11.235, Analyzing Projects and Organizations, Reading assignment #1

This brief note presents the two readings for discussion for Session 2.

The assigned readings are:

Kelman, Steven (2005). *Unleashing Change: A Study of Organization Renewal in Government*, chapters 1-3, pp. 1-58.

Tendler, Judith (1998). "Research questions for the Ford-Foundation's Innovations-in-Government Programs: Documentation, Evaluation, and Dissemination."

The readings for Session 2 will seem more different than similar and, indeed, might seem to be a strange pairing for a class discussion. At the same time, they have some important similarities (see #1 below). In particular, despite their vast differences in subject matter and style of research, they both look at a "success" story of an organization, and try to explain that success in terms that are useful for analysis above and beyond the particular case. It is important to keep in mind, moreover, that their style of questioning goes beyond cases that are successful–likewise with the setting in a more general context of how poor performance as well as good performance are judged, evaluated, and researched. The class session, then is not about success, but contributes to ability to understand and assess the evolution of organizations and their programs–including their successes as well as their failures, their moments of advance and their other moments of decline throughout time.

1. Similarities.   While the two readings are indeed different in many ways, these differences are rather obvious. One challenge, then, is to see the similarities between them. This will help you to stand back and learn to see the similarities–in terms of style of asking a research question based on existing research and evaluation findings on this subject, on existing approaches to researching it and, more generally, on the popular perspectives that contribute importantly to how politicians, planners, and even researchers do their research and write up their findings.

Please note that "similarities" is not being defined here in a strict way. It includes the looser concepts of parallels, analogies, etc.–namely, anything that sparks your understanding of one type of case by reading *another* type of case. What you take away from reviewing the two readings together, then, is a broader insight, that applies to yet other cases and contributes to creating a "lens" for your subsequent reading and experiencing with respect to the subject of this course.

2. Differences. This question is in most ways easier than the one above, and the answer is therefore seemingly more obvious–a 'no-brainer." Hence we can list the differences quickly on the chalkboard at the beginning of the discussion. In addition, when you are reading and after, think about certain differences that seem to lie beneath the obvious differences–differences in emphasis, point of entry at which the researcher starts, and how the reading fits into or does not fit into reigning paradigms and ways of thinking about this subject.

3. Examples. Finally, as you are reading, think about examples from your own work or volunteer experience, and/or other readings you've done. How does the reading throw a new light on the way you have always seen these experiences or other readings–a new perspective that may or may not be compatible with your prior perspective.

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