

Chapter 7 Excerpts

Peacebuilders need to turn a systems map of a social context into programming that has a greater chance of making peace last. This link from assessment to planning to implementation and back to learning is known as feed-forward. The alternative to feed-forward is hoping that the lessons from good assessment will be obvious and persuasive to other actors, who are usually not involved in the assessment itself. A frustration that I regularly hear from analysts with agencies like the US Agency for International Development and at NGOs is that assessment has little impact on planning, and there is little learning over time because there is no feedback or updating of assessments. Feed-forward tries to remedy this by helping analysts identify and hand off the most useful insights from their systems maps to those who do planning, project design, and monitoring and evaluation. Ultimately, good feed-forward should increase the likelihood of analysts getting helpful feedback from experience in the field by ensuring that programs test out hypotheses formed in the assessment phase. – pg. 138

The key to creating more cost-effective and sustainable peacebuilding programs is to magnify the impact of funds by working with the existing power of a system. For example, consider the difference between rowing a boat with the current or against it. The same amount of energy expended to move the oars will move the boat much further if one rows with the current (e.g., the current adds energy to the force supplied by the rower) than if one rows against the current (e.g., the energy of the current subtracts from the energy supplied by the rower). – pg. 146

In short, good feed forward provides planners with an assessment of a context that is comprehensive, comprehensible, and portable. *Comprehensive* refers to the ability to provide a holistic view of a social system that does not oversimplify the situation by leaving out elements outside of an organization's interests or expertise. However, that comprehensive view has to also be *comprehensible* and avoid overloading planners with too much information, or what Peter Coleman eloquently refers to as "parsimony informed by complexity." And, that comprehensive and comprehensible feed forward has to "travel well," or be *portable*. It needs to crystallize the assessment's main insights and implications for the many individuals who need to learn from and act on the assessment, especially when those individuals were not part of the initial assessment process. – pg. 174/175