Inside the black box of political will

Findings from 10 years of the Developmental Leadership Program

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DLP’s research has examined how leadership, power and political processes have driven change in diverse sectors in 44 countries. Explore more than 100 briefs, summaries, guidance notes and research papers, plus commentary from researchers, at dlprog.org.
Explaining failure

DLP's research suggests that political will is built through developmental leadership as a collective process of political contestation. Comprised of:
- motivated individuals
- collective leadership
- legitimation

Political will

What is political will and how does it work? Where does it come from? Is it individual or collective? Can it be built or supported? Is it always accepted? Sustainable?

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM
Programming and reform failure
Insufficiently significant or sustainable developmental progress

WHAT'S THE ANSWER?

SO...

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Political will
Ok, but what does that even mean? What do I do with that??

SO...

DLP'S RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT POLITICAL WILL IS BUILT ...
The black box of political will

INPUT
Reform efforts
Program design and delivery
Implementation efforts

What is political will and how does it work?
Is it individual or collective?
Where does it come from?
Can it be built or supported?
Is it always accepted? Sustainable?

POLITICAL WILL

OUTPUT
WILL PRESENT
Successful policy reform
Effective implementation
Establishment or maintenance of developmental institutions

WILL ABSENT
Failed reform
Failed implementation
Failure of developmental institutions

OUTPUT
Explaining failure

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WHAT IS THE PROBLEM

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The Developmental Leadership Program  www.dlprog.org
Developmental leadership is the strategic, collective and political process of constructing political will to secure pro-development outcomes.

It is not always successful and, while it can be transactional and effectively so, in its fullest sense it is typically transformational.

Developmental leadership is a process of political contestation that allows a diverse set of actors and interests to come to locally-legitimate and therefore sustainable development outcomes.
Three levels of developmental leadership

**INDIVIDUAL**

Developmental leadership relies on **motivated individuals** with the values, interests and opportunity to influence change.

**COLLECTIVE**

Motivated people overcome barriers to cooperation and form **coalitions** with power, legitimacy and influence.

**SOCIETAL**

Coalitions' power and effectiveness partly hinges on their ability to **contest** and de-legitimise one set of ideas and **legitimise** an alternative set.
Three levels of developmental leadership

**INDIVIDUAL**

- Developmental leadership relies on motivated individuals with the values, interests and opportunity to influence change.

**Motivated**

- Motivation to mobilise hinges on how individuals interpret the rules / context
- Conceptions of self-interest emerge from an ‘internal conversation’ (Archer, 2003)

**Strategic**

- Once motivated, strategic agents seek to achieve their goals by using political skill to manoeuvre, align with others, and build their power and capacity
Three levels of developmental leadership

**COLLECTIVE**
Motivated people overcome barriers to cooperation and form **coalitions** with power, legitimacy and influence.

**Formation, membership, values and interests**

**Strategies**
- Bundling
- Framing

**Pragmatism**
Three levels of developmental leadership

**SOCIETAL**

Coalitions' power and effectiveness partly hinges on their ability to **contest** and de-legitimise one set of ideas and **legitimise** an alternative set.

**The battle of ideas**


**The power of reform narratives**


**Sustainability is a function of embeddedness, recognisability and acceptability**

Implications

Supporting leadership
- Support the development of leadership values and motivation

Facilitating effective coalitions
- Create space for coalitions to form and to work their politics
- Work behind the scenes and explore the roles of other actors

Navigating legitimacy politics
- Do support local actors, but don’t undermine their legitimacy
- Identify opportunities for norm contestation but beware

What it all adds up to: Thinking and working politically
- Politics is not the obstacle, it is the way
- Development actors can think and work politically
- Do ongoing, internal political analysis
- Explicitly address ethical dilemmas
- Be creative with monitoring and evaluation

Don’t jump to the answers