Managing Your Authorizing Environment in a PDIA Process

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Abstract

Development and state building processes are about change. Change is, however, elusive in many contexts. In prior work, we have offered problem driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) as an approach to tackle wicked hard change challenges. This is our fourth practical working paper on 'how' to do PDIA. The working paper addresses questions about authority, given that authority is needed to make change happen—especially in hierarchical government settings. This authority is often difficult to attain, however. It is seldom located in one office of person, and is often harder to lock-in with complex challenges, given that they commonly involve significant risk and uncertainty and require engagement by many agents responding to different kinds of authority. Every effort must be taken to address such challenges, and efforts should include an explicit strategy to establish an appropriate authorizing environment. This working paper suggests ideas to adopt in this strategy, with practical exercises and examples to help the reader apply such ideas in her or his own work.

Introduction

A few years ago, one of us was working with an African government on health issues. The Health Minister was committed to building public sector capability to address women's health issues (given problems with maternal mortality). She assembled a team in the ministry, and supported a problem analysis process (complete with construction, deconstruction, and sequencing exercises). She then supported the team in crawling the design space, which generated a number of potential solutions to explore through experimental iteration. When the team tried to initiate the first set of action steps, however, they ran into trouble. Most of the steps involved actions taken in provinces, where governors had significant power and where administrators were more accountable to their provincial authorizers than to the national Minister of Health. The Minister tried to build support from provincial governors but they were generally resistant to the idea of working on the women's health issues in an experimental manner. Some of the governors asked why experiments were needed, and told the Minister her job was to provide solutions rather than identify problems and propose experiments. Others noted that they had seen many pilots in the past and were tired of the failure associated with such. In short, therefore, they refused to authorize the work and the experimental iterations were still born.

There is a vital lesson from this story: one needs authority to undertake any initiative aimed at building state capability, and this authority is often difficult to attain. It is seldom located in one office of person, and is often harder to lock-in with risky work. One runs into this problem regularly with complex challenges (as discussed in Andrews et al. 2015), given that they commonly involve significant risk and uncertainty and require engagement by many agents responding to different kinds of authority. A third PDIA principle recognizes this fact and notes, therefore, that every effort to address complex challenges must include an explicit strategy to establish and appropriate authorizing environment.

This strategy cannot simply be to garner the general support of one or other important authorizer, however. In the context of any effort to address a wicked hard challenge, establishing the 'appropriate' authorizing environment poses several specific challenges to would-be reformers, policy-makers and others engaged in building state capability for implementation. This working paper discusses these challenges, and offers practical ideas to meet such. It starts, however, by providing some background discussion on what the authorizing environment involves and why it matters.

Why the Authorizing Environment Matters

Authority is a key focal point in the literature on organizations. It has enjoyed prominence since (at least) the seminal work of Max Weber, which examined the ways in which social and political power were exerted in society (Weber 1978). Weber proffered a social-political view of authority, presenting such as the exercise of influence and control by some agents over others in social settings. This authority could be exerted through charismatic individuals (whose personal traits fostered influence), those holding traditional positions (where customs defined influence), or people enjoying stature because of formal rules (where influence was associated with a legally determined position of authority). Whereas there are obvious differences in where power comes from in these models (and how power is legitimized), they all essentially describe how some powerful agents influence and shape the behavior of other less powerful agents—constraining some activities and encouraging or supporting other activities.

Given the way authority constrains or supports certain behaviors, it must be said that authority structures have huge implications for what organizations do, how they do these things, when, where, and with whom (Aghion and Tirole 1997; Bolton and Dewatripont 2013; Etzioni 1959; Guillen 1994; Presthus 1960). In a prominent paper on the topic, Fama and Jensen (1983) identified these many manifestations, noting (for instance) that authorizers influence which projects are chosen, how obedience is exacted from subordinate employees, which actions are approved and ratified, and who gets rewarded for what, and how. Similar manifestations are common in public organizations, where authority structures shape what is possible when trying to build state capability (Dodlova 2013; Herbst 2014; Hughes 2013; Meyer 1968; Olsen 2015; Wang and Ap 2013). Powerful people (and processes that empower these people) determine what capability can be built, for instance, who will be involved in building this capability, how the process will work, how long it will continue, and what it will involve.

This means that would-be reformers need to pay attention to authority structures when they initiate any effort to build state capability. This is not news to those working at the coal face of development, in governments or in development organizations. It is indeed a central theme of the politically sensitive work by authors like David Booth and David Hulme (Faustino and Booth 2015; Routley and Hulme 2013). This work emphasizes the importance of navigating the local authorizing environment to ensure any initiative is locally led (or authorized) and politically smart (meaning, inter alia, that it has broad support and authorization). Authors like Mark Moore have been emphasizing the importance of navigating the authorizing environment for an even longer period, noting that any initiative to produce or improve public value needs to go beyond an individual with a good idea (Moore and Khagram 2004, p.9): “It [is] not sufficient for a public manager to have his or her own view of public value; others had to share it. In particular, the group of people in positions that could confer legitimacy and provide financial support to the manager would have to agree with the conception of public value that was to be pursued."

It is not easy to build authorization to act, however. Authorizing environments are commonly fragmented, and difficult to navigate.[1] Policies, programs and policies typically cross over multiple authority domains in which many different agents and processes act to constrain or support behavior. Authorizing structures often vary vertically as well, with agents at different levels of an organization or intergovernmental structure enjoying control over different dimensions of the same process.[2] Consider, for instance, the example we started this chapter with, where provincial governors were able to undermine a process that was supported at 'higher' levels by the national minister. This fragmentation is likely greater with complex state building challenges that involve many agents and organizations.

Informality often reigns in these challenges as well, manifest in personality and relationship-driven authority structures. These structures are seldom well known, especially to outsiders, and make it extremely difficult to know who really authorizes what in any context (see Chapter 3 in Andrews (2013)). Whether formal or informal, authority structures are often also fickle and inconsistent. Authorizers will sanction new activities for many reasons, and may lose interest or energy or patience for many reasons as well. This means that one is never guaranteed continued support from any authorizer for any period of time, no matter what promises are made.

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[1] Distributed authority is common in many policy areas and countries. Frosch and Kaplan (1999) note that authority structures are shared in areas like clinical medicine, for instance, and Lieberthal and Lampton argue that fragmented authority structures are a main feature of Chinese bureaucracy. Janowitz (1998) even argues that complexity has led to fragmented and distributed authority in military settings, commonly assumed to have extremely centered authority mechanisms.

[2] See descriptions of varying authority structures, especially dependent on differences in culture and social and governmental structure in Cartwright and Cooper (1993) and Horling and Lesser (2004).

Unfortunately, many project managers working for development organizations or in governments involved in reform learn this the hard way, when a ‘supportive minister stops supporting a project soon after it is initiated’.

The fickleness of authority is most evident when dealing with risky change initiatives that will almost certainly have unintended (or unanticipated) consequences. This should not be surprising, however. New institutional scholars remind us that authority is often given to those with power (or entrusted by the powerful).[3] These individuals are seldom appointed to their positions to foster dramatic change. They are, indeed, much more likely to support maintenance of the status quo, and hence resist dramatic change and the risk this involves. Furthermore, they are unlikely to entertain potential failure and uncertainty associated with complex challenges. As discussed in Andrews et al (2013), this kind of authorizing environment is not conducive to novelty or supportive of the PDIA-type change process.

We do not believe that this should be the end of the story, however, or signal the death knell of PDIA-type initiatives (or any development initiatives dealing with complex change). There are many examples where governments have adopted PDIA-type processes to foster deep change. These initiatives take the authorizing environment seriously, treating authority as variable rather than fixed; an important influence on the change space that can be expanded with well structured strategies (as discussed in Andrews et al. 2015 a). This is how we want you to think about authority and the authorizing environment, as we discuss dimensions of a dynamic authorizing environment strategy necessary to facilitate PDIA-type initiatives. These strategic dimensions require attention to three questions:

[3] This thinking is reflected in work on the paradox of embeddedness, which suggests that those most embedded in any context typically have power in such, and are simultaneously probably most averse to change. The paradox is that they are needed to effect change, given the authority they provide. See Greenwood and Sudabby (2006), Pache and Santos (2013), Seo and Creed (2002), and Waddock et al. (2015).

- What authority do we need?
- Where can we find what we need, given how authority is structured?
- How do we get the authority we need, and grow this authority over time?

What Authority Do We Need?

Questions about the authorizing environment always arise when we are teaching about PDIA. As mentioned, these questions tend to be infused with pessimism; where participants question the likelihood of getting the authority needed for this kind of work. In response to this pessimism, we often ask participants to tell us their general experience with getting authority to support policies, programs and projects; as well as their most positive and negative story about getting and keeping authority in a change process. Most answers are quite depressing, with participants noting how hard it is to ensure proper authorization of any change process (whether using PDIA or more linear project management mechanisms). The horror stories tend to tell of reform champions committing to a project and then withdrawing support shortly afterwards, or who were relieved of their position mid-way through the process and replaced by a less supportive non-champion authorizer. The most positive stories are about reform champions who actually hold interest and office for long enough to support initiatives to the end.

These answers reveal a lot about the strategy commonly adopted to attain authorization for policies, programs and projects aimed at building state capability (Andrews 2013c). First, the strategy is very narrowly focused—on getting authorization from high level authorizers like government ministers. Second, the strategy is often general in nature—on ‘getting ‘support— with little definition of what is actually required from the authorizer(s). Third, the strategy is quite fatalistic—the high-level authorizer either pulls through and actually provides whatever support is needed or does not.

We believe that versions of this kind of narrow, general, fatalistic strategy are common in development. Such a strategy may even be appropriate for certain kinds of initiatives. Consider, for instance, the strategy to do something simple—like traveling from St Louis, Missouri to Los Angeles in 2015. This would involve hiring a car and following a map, with minimal authorization required (by someone who could pay for the car). There is no need to authorize risky activities, or to support actions that could lead to failure. The authorizer simply needs to say 'yes' at one point in time, allocate minimal resources at that time, and step back. Nothing more. This, arguably, is the kind of authorization one needs when undertaking simple logistical tasks, where one knows the solution, has full information about the challenge, does not require special skills or resources, and is not dealing with high stakes or risky business.

This is not the kind of authorization one needs to tackle more complex challenges, however, like traveling from Missouri to the west coast of the United States in 1804—when the west coast had not ben found and any trip was about unknown costs and expectations. These challenges pose many more demands on those who provide authorization—and the processes through which they provide this authorization. Consider how much the Lewis and Clark expedition that did go west in 1804 needed to make a full trek across the western half of the United States: a significant amount of money from Congress (with no promise that it would be used well or repaid); a number of specialized public officials and soldiers to be released from their other duties for an indeterminate period of time; permission for those mid-level officials to negotiate in the name of the government when encountering native tribes; the right to set up camps and bases along the route, and to pass through territories that were already inhabited;

permission to hunt in already-settled areas; food and resources en route; horses, boats, and other vehicles to use to get past obstacles and cover long distances; assistance from guides and translators along the way; help from unknown and potential hostile tried; and more.

This list of needs is obviously not as long as the de facto list from the actual expedition. The expedition list was also probably not complete at any design or preparation or planning stage when Lewis and Clark were engaging with their champion, President Thomas Jefferson. The experimental nature of their journey meant that they would certainly encounter other needs along the way that they could not present before the President at the start. This meant that the President had to accept that there would be more needs that he would need to authorize, and also that he would have to be open to Lewis and Clark looking to others along the way for authorization (like local chiefs). This meant that Jefferson had to provide what we call ‘flexible authority’ and ‘shareable authority’ (where he would be willing to entertain emergent authorization requests and allow the engagement of other authorizers, giving up some of his own control and ownership in the process). He also needed to provide what might be called ‘grit authority’, which is steadfast and patient, and ready to explain short term failures to naysayers (given that these failures must be expected in such challenges).[4] These are additional needs for any group embarking on a complex and unpredictable journey to address 1804 challenges.

We believe that anyone attempting to launch an effort to build state capability should take stock of the kinds of authority needed, before starting *and at* regular intervals during the journey. This stands in stark contrast to the fatalistic approach where one assumes that the authorizer will

[4] We build on the idea of ‘grit’ in the management literature. This concept has been headlined in research at the University of Pennsylvania, which finds grit (defined as ‘perseverance and passion for long term goals’) is a key ingredient to success in complex projects, such that “the achievement of difficult goals entails not only talent but also the sustained and focused application of talent over time“ (Duckworth et al. 2007, p.1087).

work out what you need support for and simply provide it (or not). These needs often include decision rights over the reform agenda, specific people, time, money and resources, legal and regulatory matters, mechanisms to suspend or amend unhelpful processes and rules, and more. This is a demanding list, but it is perhaps not as demanding as the key elements one actually needs to tackle complex challenges, when experimenting to find and fit new solutions: ‘flexibility’ and ‘shareability’ and ‘grit’ (or patience) —as noted above—from those providing authorization (where the last characteristic relates to the ability of an authorizer to manage waiting periods, failure, and changes in direction, given a passion for the long term goal). These are key attributes of supporters who create what adaptive leadership theorists call the holding environment (where support is provided for those those working on the policy, program or project “in spite of the divisive forces generated by adaptive work” which could include failure, the learning of uncomfortable lessons, or other disruption (Heifetz et al. 2009, p. 305)).

We believe that these needs can be met in change processes. We see examples in the Sweden budget reform example and in the Nostrian and Mantian cases (as discussed already in working papers like Andrews et al 2015):

- The Swedish reforms required significant authority from Parliament to cede some power to the executive. It also required the Minister of Finance to allocate top people to change processes for a number of years. It also required a patient wait for nearly five years before new laws were introduced to institutionalize changes. These and other needs were not easy to satisfy, but were satisfied over time given specific strategies adopted by reformers.
- The Nostrian judicial reform team comprised experts from across the sector, in agencies that usually did not work together. The team needed authority from all the

heads of these agencies to meet regularly, work together, and share information. They needed these authorizers to accept that their reform process was experimental and did not offer immediate solutions as well, and that they would be working on a project with no clear solution of pay off. These needs were difficult to meet, but they were met over time.

- The Mantian reform involved agencies across government working with private companies. The coordinating agency needed to ensure the involvement of all these other players, keep them involved, and push them to allocate time and resources to a specific set of reform demands. The coordinating team did this under the auspices of a minister who had to be patient in waiting for results, spending political capital before knowing the return on such. These needs are commonly hard to meet but were met in the reform process.

The basis of any strategy to *get and keep* authority to do PDIA (and any complex and contentious other state building activity) is to maintain awareness of the authorization needs of the initiative. Table 1 is provided to help you think through the needs in respect of a challenge you may be working through (and the one you may already have worked with in our prior working papers on doing problem driven work and iterative adaptations). Take a few minutes thinking about these needs now and generating a list in the table. Include some descriptions of the ‘flexibility’, ‘shareabilty’ and ‘grit’ needs you might have (where you need an authorizer who is flexible in her support, open to sharing authorization, and patient with experiments).

We do not expect you to identify an exhaustive list of needs here, given that there will be emergent needs as you progress through your iterations. Furthermore, your list will always be based on many assumptions. We anticipate that in PDIA, however, and allow opportunities to reflect on both the list content and underlying assumptions. In particular, we propose that this list be part of the iterative check in every iteration cycle (discussed in a prior working paper on iterative adaptation), where you can update your understanding of authorization needs (and assumptions) at regular intervals and engage authorizers about this. A prior working paper (on iterative adaptation) recounts an example of this kind of update in Nostria, where the reform team realized mid-stream in an activity that they needed authorization to share data, discussed this need with their authorizer, and constructed a strategy to get the authorization. In the spirit of this example, the content of Table 1 should be dynamic—but a good start should help you think carefully about what you need right now, which informs your steps to attain the relevant authorization to start your work.

Table 1. What are Your Authorization Needs?

Potential categories	Your answers
Your own time and effort	
Other people’s time and effort	
Resources	
Decision-making rights	
Other	
Flexible authorization	
Shareable authorization	
Grit authorization	

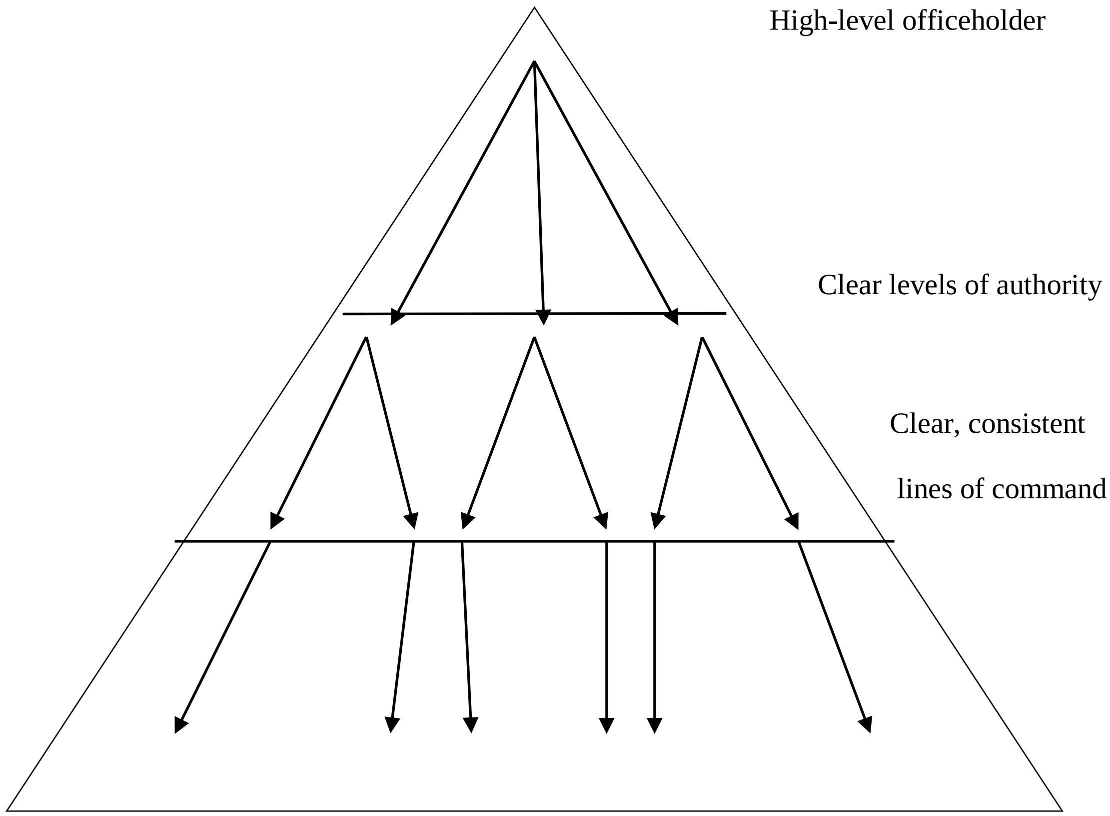
Where do We Find the Needed Authority?

Our guess is that you have a long list of needs in Table 1, given that you have been addressing a complex challenge and not a simple challenge. Challenges in the complex category typically have a lot of needs, and are thus very demanding on the authorizing environment. An active strategy to manage one's authorizing environment cannot stop with listing authorizing needs, therefore. One also needs to ask where the authorization will come from to meet these needs.

As already discussed, in our experience, many would-be reformers look for authorization from the officeholder at the top of the organization proposing change. An effort to build state capability through budget reforms commonly looks to the Minister of Finance as the authorizer, for instance. In the example at the start of this chapter, the health sector team looked to the Minister of Health for authorization. The assumption is that this officeholder sits atop a hierarchical bureaucracy in which decisions are made at the top, communicated downwards, and implemented as ordered.[5] This assumption draws on (what we see as common) views that governmental bodies are bureaucratic hierarchies characterized by effective downward authorization mechanisms. These could be informal mechanisms (like the charisma or political persuasion of a minister) or formal mechanisms (including line management and delegation mechanisms that foster unity of direction and command). One expects that authority does emanate from the top of the organization in these structures, as in Figure 1 (a simple hierarchy with downward lines of command that pass seamlessly through levels of management, until they reach the lowest levels).

[5] This thinking reflects the assumption of an 'ideal type' bureaucracy (Weber 1978) or an administration organized along the lines of classical theory (Gullick 1937). This kind of thinking leads to management strategies that Nutt (1986) describes as 'implementation by edict'. A vast literature shows that this approach has limits in most contexts, however, because there are no 'ideal type' bureaucracies, and authority seldom works this simply (Clegg 2012; Ezrow and Frantz 2013; Im 2014). In many senses the emergence of new public management, public choice and other reform types was because of failures in traditional bureaucracies, which signaled limits to this kind of thought.

Figure 1. The Common Assumption of ‘Ideal Type’ Hierarchical Bureaucracy



This expectation of effective downward authorization is often not met, however, and the authorization one falls short of what one needs or hopes for (Horling and Lesser 2004; Nutt 1986). There are many reasons for this. Some are illustrated in Figure 2 (with examples from various countries and sectors evident in recent articles, like Campbell (2012), He (2012), Jones et al. (2013), and Poole (2016):

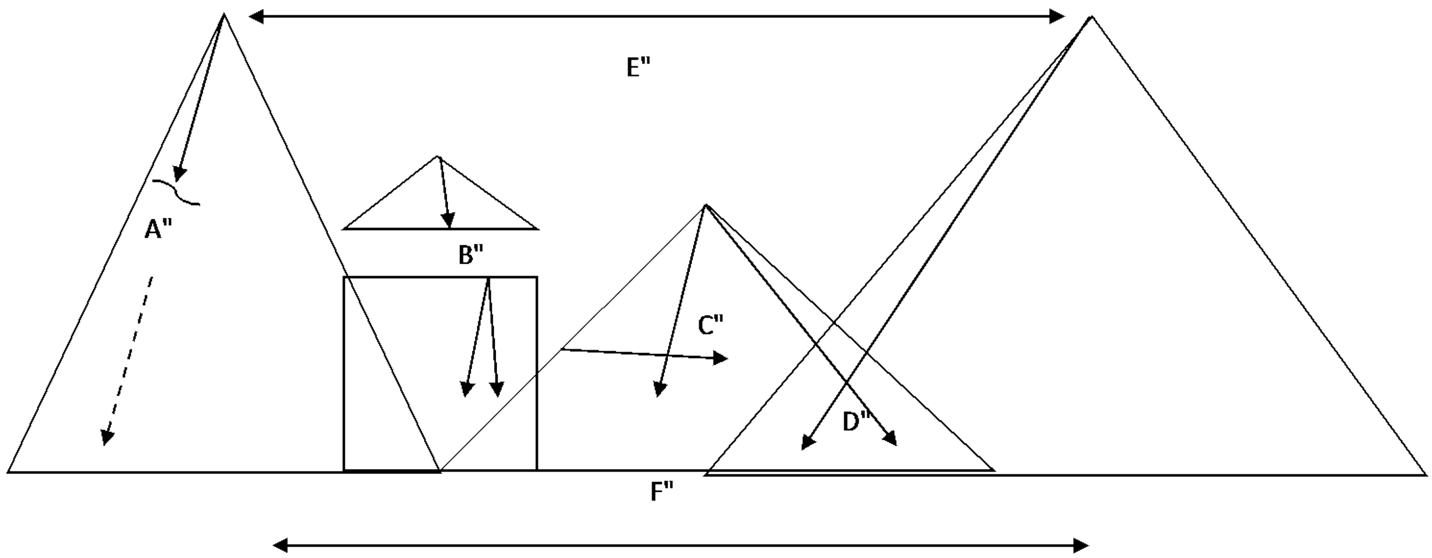
- Most officeholders in public organizations actually have limited personal authority in their organizations, and find their efforts to impose such quite ineffective. Career bureaucrats who have been in the organization for long periods commonly stop the flow of these officeholders' commands down the organization (as shown by marker A in Figure 2). Personal charisma is not very effective in overcoming these kinds of structural gaps, especially in large organizations.

- Most bureaucratic organizations do not have the 'ideal type' lines of command required for effective hierarchical authorization (shown by marker B in Figure 2). There are breaks in these lines (where mid-level managers simply fail to transmit commands) and deviations from such (where mid-level managers actually transmit different commands, exercising their own authority in mini-fiefdoms that are, de facto, not under the high officeholder's authority). Many bureaucracies lack feedback mechanisms flowing upwards to inform high level officials of these gaps and deviations, which allows breaks in command to fester.
- Organizations do not only have line authority systems (where commands flow downwards, typically, to ensure a goal-orientation exists). Most organizations and governments also staff and function authorizing mechanisms in place. Staff authority mechanisms shape the way resources are used, and functional authority mechanisms allocate authority for specific types of activities to specific groups. The different mechanisms commonly clash (as in marker C in Figure 2). For instance, an agent may be told to spend money on a particular project by a line supervisor (even the minister) but the budget department may not allow such spending given the rules they have for disbursement, and a functional team leader may lay claim to the funding for a special project. This kind of clash frustrates the flow of downward authority (often purposefully) and imposes limits on the authority of even the most influential high level officeholder.

- Agents in organizations often have to deal with competing voices (or lines of authority) as well (illustrated through marker D in Figure 2). A local government official working in the health sector, for instance, may be taking orders from both the Minister (through the ministry) and a local government official (the Mayor or Town Clerk, for instance). Lines of command can exist outside of these competing bureaucratic structures as well, with commands also emanating from professional, political, religious, familial and other domains (where agents are given directives on how to behave, who to serve, what to prioritize, and more by authorizing agents in the many domains they inhabit outside of their formal job). These competing voices can dilute influence of a communication line from any one source.
- There are also commonly tensions between those holding high level office in different organizations or parts of the same organization (as reflected in E in Figure 2). Ministers and top managers are often political or professional competitors, or sit together in other settings (political parties, Cabinets, boards) and can see each other as subordinates or superiors. This means that any one minister or manager may in fact be taking orders (formally or informally) from another minister or manager in a different organization. This obviously complicates authorization structures.
- Most organizations are part of broader sectors or networks in which many authorizing structures are at play (see F in Figure 2). This further complicates any views about authority. It is seldom possible for a hierarchy in a shared ecosystem to define its entire authorization structure or to contain the overlap of other authorizing mechanisms and influences. These influences can fragment internal authorizing

mechanisms or introduce confusion about what is authorized and what is not authorized.

Figure 2. The reality: fragmented and dysfunctional authorization mechanisms



This discussion is not meant to frustrate or frighten you as a reader. It is simply intended as a reminder that authorizing structures are complex and we cannot assume that one authorizer will fulfil all our needs. There are many reasons why even the most well meaning high level officeholder will not be able to authorize all we need when doing active state building work, and we should acknowledge this upfront. Instead of only depending on individual champions for authorization, therefore, we should make a habit—and discipline—of actively navigating the authorizing environment in which we will work. In other words, we need to adopt a more expansive view of our authorizing environment when looking for support.

We see this in the examples discussed over the past few chapters. Sweden's budget reform was certainly championed by a group in the Ministry of Finance, but it was also authorized (crucially at points) by Parliamentarians, local government leaders, ministers in line ministries, and other influential actors. This support cut across organizational boundaries and between the worlds of technical administration and politics. The Nostrian judicial reform was similar. Authority was initially provided by a supportive minister, but over time it was also provided by heads of the court system, prison service, and other central agencies, as well as local government officials, administrators in local courthouses, and more. The reform was complex, and required a complex authorizing arrangement.

It is not easy to navigate an authorizing environment, however, given the many unseen complexities in most contexts (which we have likened to icebergs in past work, where one can only see a small part of the rules and mechanisms driving behavior (Andrews 2013)). The iterative nature of PDIA is helpful (and intentional) in this respect, as it fosters constant learning about the authorizing environment (in all reflections, at all times, one should be asking what one learned about the authorizing environment). The experiential lessons about authority are much more useful than any theoretical, armchair pondering about such. This noted, however, we think it is very useful to start any initiative with some armchair pondering, asking where the needed authority will come from in one's authorizing environment.

We propose starting with identifying the primary authorizer(s) you plan to work with; given that we expect most reforms are initiated under the auspices or with authority of one or other high-level officeholder. In the Nostrian example this was a supportive Minister of Justice, who opened the door to the work, agreed about the problem, and appointed a team to do experimental iterations. Then, identify which needs you assume this authorizer will be able to meet. In the Nostrian example, this included things like the following; access to officials in the Ministry of Justice, as well as data in the ministry, and (hopefully) a holding environment in which to experiment (given that the minister promised to be flexible, to share authority, and to exercise patience and grit). Similarly, you should then note which of your needs are obviously outside of the scope of your primary authorizer's supervision and influence. This was a long list in Nostria, where the champion minister could obviously not authorize the participation of staff members from other justice sector agencies, or authorize access to information in those agencies, or ensure the flexibility and patience of other high-level officeholders. The next step is to identify where or who you believe additional authorization will need to come from to fill the authorization gaps. In Nostria this list included the Chief Justice, Head of Prosecutions, and more. It also included mid-level bureaucrats responsible for budgeting and personal management (given the influence they had on key resources).

This exercise helps to promote awareness of the challenge involved with building true authority to foster change and build state capability. It is a more fleshed out version of the conversations we promoted in Andrews et al (2015), in the section on problem driven sequencing. Such an exercise matters because it guides would-be reformers in recognizing where they have authority to act and where they do not have authority to act (given that authority is a key ingredient in the change space discussed in Andrews et al (2015)). The exercise also ensures transparency about the assumptions one makes about the authorizing environment, which is a key element in the work on 'Theory of Change' (where would-be reformers are encouraged to flesh out their theory as to why and how change will happen). These transparent assumptions can become a key part of the iteration and learning process, guiding questions during reflection periods (shown in the iteration phase in what we call a SearchFrame process). We find that reform groups learn a lot about their authorizing environment when iterating, but sometimes the lessons are hard to identify and capture because no one constructed a set of leading assumptions to reflect upon. Lessons are easier to capture when these assumptions exist a priori.

For this reason, we ask you to use Tables 2 and 3 to list the assumptions you currently have about your authorizing environment. Do the exercise on your own and then with group members, to see what you can already learn about different opinions and assumptions you all have about ‘the rules of the game’. Please note that the table lists questions raised in the description we have just completed. It does not ask how you will ensure that you get the authority you need, simply that you flesh out what you think that authority is and where it might be found. We will move onto a discussion of gaining and growing authority once you are done.

Table 2. Where will you look for your authorization needs

Who is your primary authorizer	
Why do you assume her/his support?	

What are your needs (in the following categories, as determined in Table 9.1)	Do you think your primary authorizer will satisfy this need?	Who else needs to provide authorization to satisfy this need?
Your own time and effort		
Other people’s time, effort		
Resources		
Decision-making rights		
Other		
Flexible authorization		
Shareable authorization		
Patient (grit) authorization		

Table 3. Assumptions about our authorizing environment complexity (see Figure 9.2)

Authorizing Environment Complexities	My assumptions
A. Limits to personal authority of high-level authorizers	
B. Breaks in formal command structures within organizations	
C. Conflicting authority structures within organizations (line, staff, and functional, etc.)	
D. Competing voices faced by mid-level employees and/or frontline bureaucrats	
E. Conflicts between high-level authorizers across an organization/sector	
F. Many horizontal authorizing structures overlap	

How Do We Gain and Grow the Needed Authority?

We expect that your completed Tables 2 and 3 are quite detailed. They probably also reveal quite a few gaps in authority needs and challenges you expect to face in addressing such needs. These are the areas where you will have to work hard to gain the authority required to make your policy, program or project a success. The question, then, is how to gain needed authority, and also to grow the authority in tandem with growing scope and scale demands typical to complex challenges. This is what we will address now.

The first point to make is simply that you should treat all your assumptions about authority with the same degree of healthy skepticism. Even when you are sure that a champion will support certain needs, you should recognize that your certainty is actually just a strong assumption. And you should be open to the potential that your assumption is incorrect. This perspective will compel you to think strategically about all the authorization needs in Table 2 (not just those where you have gaps) and to reflect about all your assumptions (including those about your champion). This will mitigate any 'authority blind spots' you might have.

The second point is that you need a concerted strategy in place to gain the authority you need from authorizers, and communication is at the heart of this process. Authorizers are often arms-length removed from the details of change processes or of challenges with capacity building. They have many issues to deal with and need to determine how they allocate their time, energy, authority and (often) political capital. This means that they are often unaware of the authorization needs in new initiatives, or unconvinced that they should cater to these needs. A communications strategy will inform them of both, persuading them to provide needed authority. As discussed in Andrews et al. (2015), we believe that a problem driven approach is crucial in this regard. The goal is to construct the problem one is trying to solve (using data, focal events and narrative) in a manner that makes the authorizer agree, 'we have a problem…and must do something about it.' This seems a simple and obvious element in any strategy, but we are amazed at how often it is ignored in development work. Policies, projects and programs are introduced with very little effort at strategic framing, with the apparent assumption that authorizers will simply get behind any new initiative.

The communications and persuasion process is made more complex when one has multiple authorizers to engage. It is common for different authorizers to respond to different kinds of problem construction, and thus would-be reformers cannot settle once they have gained the ear of only one authorizer. In Nostria, for instance, the problem of case backlogs was enough to motivate the Minister of Justice to support a change initiative. She supported an experimental approach, given a narrative her team constructed about past failures in solution-driven reforms. Other authorizers were less convinced, however, and had become used to having case backlogs. They were also resistant to the idea of experimental reforms. The team needed to reconstruct the problem to convince them that it mattered (and hence was not just a condition to be lived with) and that there was no routine solution. This persuasion activity involved linking case backlogs to deficient data and ultimately to failed budget requests that most high-level officials were very concerned about. They were also made aware that their failed budget requests had persisted even after reforms that were designed to improve the situation. This led to them supporting the reform process and blessing the experimental approach the team chose to adopt.

When one is tackling complex reforms, it is important to ensure that authorizers do not just support action in a specific area. There needs to be an explicit authorization of the experimental approach one needs to adopt. The communication strategy can help in gaining this authorization, as it was in Nostria where the reform team used evidence of failed reforms in the past to motivate authorizers to do something new. The team 'sold' the need for experimentation in this context, and communications strategies can be used to 'sell' other aspects of a flexible reform process as well, including the need for learning from failure. Authorizers will be more supportive of such process if they are convinced that it is structured, that lessons and (potential) failure will result from forward-looking experimentation (rather than laziness of poor management), and that the process will be undertaken in a responsible and highly engaged manner—promoting accountability.[6] The strategy for experimental iteration outlined in prior work (Andrews et al 2016) is designed to help you make this case to your authorizer. It is

[6] This is partly our own learning, but draws on various recent studies on the topic. Amy Edmondson's work on this topic has been particularly influential. She (and colleagues) tackle the problem of getting performance-driven organizations (and authorizers) to allow learning through failure. They find that the list of strategies discussed here matter a great deal in this process. See Edmondson and Singer (2012), Khana et al. (2015), Senge and Kim (2013) and Senge (2014).

structured, focused on a goal ('problem solved') with multiple milestones and many regular reflection points where you and your team can report to the authorizer, enhancing accountability for all.

Table 4 poses some basic questions one could ask in designing a communications and persuasion strategy to gain authority to act in this manner. We recommend that you take a few minutes and fill your thoughts into the open spaces. These thoughts could become the basis of a first step to convince authorizers to support your initiative.

Table 4. The basis of a communications and persuasion strategy

	Authorizer 1 (named in Table 2)	Authorizer 2 (named in Table 2)	Authorizer 3 (named in Table 2)	Authorizer 4 (named in Table 2)
Does the authorizer agree that you have a problem?				
What would make the authorizer care more about the problem?				
Does the authorizer support the experimental iteration you propose?				
What could convince the authorizer that you need and experimental iterative approach?				

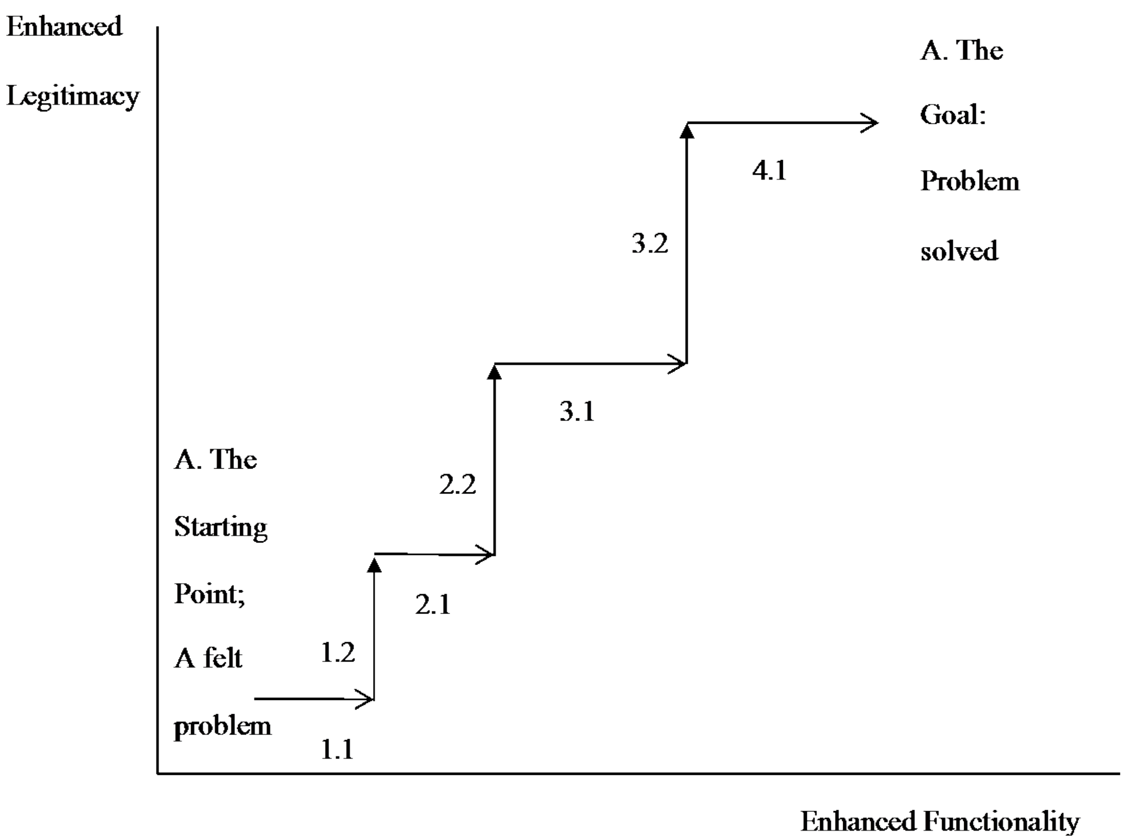
Note: Do this for all the authorizers named in Table 2, identifying potential strategies you could use to gain their support.

The third point is that you do not require full authority at the start of your initiative. It is common to find some authorizers offering more support at the start of a reform, and this authority often allows one to mobilize enough resources to initiate some action. We saw this in Mantia, where the reform team actually had very little authority over the 42 point agenda to address problems facing business. Many of the agenda items were under the authority of other ministries and local governments. The team was tempted to stop and wait until it gained the authority of these other agents before starting the work. However, they could identify five entry points for change that were directly under the control of their ministry and their supportive Minister. They began work in these entry points, building momentum through real action. At the same time, they worked to gain authority from other Ministers and ministries, so as to gradually expand both their authorization to act and reform impact. The momentum from early action steps was vital in convincing other authorizers to join, given that they could see the approach being taken and the results being achieved.

We see this happening quite regularly, and it raises an important point about tailoring iterations in the change process: do not wait for full authority to start, and do not start with too many action steps or with overly demanding action steps. More (and more demanding) action steps escalate the risk of failure, which one does not want to do in early iterations (given the potential to demotivate authorizers and implementers). Further, one does not want to over-ask from authorizers, especially at the start of an iterative process. This could cause the primary authorizer to over-commit early on (yielding her vulnerable to criticism and even to losing her authority) and it could cause other potential authorizers to shy away from supporting your initiative in future.

Beyond starting small (so as not to overwhelm your limited early authority) we also propose—as a third point—being strategic about growing your authorization as you progress through the experimental iterations. This requires acknowledging that authorizers are not just supporting an effort to enhance state capability because it yields new functionality (be this better services in Malawi or higher employment in Mantia). Authorizers are also interested in the legitimacy they derive from the initiative—being seen as the ones who supported the work, and especially being associated with its successes. We show this in Figure 3, which reflects on the 'success' of a state building initiative as involving both improvements to functionality (on the horizontal axis) and legitimacy (on the vertical axis).

Figure 3. Iterating to progressively improve functionality and legitimacy



We argue that would-be reformers should strive to use each iteration to improve both of these success dimensions, enhancing functionality and ensuring authorizers get more legitimacy in the process. This involves taking a step to improve functionality (1.1) and then stopping to ensure legitimacy is also enhanced (1.2); then taking another step towards greater functionality (2.1) and stopping to consolidate support and ensure that authorizers are gaining in legitimacy.

This kind of thinking is built into the iterative processes discussed in Andrews et al (2016), where action steps are taken, lessons are learned, and results are discussed with authorizers (in the Iteration Check, see Andrews et al (2016)). It is useful to structure each of these discussions so that authorizers leave with news they can share to expand their legitimacy (about progress that has been made, or even lessons that have been learned). This will often lead to expanded authorization in the next step (given that the authorizer sees personal value in the exercise), which could facilitate bigger advances in functionality. Over time, the idea is to create a stairway to expanded state capability, with iterative improvements in both authority and functionality.

We saw an example of this in the work in Nostria. The initial work was done under the authority of a Minister who was willing and eager to support an expansion in functionality in the justice sector. She was in a (commonly) contentious relationship with other high-level officeholders in the sector, however, and could not authorizer everything that was needed to achieve full success. Early iterations were thus necessarily cautious, involving work with only officials in the ministry. They were rapid, however, and targeted some quick wins—in terms of lessons learned about potential opportunities to improve the sector and in terms of expanded engagement across the sector. The Minister was briefed on the lessons learned and the added members in the group, using this information to market the reform process with peers. She did so confidently, knowing that the process was yielding modest but real results (even in the first few iterations). As time went by, when iterations involved direct steps to enhance the skills of people in her ministry (through Excel courses, for instance), she ensured that other agencies had free and easy access to the same sessions. This enhanced her legitimacy and the legitimacy of the process, and led to other authorizers committing their support. They saw that the process yielded tangible results quickly and consistently, and that it was yielding change at a rate they—and their staff—could manage. Interestingly, authorizers were not deterred by the limited size of results in early iterations (as some observers in large development organizations advised they would be). Authorizers saw the process as legitimate because the results—no matter how small—were produced quickly and regularly. In a sense, these results gave authorizers 'sound bite' legitimacy (something to mention in a Cabinet meeting or weekly press report, as evidence of ongoing progress) instead of career-defining legitimacy (a big achievement). Politics is as much about sound bites as it is about career wins: PDIA allows many of the former en route to the latter. It is important to note that we are not talking about 'quick wins' on their own here (which studies find matter but do not always open up into broader reforms) (Bunse and Fritz 2012; Haggard 1997; Porter et al. 2012; Teskey et al. 2012). We are emphasizing using quick wins to build space for reform, so the strategy in which these wins is pursued and communicated matters as much as (or more than) the wins themselves.

The final point we would like to make about gaining and growing authority centers on the use of coalitions in PDIA. As we have argued in prior work (Andrews et al 2015), most state building challenges are complex. They involve many agents and impose many needs on would-be reformers. They also tend to be high stakes, rife with risk and uncertainty. Many authorizers will shy away from supporting action in these areas because of such characteristics. This is, we believe, a primary reason why low capability equilibria persist in many contexts (and why many of the deficiencies associated with these low capabilities fester as conditions, never attracting the attention of a real problem). There are individual authorizers who do step out and support efforts targeting these challenges, however, and sometimes they make a big difference. However, we observe two realities that often limit the individual authorizers potential to really support complex challenges. First, these authorizers often take on too much personal risk in the process and do not survive to actually follow through with the authorization they promise at the start. Second, these authorizers often lack the scope or breadth of influence required to address complex challenges, and end up supporting narrow interventions that cannot be scald or diffused or sustained.

These limits to individual authority are commonly referenced in the growing literature on leadership in development (Andrews 2013). This literature routinely finds that deep and broad change is more commonly associated with work by groups of authorizers (Haggard and Webb 1993; Krueger 2002; Leftwich 2010; Lewis 1996). These groups typically engage in coalition-like structures, where they agree to combine efforts to address shared problems that they cannot solve on their own.[7] They provide the different kinds of authority needed to achieve a solution, and share risks involved in the process.

We believe that the authorizing needs of complex initiatives will always call for some kind of coalition arrangement. These initiatives may well start with an individual authorizer acting alone, but the authorization needs and risks will soon prove overwhelming. Would-be reformers should therefore strategize to build authorization coalitions from early on in any initiative, and constantly try to build the coalition. It is the key to managing risks associated with this kind of work and also to providing all of the authority needed in such.

[7] There are various interesting strands of such thought, as reflected in recent work. For instance, Oborn et al. (2011) note that the policy entrepreneurs referenced in work by people like Kingdon often have their biggest impact when drawing agents together in coalitions. Nowlin (2011) writes about the importance of coalitions in pushing policy processes forward, emphasizing the importance of balancing homogeneity and heterogeneity in the design of such. Faust (2010) discusses the way in which coalitions emerge to foster development agendas, changing as reform iterations demands.

Table 5 acts as a summary set of questions we believe any would-be reformer should ask when trying to gain and grow the authority to address a wicked hard, complex challenge. You can use the table to reflect on addressing the authorization needs identified in Table 2. It asks you to think of ideas you may take in early iterations of a find and fit process (see Andrews et al 2016): Do you comfortably have enough authority to take these steps? What legitimacy will these steps yield for your authorizer? How will this legitimacy attract other authorizers to the initiative? Who might you be looking to include in a coalition, and what strategies do you have to create such coalition? We propose answering these questions at the start of any initiative and revisiting them in every reflection period, to ensure that you are constantly mindful of the challenge of gaining and growing authorization to do this work.

Table 5. Questions to ask about gaining and growing authority

Your proposed first (or next) action step(s)	Do you comfortably have enough authority to take these steps?	What legitimacy will these steps yield for your authorizer?	How will this legitimacy attract other authorizers to the initiative?	Who might you be looking to include in a coalition, and how might this step help to create the coalition?

Where Does This Leave You?

We have covered a lot of ground in prior working papers (see Andrews et al. (2015) and Andrews et al. (2016)), and hopefully you have participated actively through the exercises in those chapters. If so, you would have seen a challenge transformed into an attention-grabbing problem, and then into a deconstructed set of entry points for action. You would then have identified multiple options to address various entry point issues and crafted a strategy to conduct experimental iterations with these ideas, learning about what works and why. Finally, you would have considered the authorization needs of your initiative, as well as where those needs might be met and how to gain and grow necessary authority.

Our discussion has been very practical and applied, and we hope this is useful to you. The true test of all these ideas is when you apply them to your real challenge, however, and actually start iteration. This is when you get to see the way in which well constructed problems mobilize attention, and how participatory problem analysis empowers colleagues to think in new ways. This is when you realize how much can be learned when one tries an action and then stops to reflect on what happened. Finally, when ideas turn to action one learns a huge amount about who really has power and authority, and who is really willing to use it to build state capability in areas where it has been lacking.

We hope that you have found the ideas and tools interesting enough to even consider taking the next step into action. We want to warn you not to do this on your own, however. Just as we believe there are limits to the influence of individual authorizers, we also believe that there are limits to the influence you can have—as development entrepreneur, would-be reformer, agitator, or whatever identity is appropriate. Many people are required to build state capability, playing many roles and sharing the risk involved. Broad engagement is also the key to building capability at scale. A forthcoming working paper explains why, and offers some practical ideas on how to engage broadly in your efforts to build state capability.

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