

Afghan public servants often stereotype overseas consultants as incompetent, but they know they are subject to categorisations too – as underdeveloped, Third World etc. Recipients of aid are disadvantaged by the symbolic order in the field, and their need for capacity building implies an inferiority/superiority relationship with aid providers. This conflicts with the innate need for social equity, the self-concept of expert and government official, and may reduce learner self-efficacy (Grossman and Salas, 2011). Such effects were particularly pronounced in discussions on the interactional qualities of capacity building interventions summarised next.

Interaction-related factors

The role of the instructor and the quality of instructional interaction are issues that have not received considerable attention in the workplace learning and transfer literature, an omission that is increasingly recognised (Jacobs and Park, 2009). The findings of this research make a contribution to the literature by demonstrating that the micro-processes within the learning dyad exert strong influences onto the effectiveness of capacity building interventions. Issues of interactional quality seem to gain more prominence in the circumstances of aid, due to the inherent power asymmetries that characterise its practices. The manner of providing assistance matters, as it can conceal or exacerbate the symbolic violence of the act of gifting (Bourdieu, 1992).

Interpersonal dynamics are significant also because it is through the process of interaction that relations of domination can be maintained or challenged (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). A major theme that emerged in discussions about the micro-processes of capacity building practice concerned the tension between two species of symbolic capital (Bourdieu et al., 1994), the statist capital that government officials are endowed with, and the political capital conferred onto consultants by virtue of superior knowledge and association with foreign donors and Government top officials. The non-state players proliferated in the field were shown to engage in power struggles with Afghan public servants, seeking to maintain privileged positions, and divert to their advantage whatever power they can capture (Wacquant, 1993). This has reduced learners' trust that consultants have their best interests at heart.

Sedimented power relations were also shown to affect the dispositions of consultants in the field, often inculcating negative cognitive categorisations of Afghan learners. Patronising attitudes, doubts about Afghan public servants' abilities or motivation to learn, lack of recognition and respect for local expertise were widely registered and reported by Afghan participants. Such instructor dispositions can erode the quality of the learning interaction and produce psychological discomfort and disengagement . As indicated in Table 5, provider-recipient interactional dynamics can have a negative effect on key learner characteristics, i.e. motivation to learn, perceived utility of learning and self-efficacy.

Consultant dispositions and conduct are also strongly influenced by the logic of the donor field, which prizes the quality of the technical output, not the human learning entailed in its production. The complicity of field and dispositional factors has resulted in Afghan civil servants' marginalisation from the domain of their own work, producing a parallel 'second civil service' recognised in country analyses. Possibilities for substantial learning through guided participation and engagement, recognised as fundamental in both workplace learning and alternative paradigms to development, have been essentially curtailed by the very agents engaged with funding and provision of capacity building services.

One exceptional case (Vera's) was discussed in more detail, as it suggested that consultant non-participatory dispositions can be modified, and donor pressures can

be re-negotiated to the effect of establishing the intrapersonal comforts necessary to moderate the negative attributes of aid. The adopted people-centred, consciously participatory approach and commitment to a relational depth of the interaction achieved the harmonious co-habitation of diverse forms of capital within the Afghan bureaucratic field, and reaped substantial learning outcomes.

Implications for practice

The existing setup of development assistance was shown to be often prohibitive to workplace learning. Yet this thesis does not subscribe to post-developmentalists' call to end development in its entirety, as for all its faults it responds to Afghan aspirations for modernisation and normalcy in their lives. As stated at the beginning of this study, the objective of this research is to add to the corpus of knowledge about what really goes on in development settings, and suggest avenues for increasing aid effectiveness.

This study showed that workplace learning in Afghanistan's public sector is a complex endeavour, contingent on the configuration of a range of contextual and subjective factors, a range that appears broader than those in developed settings. The situatedness of learning indicates the impossibility of formulating blueprint approaches, yet there are salient themes that suggest that improvements in capacity building outcomes can be achieved with changes in development policy and practice such as:

1.   While capacity development is stated as a key policy objective for donor agencies, they are not equipped to oversee instructional and learning processes. This has a profound effect on both design of learning interventions, and the dispositions of development consultants. Aid institutions at the country level need to be adequately professionalised and resourced with workplace learning expertise to be able to understand, direct and elicit learning outcomes.

2.   A recurrent theme concerned Afghan recipients' subtle strategies to resist the donors' neoliberal agenda. The resultant lack of alignment between capacity building interventions and organisational goals creates a confusing and ambiguous learning environment. Difficult to detect by outsiders, such disjunctures suggest the

importance of understanding recipient (learners' and managers') attitudes to the ideological elements of aid-provided learning. This is preferably done at the needs assessments stage, to inform learning strategies and design.

3.   One of the most commonly mentioned prohibitors to learning is the lack of content relevance in capacity building projects. Longer inception periods are strongly suggested, as they allow for detailed task- and learner- pre-intervention diagnostics involving all key parties in the learning interaction – the learners, their line managers, and the organisational leadership.

4.   The insufficient instructional expertise of the average development consultant translates into limited attention to instructional strategies in capacity building interventions. Effective mitigation measures are:

a.   The introduction of induction periods and guidelines on workplace learning pedagogy for consultants, including instilling the awareness that consultant conduct can have powerful (de)motivating effects.

b.   Requiring recipient feedback on individual consultants as a part of the project monitoring and evaluation.

5.   Furthermore, existing donor initiatives aiming to harmonise approaches to monitoring and evaluation could be usefully extended to capacity building interventions, to develop metrics (and as a result accountability) focused on the process of learning.

6.   The attention to the cases of capacity building success was beneficial, because it demonstrated that prohibitors to learning in one area can be compensated by enablers in another. In all, this implies a need to build on and extend Korten's (1980) idea of relative 'fit' to the whole chain of contextual and individual factors characterising both sides of the aid divide, recipients and providers.

Finally, the study confirmed the effectiveness of participatory approaches to learning, the importance of experimentation and interpretation of knowledge, and the significance of human relational factors. Such people-centered approaches have been slow to take hold in actual development practice, mostly as a consequence of how aid is managed. Political imperatives in donor countries have created mental

models that accommodate accountancy operations of the input/output ratios of aid but disregard the undisciplined and non-linear processes of human development it is supposed to unlock. It would be naïve to recommend that aid bureaucracies change the way they think overnight; however, it is hoped that increasing the evidence that such change is necessary will contribute to a gradual adoption of more thoughtful, people- and context-sensitive development policies and practices.

Further research and limitations

A central contribution of this case study is that it re-contextualises workplace theories and suggests their applicability into the unchartered territory of capacity building practices. It proposes a framework that can underpin better understanding of individual learning in development settings, and ultimately lead to more effective strategies for capacity building. Due to the novelty of this approach, more research would be useful to further align workplace learning theoretical models to the complex settings of developing jurisdictions and foreign assistance.

One of the strengths of this study is the sample range and size, allowing identification of salient factors experienced across Afghan public sector organisations. At the same time, it is one of its limitations, barring a fully integrated discussion of the dynamic interaction between contextual and individual factors. The included cases of successful capacity building cases suggest that research into individual interventions could achieve additional relational depth. Studies into learning through development assistance would also benefit from including the voices of recipient top managers, donors and consultancy companies. While not directly involved in the delivery of interventions, these actors behind the scenes have a strong impact on actual implementation.

Finally, development settings appear to be an extraordinary laboratory for analysing the effects of power on learning, a topic in need of more research in workplace learning. The case study of Afghanistan described power and domination as mostly disabling but they were also shown to trigger a strong drive to sovereign development, and indigenous attempts to improving the effectiveness of capacity building practices. In analysing field struggles, the Bourdieusian conceptualisation of

different types of capital was extremely good to think with, revealing new themes and contributions to development studies such as the competition of domestic statist and foreign cultural/political capitals.

Final reflections

Chapter Three of this thesis described the strategies I took to mitigate the various biases inherent in the position of the analysing subject (Wacquant, 1989). Yet was I little prepared for the anxieties associated with work on this study.

Field work in Kabul and interviews with Afghan participants highlighted the prime importance aid recipients allotted to the process of capacity building, and to the need to improve its effectiveness. Learning was a valued lasting legacy of development assistance, yet the results after years of investment were far from satisfactory. Getting it right and conveying the full story felt like a moral obligation, gradually followed by the realisation that a thesis is an abstraction, and abstractions have limitations. It was the focus on the selection of properties to be abstracted that proved more productive.

Bourdieu argues that sociology's key task is "restoring to people the meaning of their action" (epigraph in Grenfell, 2004). Having been a consultant to the Government of Afghanistan, in the process of research I naturally engaged with analysis of my own past actions. Such self-reflections were difficult, as they highlighted the ease with which one self-categorises as developed and knowledgeable, and the unwillingness to problematise value-laden concepts of 'underdevelopment,' 'aid,' 'assistance,' or 'capacity building' (Kapoor, 2004). Some of this baggage was gradually shed but it accounted for reactions such as my initial surprise at the sophistication of Afghan participants' observations and sensitivities.

Finally, as Josselson (1996: 70) writes, representing people's voices invokes dilemmas and emotional responses such as guilt, because "I have taken myself out of relationship with my participants… to be in a relationship with my readers. I have, in a sense, been talking about them behind their backs and doing so publicly." Furthermore, no matter how compassionate and respectful, a research process can be experienced as exploitative by its participants, even more so in development

settings. Yet many of them gave time and shared thoughts with the conviction that it is important to tell the 'real' story. Such is the logic of the gift that I hope I would be able to give them something back.

Appendix 1: Research participants

Afghan public servants

Af1 is a male civil servant in his 50s, who is a manager (civil service grade three) at an organisation in the governance sector. He holds an engineering degree from an Afghan university. Af1 has over 30 years work experience, most of it accrued in the public sector. During the Taliban period he lost his government job and worked for non-government organisations (NGO) and private companies. Due to the nature of his work, over the last five years he has interacted with technical assistance projects across government. This interview was facilitated by an interpreter.

Af2 is a high-ranking director (grade one) at a public sector organisation engaged with economic governance. He is in his 40s, and a holder of a Master's degree earned in the West. His experience includes working for government and international development organisations in Afghanistan and abroad. The interview was conducted in English.

Af3 is a male aged in his 40s, manager (grade three) of a technically specialised government unit in the agriculture and rural development sector. He has a Master's degree from an Afghan university, and some donor-funded specialisations abroad. He has 12 years' experience with the Government; other experience includes work in the NGO sector. The interview was conducted in English.

Af4 is a female in her 30s. She is a director (grade two) at a government agency in the economic governance sector. In her 5 years work experience, she has had extensive interactions with international development agencies and projects across the government. She is a holder of a Master's degree earned in the West. The interview was conducted via Skype and in English.

Af5 is a director (grade two) at an organisation in the governance sector, in his 60s. He holds a Master's degree from an Afghan university. With the exception of

the Taliban period, he has mostly worked for Afghan government organisations. The interview was conducted with the help of an interpreter.

Af6 has been with the same government organisation in the infrastructure and natural resources sector all of his working life, for some 27 years now. He is a director (grade two) holding an engineering degree from an Afghan university. He worked closely with an embedded technical assistance project for some five years. His interview was supported by an interpreter but Af6's English was good enough to make a number of points directly.

Af7 is a male in his 30s, with 10 years' experience working for NGOs and the government in Afghanistan. Currently he is a director (grade two) at a public sector organisation in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. Af7 is a holder of a bachelor's degree from a private university in Afghanistan, and a fluent English speaker.

Af8 is a director (grade two) at a government agency in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. He has a Master's degree from an Afghan university. He has been with his organisation for some 35 years now, including times of war and the Taliban regime. He interacts with a number of international technical assistance projects at work. While he has a good command of English, he preferred to have an interpreter in the room, to ensure accuracy.

Af9 manages a specialist government unit in the agriculture and rural development sector (grade three). He holds a Master's degree from a university in the region. He was conscripted to a military service during the civil war. He has 13 years of work experience, and he has worked with a succession of projects providing technical assistance to his unit. This interview was conducted in English.

Af10 is a female in her 30s, director (grade two) at a government agency in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. She grew up and was educated outside of Afghanistan, in a neighbouring country. She is a holder of a Master's degree earned in the West. Af10 has over 5 years work experience in Afghanistan, with the government and international development organisations. She is a fluent English speaker.

Af11 is a female in her 30s. She holds a Master's degree from a university in the West. She is director (grade two) at a government agency in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. Af11's 5-year work experience has been with government organisations in the country. Fluent English speaker.

Af12 is a male director (grade two) with over 20 years' experience working for the government of Afghanistan. His career was interrupted while he fought in the civil war. Af12 holds an engineering degree from an Afghan university. His directorate attracts significant donor support, and he has worked with a broad range of advisors. The interview with Af12 was facilitated by an interpreter.

AF13 is a male in his 30s and a deputy minister at an organisation in the governance sector. He has more than ten years of work experience, mostly in the public sector of Afghanistan. He is a holder of a master's degree earned in the West. He has worked closely with international technical assistance projects. The interview with him was conducted in English.

Af14 is a male in his 50s. He is a director (grade two) at a public sector organisation in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. He has over 23 years of work experience, six of which with the government. He was a political prisoner during the Soviet occupation, and conscripted to a military service during the civil war. His exposure to development assistance started some four years ago. The interview was conducted with the help of an interpreter.

Af15 (pseudonym Mahmood), is a male director (grade two) at a government organisation in the health and social care sector. He is in his thirties and he has a Master's degree from a 'Western' university. His ten years' experience includes work for the government and as a member of technical assistance projects in Afghanistan. He is a fluent English speaker.

Af16 is a male director (grade two) at a government organisation in the economic governance sector. Despite numerous interruptions, he earned a Master's degree from an Afghan university. He has worked for the government sector and non-government organisations. In his current position, he interacts with donor-funded advisors on a regular basis. The interview was conducted in English.

Af17 is a male manager (grade three) in his forties working in the agriculture and rural development sector. He is a holder of a University degree earned in Afghanistan. He has 17 years of work experience, ten of which with government organisations. Over the past five years, he and his unit have received continuous technical assistance and capacity building support. He has a working knowledge of English and the interview was conducted without an interpreter.

Af18 is a male in his fifties. He works as a director for a government organisation in the health and social care sector (grade two). He has more than 25 years of work experience, having worked mostly in the public sector but also for non-government organisations during the Taliban regime, and with development assistance projects after 2001. Over the past few years, his directorate has been receiving dedicated technical assistance from a bilateral donor. He has a working command of English and the interview was conducted in English.

National advisers

AfCo1 worked for three years within an Afghan public sector agency in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. He is a male aged in his thirties. AfCo1 has a dual citizenship, and he grew up and was educated in the West. His initial employment in Afghanistan was in an advisory position, and he was later seconded to a government position (whilst on a technical assistance project payroll). He holds a post-graduate degree and he is a fluent English speaker. He was interviewed over Skype.

AfCo2 is a male aged in his thirties. He works as an embedded national adviser at an organisation in the agriculture and rural development sector for the last two years. His overall work experience is seven years, mostly in donor-funded capacity building projects. He has a Master's degree from a regional university and he spent part of his childhood out of country. The interview was conducted in English.

AfCo3 is a male director of a bilateral technical assistance programme in his thirties. He was promoted to this position some two years ago. Before that he worked as a national adviser in various technical assistance projects. He holds Master's degrees from an Afghan and a 'Western' university. He spent the years of war and Taleban in Afghanistan. He is a fluent English speaker.

International advisers

Fo1 (pseudonym Vera) is a female in her thirties. She holds a post-graduate degree. Before coming to Afghanistan she worked for some ten years as a trainer for NGO and government staff in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Central America. In Afghanistan she manages a technical assistance project embedded in a government organisation in the agriculture and rural development sector. She has two years of country experience.

Fo2 is a male in his fifties. Over the past year, he has led a technical assistance project embedded in a government organisation in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. He holds two Master's degrees. He has other overseas experience working for the private sector. This is his first job in Afghanistan, and his first consultancy position on a donor-funded technical assistance project.

Fo3 is a male advisor in his thirties. He has some three years of experience working in Afghanistan, and he has done consulting work in a number of Afghan organisations. His current position is an embedded technical adviser at a government organisation in the agriculture and rural development sector. He holds a postgraduate degree.

Fo4 is a female advisor in her fifties. She has significant overseas development experience working for donor-funded technical assistance projects, and some four years of experience in Afghanistan. She provides on and off advisory and capacity building services to a government organisation in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. She holds a postgraduate degree.

Fo5 is a male in his sixties, having worked for the private sector and the development industry in a number of countries for the last 35 years. He holds a post-graduate degree. He has been working in Afghanistan (on and off) for more than four years, mostly as an embedded advisor and a team leader to a technical assistance project providing services to a government organisation in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. The interview with Fo5 was conducted over Skype.

Fo6 is a male advisor in his sixties, having mostly worked for the private sector during his career. His first project in Afghanistan started some five years ago, and he was an embedded advisor and trainer to a technical directorate in the infrastructure and natural resources sector. Currently he works for a different project but he is still embedded within the same organisation. He holds an engineering degree.

Fo7 is a female adviser in her thirties. She has near ten years of work experience. Her first assignment in development was in Afghanistan some five years ago when she was hired support the staff of an Afghan government department. She has since provided technical assistance services to other government organisations. Currently she works as an adviser in a government agency in the economic governance sector.

Fo8 is a male adviser in his sixties. He used to be a high-ranking public servant in his home country. His first assignment in Afghanistan started more than seven years ago, and since then he has worked with a range of Afghan government organisations, building capacity and coaching managers. He is currently embedded as an adviser in a government agency in the economic governance sector. Educated to a post-graduate degree.

Fo9 is a male adviser in his fifties. He is educated to a post-graduate degree. He has over 20 years of experience in economic reform work funded by international development agencies. His first engagement with Afghanistan was in 2002, and since then he has worked with a number of Afghan institutions on donor-funded projects. While he drew on his overall experience in country, his opinions about capacity development work were largely based on observations of an embedded project in an economic governance agency, which he led.

Fo10 is a male aged in his thirties. He worked as an embedded departmental advisor in an Afghan government agency in the infrastructure and natural resources sector for some two years. This was his first experience in Afghanistan. He is a holder of a Master's degree. The interview with Fo10 was conducted in English via Skype.

Fo11 is a male adviser in his fifties. He is educated to a post-graduate degree. He has significant overseas experience working for the private sector. He started work in Afghanistan some three years ago, and this was first consultancy position on a donor-funded technical assistance project. Currently he provides technical assistance services to two government organisations in the infrastructure and natural resources sector.

Donor Officers

Do1 is an Afghan male respondent in his thirties. He holds a management position in a donor-funded, government-implemented programme for provision of technical assistance. He has been in this position for three years, having worked with a range of government agencies in Afghanistan. He holds a Master's degree earned from a university in the region. He is a fluid English speaker.

Do2 is an expat male in his thirties, and a holder of a post-graduate degree. He works for a major bilateral donor agency in Afghanistan. He manages technical assistance projects to Afghan government organisations in the economic governance and the infrastructure and natural resources sectors. He has worked in Afghanistan for about 18 months.

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