

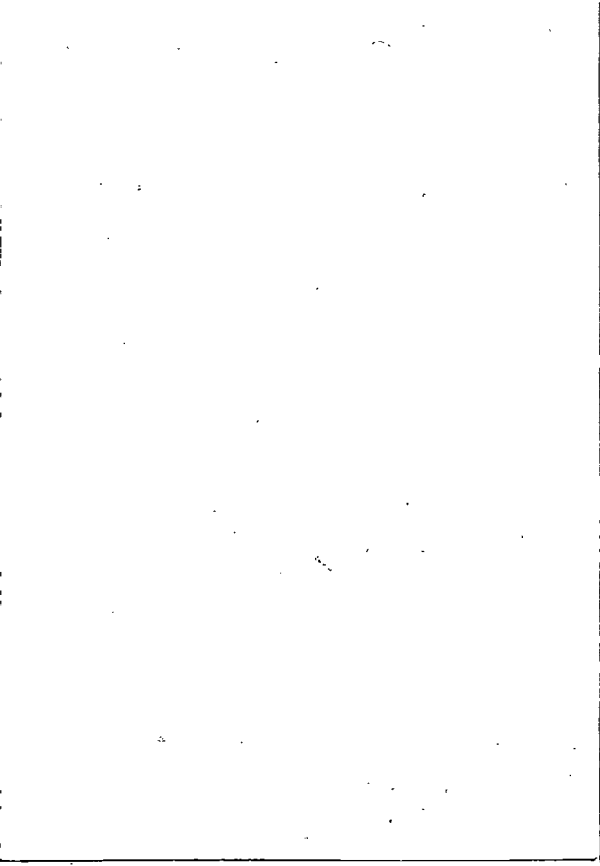
## **Integrating Policy: A Matter of Learning**

Report on the INTESEP  
Workshop  
IDRC, Ottawa  
May 1995

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The International Development Research Centre  
Le Centre de recherches pour le développement international  
El Centro Internacional de Investigaciones para el Desarrollo

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# **Integrating Policy: A Matter of Learning**

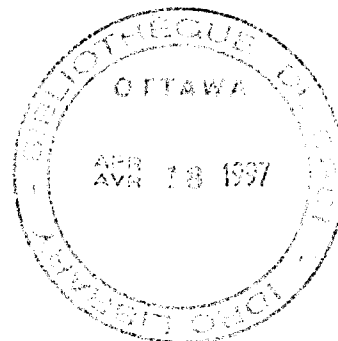
Report on the INTESEP  
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## INTEGRATING POLICY: A MATTER OF LEARNING

### I - INTRODUCTION

In May 1995, the International Development Research Centre organized a workshop in Ottawa, under the rubric of its INTESEP programme (Integrating Economic Social and Environmental Policy). The purpose of the workshop was to give practitioners actively involved in the day-to-day problems of building integrated social, economic and environmental policies in Canada, Latin America, Africa and Asia, an opportunity to consider how learning theory applies to the practical realities of field operations.

The primary participants at this workshop were seven professionals working for private or public bodies on activities designed to bring stakeholders with a variety of social, economic or environmental concerns together for face-to-face negotiations of integrated policies. They were provided with a background paper which presented a framework for discussion. This framework focused on how *learning theory* could be applied to the processes of building integrated policies and programmes. All were asked to describe their own activities in light of propositions about learning, and to discuss the validity of these principles, when applied to practice. The assumptions made by the organizers of the workshop were:

- a) That concepts derived from learning theory would prove relevant to the experience of building and implementing integrated policy;
- b) That these same concepts would provide a common language to facilitate the cross-cultural description and analysis of the processes involved in building and implementing integrated policies and programmes;
- c) That focusing on propositions about how learning relates to multistakeholder negotiations, would prove useful to the identification of strategies for interventions designed to facilitate and guide the processes of integrated policy development.

Alan Thomas, Professor of Adult Education at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, chaired the workshop. Seven professionals led the discussions:

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*Lalla Aicha Ben Barka*, Coordinator of Project ROCARE II in Mali, described the case of an educational research network in **West and Central Africa**, which brought together a culturally and linguistically diverse group of educational practitioners, researchers, policy makers and representatives of local communities, for a process of "social negotiation" on how African education should be reformed.

*Somsook Boonyabancha*, Director of the Asian Coalition for Housing Rights in **Thailand**, described the Urban Community Development Office in Bangkok, which brings together community groups, representatives of the private sector, NGO's and government agencies to develop, implement and evaluate integrated development projects in Bangkok slums.

*Fadel Diamé*, Director of the Fondation Rurale de l'Afrique de l'Ouest in **Senegal**, described the learning processes involved in supporting and strengthening farmers' associations in West Africa, which bring together scientists and villagers to develop sustainable integrated development projects in the face of massive social, environmental and economic crisis.

*Elias Mujica*, from the Consortium for the Sustainable Development of the Andean Ecoregion, in Lima, **Peru**, described the work of "Concertation Tables" in Peru, which bring together provincial, district and municipal leaders, with universities, private sector organizations and community groups, to develop sustainable integrated development plans, in the face of opposition from the national government.

*Stephen Owen*, Commissioner on Resources and Environment in **British Columbia**, Canada, described a process of multi-stakeholder negotiations between environmentalists, labour unions, community groups, private sector developers, and government departments, to develop mutually acceptable, sustainable development plans for a variety of controversial sites in the province.

*George Penfold*, of Guelph University, and a member of the Planning Act Reform Commission in **Ontario**, Canada, described an attempt to bring a large number of disparate interest groups from the public and private sector together to develop new standards for sustainable integrated land use planning in the province.

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*Alfredo Rojas Figueroa*, of the Centro de Investigación y Desarrollo de la Educación in Santiago, Chile, described how multiparty negotiation techniques have been applied to bring education professionals together with community groups for the development of innovative programmes in Chile's poorest schools.<sup>1</sup>

This paper provides a synthesis of both the original analytical paradigm provided by learning theory, and comments on the utility of that paradigm by the workshop. The original theoretical paper provided twelve propositions on how learning theory could be applied to multiparty stakeholder negotiations. Those original propositions, which formed the basis for the workshop, have been reformulated as a result of the discussions, and the reformulated propositions are presented in an appendix to this paper along with a list of research questions provided by the field practitioners.

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<sup>1</sup> Background papers were also provided and discussed by Maybelle Durkin, Executive Director of the Canadian Home and School and Parent Teacher Federation, (on the development of literacy programmes), Ken MacKay, of IDRC (on the development of sustainable fisheries management policies), Anna de Rosas-Ignacio of Ateneo de Manila University (on the development of the Philippine Social Reform Agenda) and Roger Schwass (on the Pakistan national conservation strategy). Other participants at the workshop included, from IDRC, Anne Bernard (coordinator of the workshop), Fred Carden, Daniel Morales-Gomez and Jamie Schnurr; David Runnalls of the Institute for Research on Public Policy; and Greg Armstrong.

### II - BASIC CONCEPTS OF LEARNING

There are a number of definitions of learning, but for the purposes of discussion related to the formulation of complex integrated policies, it is postulated here to be *"...the capacity to interact with one's social and physical environment in such a way as to derive logical meaning, guiding principles and consistent perspective. It is a process which results in relatively stable changes in previous behaviour, attitudes or values, or the establishment of new ones...changes beyond what could be attributed to normal maturation."*<sup>2</sup>

Learning involves the acquisition of information and the process of converting it, through analysis, to new forms of knowledge; the development and extension of intellectual and mechanical skills; as well as the expression of new attitudes. Most importantly, and central to the experience of individuals working with the complex processes of integrating social, economic and environmental policies, learning results in an increased ability *"...to predict consequences, weigh alternatives, perceive comparative advantage and distinguish salient characteristics of a situation."*

Learning is, inherently, an individual activity which is influenced by the characteristics of the learner and his or her environment; at the same time, it is a fundamentally social event. Learning is motivated and influenced by the nature of the learning context including the actions and perceptions of other people, the distribution of power in and between groups, and the learning event/task itself (that is the complexity, urgency, degree of newness implied). Thus, while an external intervention designed to achieve change may require the same end results of all participants, people will face differing degrees of difficulty in learning new behaviours as accommodations to personal, cultural and social differences are made at both individual and group levels.

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<sup>2</sup> Bernard, 1991, p.34.



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### ***Readiness for Learning***

This implies that interventions aimed at promoting multistakeholder negotiation of integrated policies, as any other change event, must take account of, and plan for, the fact of significant diversity in the readiness for learning of different people and the different groups with which they are working; and recognize that individuals and groups will be at different stages of learning.

Fundamental to learning theory, and buttressed by experience in the field, is the fact that attention has to be paid to these individual learning differences when intervenors determine the time and the types of facilitation strategies required for the movement of individuals and their institutions towards an understanding of the requirements for multilateral negotiation as a new way of thinking and behaving.

The broad range of interest groups involved in most multistakeholder negotiations brings to the table major differences in both the understanding of issues and of priorities. Groups will often have divergent experiences and substantial differences in access to resources, and therefore to power. These differences mean, in practice, that individuals and groups will take different approaches to learning the new attitudes implied by policy integration, and will be at different stages of readiness for the learning processes involved in negotiation.

For the intervenor, enabling these groups to reach a stage of readiness for learning about both one another (as a sense of shared purpose is sought) and about the nature of the policy changes being proposed, is almost always in practice a *largely* unpredictable, non-linear and time-consuming process. The processes of negotiation themselves will need, similarly, to be diverse, differing from one change intervention to another, building from and on the differences in experience and learning styles of the individuals and groups represented. What must therefore be recognized is that these change interventions will often be lengthy and variable, as accommodations are made to the differences which participants have in their readiness for learning.

One of the realities of bringing different groups together is that the groups themselves may see little commonality of interest or experience at the beginning of the negotiation process, and thus often have little motivation to

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engage in the process. In the experience of one change intervention which brought representatives of slum communities to deal with bankers to negotiate new housing arrangements, the challenge for intervention was clear:

*"[They] did not like to learn from each other...they had no experience working with each and they did not want to have that experience."*

Unfortunately, it is these initial difficult stages of negotiation, designed to engage and seek commitment of diverse groups in the process of learning, which underlie the profound changes implied by policy integration. They take time, sometimes years, and are just the earliest stage in the longer-term task of what the INTESEP workshop saw as the most important policy integration exercise: learning to change the process of governance itself.

Political leaders, who have a direct interest in the maintenance, exploitation or change of governance processes, are necessary participants in the policy change process. They are also, themselves, an interest group (or groups) with their own stages of readiness for learning the skills required for making changes in both policy and the in the processes of formulating policy. Several of the workshop practitioners, with experience working in different countries, cultures and policy domains, saw political élites as the most difficult interest group representatives to engage in the learning processes. "Consultation between politicians is completely different from consultation between other kinds of people", said one practitioner. These differences may reflect political leaders' perception of the risks which consultation poses to their positions of power or may reflect their commitments to other factors or other participants in the policy domain. That said, learning among politicians must (and does) necessarily take place in these situations, as different levels of government must agree to participate in multistakeholder policy negotiations if policies are to change in durable ways.

### ***Learning to Learn***

Learning is usefully understood in terms of a complex of types and levels. One theoretical distinction which has relevance for negotiation interventions is that between "loops" of learning. In simple or "single loop" learning, people learn from experience to adjust; for example, rewording

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a policy which has proven ineffective. In more complex or "double loop" learning, negative feedback from experience leads a person not just to adapt or change policies or behaviours, but to examine the basic assumptions behind them; to reconsider the underlying rationale for the policy. Finally, in "deutero learning", a person *learns how to learn*; to begin to understand the process of learning itself.<sup>3</sup>

This means, in effect, that:

*The most complex learning involves learning how to examine assumptions, how to formulate hypotheses, and how to collect information to test hypotheses, values, attitudes and behaviours.*

It is these skills, learning theory suggests, which are the key to governance activities; to broadening the base of people who are competent to intervene in the questions of governance which affect their lives. It is these skills which may help people understand different perspectives and policy options, to see the world in more comprehensive, less linear or win-lose ways.

From the perspective of learning, a similar distinction can be made between different levels in the inputs to learning, between *data*, *information*, and *knowledge*. *Data* have been referred to as "unrefined, undifferentiated facts" without any particular context. *Information* can be viewed as organized or refined data; given a context, but not yet internalized by the learner. *Knowledge* is information which has been internalized, integrated into the conceptual frameworks of the learners.<sup>4</sup>

One implication of this is that INTESEP research (research on the process of integrating economic, social and environmental policies) which is designed to support the process of change can, at best, generate data aggregated as information. *Knowledge* about the meaning of integration in terms of policy or programme practice depends on the manipulation of that information by its users, the policy and negotiation practitioners who must internalize and integrate this information with their own differing conceptual frameworks. This process of manipulation, internalization and

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<sup>3</sup>Argyris and Schon, 1978.

<sup>4</sup>Rosell, 1991, p. 21.

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integration is, fundamentally, the learning process which underlies the changes in knowledge, attitudes and practice implied by integration initiatives.

### *Cognitive Structures*

It is a basic tenet of learning theory that people, and through them their institutions, change by building on their experience, skills and values -- in effect, moving from data through to knowledge through increasingly complex negotiations with the environment. The learning which underlies change is, thus, a *naturally occurring process*, happening with or without intervention by outside change agents, and it is motivated by the need everyone has to make sense of what is occurring in life.

As people go through this process of making sense out of experience, *cognitive structures* are developed. These, essentially, are the paradigms which make dealing with information more efficient, by providing the "hooks" to interpret and manage it. These are the structures through which experience is put into a particular perspective, and may include, among other things, religious beliefs, philosophy, values and attitudes. When information generated from experience matches existing cognitive structures, previously learned attitudes or behaviours are reinforced.

Learning is affected not just by experience, therefore, but by expectations generated by our culture and our cognitive structures. Also referred to as "myths", "cosmologies", or "learning metaphors", cognitive structures affect not just what is learned, but who participates in learning, how learning occurs and whose learning "counts".<sup>5</sup> The cultures which generate cognitive structures may be broad, cross-national cultures such as those embodied in philosophical or religious concepts, or they may be subcultures at provincial, state, ethnic group, local community or organizational level. These subcultures generate micro cognitive structures which govern expectations about how people behave, and what is right.

Because cognitive structures are so useful and are reinforced through use, they are also extremely difficult to change. It is only when experience and information does not

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<sup>5</sup> See Thomas, 1989; Michael, 1992 for further discussion.

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match expectation generated by cognitive structures that uncertainty is created, and with uncertainty the opportunity for new learning. But breaking down what are essentially the explanatory schemata for our lives is not a simple matter; it is these cognitive structures which are key elements in the type of "paradigm shifts" often involved in moving toward negotiated approaches to making or implementing policy.<sup>6</sup>

Even in the face of contradictory situations, it is not certain that learning will take place. Or, it may take place, but be ultimately dysfunctional where the environment is inappropriate for the learning objectives, or where the intervention is insensitive to the culture and readiness of the person or groups involved. "Knowledge of the learning myths or metaphors imbedded in every culture is essential for the non-exploitive development of that culture."<sup>7</sup> The same holds true within cultures, of course. The varied experiences of the INTESEP workshop strongly endorsed the implication that an awareness of the existence of cognitive structures and the need for approaches to learning which would help extend or change these structures, has direct relevance to the success of any process attempting to negotiate across policy perspectives.

There was, for example, agreement that levels of literacy, the language of communication and the values reflected by these govern both the pace of learning and approaches to negotiation and communication strategies. Multistakeholder negotiation processes tend to be organized by people literate in cosmopolitan languages, and the more powerful participants in these negotiations (government officials, representatives of private corporations, donor agencies) share this literacy. Subcultures within a social or political system will influence how deep and how wide is the adoption of the innovations implied by multiparty negotiation of integrated policy. Representatives of different departments, agencies or groups will interpret the advantages or disadvantages of learning the skills of multiparty negotiation at different speeds, and some may fail to learn them at all. Community representatives affected by development plans may be unable to communicate effectively in the language used by government, or be less proficient in the use of this language. Interventions which ignore or diminish such

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<sup>6</sup> See Bernard, 1990 for more detailed discussion.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas, 1989, p. 5.

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differences sow the seeds of their own failure by failing to address issues in the language and concepts of those expected to accommodate and negotiate them.

### ***Incidental Learning***

Related to the natural link of learning with experience is the concept of unplanned or *incidental learning*, generally understood as that learning which occurs every day as people interact with and negotiate their environment. Incidental learning occurs also in the context of planned intervention. Facilitators of complex policy negotiations need to recognize that while they may hope their advocacy, directives or guidance will result in new knowledge, attitudes or practice more or less in line with the objectives of the intervention, it is certain that other, unplanned, lessons will also be learned by the participants.

Unplanned or incidental learning may complement or contradict the planned learning objectives. Examples drawn from practice suggest, for example, that people may learn to be wary or defensive in the face of information or directives they do not understand, or which appear to contradict their basic values or core beliefs. People may learn to avoid changes which imply risks which are beyond the capacity of the individual or community to manage. They may simply misinterpret the implications of an innovation, or fail to see it as different, therefore reconfirming old patterns of behaviour rather than learning new ones.

Studies of the implementation of complex innovations suggest that policy initiatives or other innovations sometimes fail, get renegotiated or redirected, for reasons unassociated with the basic merits of the initial idea. It is essential, therefore, to account for incidental learning during the implementation process, if we are to understand why an innovation succeeds, fails or shifts focus during implementation. This is a matter of incorporating effective monitoring and evaluation in the implementation process. It is also a matter of creating an innovation implementation process which accounts for the perspectives, priorities and needs of those expected to change.

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### *Congruence of Theory and Action*

For integrated policy development, another useful learning concept related to the notion of the natural and experience-based nature of learning and perhaps explaining the logic of incidental learning, is what Argyris and others call "*theories of action*". These are the theories derived from cognitive structures; essentially, the logic individuals use to translate the implications of these paradigms into the working rules which govern their own behaviour and through which they interpret the behaviour of others.

These are the "theories" which tell us what is acceptable in behaviours and attitudes, and what is not. What is relevant to those involved in generating and sustaining more integrated policies and consensus about policy, is that these theories appear in two forms which do not always match: "espoused theory", the expressed rules governing individual or group behaviour and expectations; and "theory-in-practice", rules we actually apply. The espoused theory of sectoral professionals, for example, may hold that people should and will learn from criticism or from new information. Their theory-in-use, however, may be that criticism and negative feedback are threats to be countered by defensive argument and a shutdown of learning processes.<sup>8</sup>

Interventions trying to forge consensus on inter-ministerial or multistakeholder policy development, or to sustain implementation of such policy, need to clarify both the "espoused theories" of those involved in intervention, and the "theory-in-use". If the espoused theory is to open the process of policy learning to incorporate dissent and new and unexpected policy developments, but the theory-in-use leads to central control of the policy development process, it is generally the theory-in-use which will govern what people learn, and therefore achieve, during the policy development process. Incongruence between the two is likely to undermine even the minimum level of agreement critical to new behaviour.

Congruence between the means used to achieve a goal and the goal itself, is also a key factor in successful change management. If the stated goal (*the espoused theory*) of a policy intervention process is broad-based participation and empowerment, but the process is carefully controlled by outside intervenors (*the theory-in-use*), the probability is

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<sup>8</sup>Argyris, p. 184.

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that people will learn **not** the goals of the intervention, but the **process** of control, and how to defend against it. They may learn not to trust each other; they may learn to expect answers from experts rather than from themselves; they may learn that they are not, in effect, "empowered"; and they may learn that "participation" is little more than business as usual.

What people will not learn from a controlled process is what participation means in both its rights and its responsibilities, since they did not have the opportunity to properly test and correct their behaviours and attitudes by practicing participation. It is such incidental learning which may ultimately prove dysfunctional for change interventions, undermining rather than sustaining the change process.

For integration to work, the INTESEP workshop agreed, the process of multiparty negotiation must not only appear to be genuinely participative, but must in fact be so. The process must generate trust that it is transparent; must reinforce the idea that all participants are genuinely committed to finding common ground, and that the participatory process is not simply a smokescreen to hide government's intention to proceed with its own agenda.

### ***Conclusions about Learning***

1. *Learning is an activity.* It involves doing something. Learning does not occur without the chance to practise through intellectual and practical engagement with new ideas, testing the new in the context of the known.
2. *Learning takes time,* and the time required varies with different individuals within the specific context of their past learning, the constraints and supports of their present situation and the nature of the specific learning event. In any group, individuals will be at different stages of readiness for learning.
3. *Learning is irreversible.* A person may relearn old behaviours or values, but what was previously learned remains a part of the world as we see it. New learning occurs when negative feedback causes re-evaluation of old constructs and adaptation to incorporate new ideas or information.



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4. *Learning is cumulative.* Everything which is learned, affects everything else previously learned.

5. *No one can be coerced into learning.* Internal motivation is required if learning is to occur.

6. *Learning is continuous.* It is not an outcome; it is a process.<sup>9</sup>

7. *Learning is both a social and political process, as much as a psychological one.* "The minute you invent an organization [or attempt to change one], you have automatically stimulated a whole set of learning responses" as one workshop participant said. To understand how people learn in groups it is necessary to "liberate learning from the grip of psychologists" and to understand it as a socio-cultural undertaking.

There was broad recognition through the cases and experiences presented in the workshop that the acquisition of new perceptions, ideas and skills is basic to all interventions intended to integrate disparate interests into a coherent policy. The INTESEP workshop identified specific skills and behaviours which must be learned by both intervenors and participants in multistakeholder negotiation of integrated policies:

- a) How to identify core interests from peripheral interests;
- b) How to understand the interests of other groups (even if not accepting them);
- c) How to represent the views of one group to others;
- d) How to deal with conflict;
- e) How to find the common ground among people and groups with divergent interests;
- f) How to convey agreements on common ground to wider audiences or to interest group members who have not been part of multistakeholder negotiations.

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<sup>9</sup>See Thomas, 1989; Bernard, 1991.

### III - FACTORS AFFECTING INTERVENTIONS

#### *Policy Communities and the Functions of Conflict*

The concept of policy communities provides useful terminology for linking the concepts of learning to concepts related to integrated policy development and implementation. Policy communities have been described as networks of groups engaged in discussion or debate on a given policy issue, or on a constellation of related issues. The members of any policy community may engage each other in discussion, but the community itself can be comprised of policy coalitions with sharply contrasting viewpoints.<sup>10</sup> Advocacy or policy coalitions are comprised of individuals organized around common policy positions which may be based upon certain shared core beliefs, determined by the cognitive structures which are both derived from previous learning and which govern what learning occurs and how it occurs.

Even when coalitions clash, it is useful to determine if they share any common values -- even if these are peripheral rather than core values.

What needs to be recognized is that policy communities, sometimes referred to as "policy domains" are unpredictable, constituting

...an amorphous region inhabited by people united by common interest in an issue without boundaries. The issues are often sticky, complicated, tangled and conflicted affairs. They reflect the coalescing of many ongoing social, technical and political dilemmas that cut across organizations, nations and communities.<sup>11</sup>

Lindquist suggests that advocacy coalitions engaging in discussion within a policy community must be committed to the quest for solutions to specific problems, but that the coalitions within the policy community should not be expected to embrace each others' belief systems. The learning required of the participating policy coalitions in a policy community

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<sup>10</sup> See Lindquist.

<sup>11</sup> Weisbord et. al, 1992, p. 157.

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during the search for consensus must, therefore, begin with the search for a neutral language or terminology to bridge differences in beliefs and facilitate dialogue. The participants in this process must seek "credible data" to help focus discussions on the achievement of concrete results.

While policy communities, as Lindquist says, are not always ideal fora for learning because value conflicts are inevitable and distrust common, learning theory suggests that the most profound learning and therefore the greatest likelihood of a change in behaviour arises from exactly such processes of interaction between groups with different values -- **where these are in some way supported or facilitated.**

Most significant learning occurs where the existing attitudes, values and beliefs of individuals, the cognitive structures which govern their lives, are challenged by new information or experience. This creates the opportunity for the re-examination of those structures, assumptions and beliefs. Learning theory would imply, and evidence suggests, that coalitions with common policy perspectives are most likely to engage in the serious double-loop or deuterio learning when their basic assumptions are challenged or when they are threatened with failure to achieve their own most basic objectives. Conflict, "the challenge of running our beliefs up against the 'brick wall' of different opinion", may in fact be a positive force for learning which is inherent in conditions of negotiating or integrating ideas.

Advocacy coalitions may only be motivated to learn new attitudes, to question assumptions, when they are challenged in situations of conflict with other groups which do not share their goals, their assumptions or their attitudes. The process of learning in this context may not be easy, but the outcomes can be profound if the process is allowed to run its course. Discussions among integrated policy practitioners at the workshop confirmed that conflict, or its potential, exists in all attempts to build negotiated and integrated policies, whether between individuals or within and between the organizations of policy coalitions. These practitioners agreed that the most important initial stage of change, that which provides government with a motivation to undertake integrated policy development, in most cases emerges from growing social conflict.

Where the utility of conflict becomes less clear, however, is in its meaning and value in the actual construction of integrated policy. For some practitioners,

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conflict during negotiations can be turned to a learning advantage: "mobilizing people to try to understand the perspective of other interest groups", as long as it is not allowed to proceed to extremes, to become "pathological" and therefore counter-productive. Several examples of the potentially productive utility of conflict were summarized by one participant:

*"Conflict is not an uncomfortable coincidence of these changes,...it is central....You should be thinking of conflict, planning for it, because it is fundamentally important to these changes, and if it is not there we would not be dealing with integrated policy and fundamental change. Trying to think of conflict proactively or in a positive sense as something we are trying to find, accommodate, deal with and manage constructively... is really crucial to the idea of integrated policy."*

For other practitioners, however, it is not conflict *per se* which leads to constructive change, but exposure to the heterogeneity, to the contending ideas, which can grow out of (or generate) conflicting positions. Conflict, these practitioners maintained, is just one manifestation of heterogeneity and needs to be situated in context as one response to differences, along with coalition building. The point of concern is not how conflict can be used productively (although that can be done), but how intervenors can deal with the spectrum of different ideas and interests which will inevitably arise during the policy integration process.

In this context, the concept of negotiations as "conversations" between policy communities or interest groups was seen by the group as key to understanding the process of interest negotiation. It is the way in which these conversations between groups with different experiences and different levels of power are conducted which determines whether conflict will be functional or dysfunctional to the process of building eventual understanding. Change, in this context, is the result of exposure, over time, to a pluralistic decision-making environment, with conflict as one dimension, or one response to that conversation.

The workshop agreed that, whatever the origin or utility of conflict as part of the multiparty negotiation process, it is the most visible manifestation of the process, and the one

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which is inevitably identified and communicated both to participants and to the wider public, often to ill effect:

*"The media love noise. Yet, if you are trying to get a consensus...that is highly public, you can only build consensus from the middle. You can't get it from the extremes. And as you build it from the centre, the extremes get more isolated, and therefore get noisier. And so you get what I call 'paradox noise'...the appearance of a rising conflict even while and because of a growing consensus from the middle of society."*

This situation reinforces the requirement for interventions to maintain active internal and external communication policies which emphasise to all constituencies the agreements which have been achieved as well as the points of conflict. One Canadian integrated policy development process, in fact, purposively involved senior news media figures in the process, so that they would understand the subtleties of the process and report the nuances of negotiations rather than just the visible conflicts.

### **"Margins" for Learning**

Individuals and constituent groups in a policy community have options when confronted with a changing environment. They can experiment with learning which challenges closely-held beliefs central to their world view, or they can retreat, perceiving the occasion not as an opportunity but as a threat.

Studies on the adoption and diffusion of innovations indicate that those who engage with change, challenge assumptions, and manage innovation, are those who **can afford the risks of experimentation**; those individuals who have some financial, psychological or social cushion which will support them as the experiment with innovation proceeds and if it ultimately fails. Learning requires room to fail -- without actually endangering the lives, welfare or intellectual, conceptual and emotional stability of the learners. This cushion is termed the **"margin for learning"**.

Margin can be provided internally within an individual or group, in the form of psychological energy, wealth, or good health. It can also be enhanced, although probably not created, by the use of outside resources, through provision of a facilitator or teacher, access to information, child-care to

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release time for mothers, training for line officers or community leaders.

A major problem for many intervention activities aimed at producing radical change is that the individual, community or institution which the intervention wants to change often has little or no margin for experimentation; may already be living at the limits of physical, financial or intellectual resources. In extreme cases, such target groups will be living on the tenuous boundaries of survival. In these situations, the reaction of the community to innovation is more likely to be reservation or rejection than experimentation. Facilitated intervention can serve to provide the necessary margin, the "space" needed by the group to risk engaging in and testing management of the change process.

*It is a mistake to assume that only the poor or disenfranchised require margin for learning.* Those with power including government officials, have a real need for margin. They want to perceive room to manoeuvre, to mitigate risk when experimenting with policy innovations; to ensure that changes will not diminish their ability to manage position and priorities. Margin is the necessary condition for questioning, testing and revising ideas and skills. Without it, the motivation, intellectual resources and tolerance for ambiguity needed for changing policy directions and for the processes of innovative policy formulation, will not be available, leaving less chance that significant learning, and therefore sustained change in behaviour, will occur.

The margin for learning, for experimenting with risk, can be enhanced:

- a) by providing the information necessary to enable people to assess risk, and the alternatives which may cushion them from failure;
- b) by providing external financial assistance;
- c) by taking the innovation process, the experiments with learning, in *incremental* steps which reduce both the risk and the conflict inherent in challenging existing beliefs and practises - by taking these challenges and conflicts in practisable, negotiated, and manageable segments; and
- d) by helping people develop expanded learning capacities for the identification of problems, data collection, and

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analysis, and determining what action to take on the analysis.

The concept of "margin" was strongly confirmed by the experiences of the practitioners at the INTESEP workshop, as of central importance to multi-sector negotiation. The resources of money, expertise and research provided in one form or another to their member groups in all of the programmes they described, were cited as critical examples of how margin can be provided -- and of the need to do so. Providing the space for experiment and risk-taking constitutes a levelling of the playing field in multistakeholder negotiations; they will not succeed where only the most powerful groups have access to such resources. Interventions, by bringing these resources to the less powerful groups, permit them the time, tolerance and flexibility to experiment with new processes. There is risk for intervenors in such enabling activities, of being charged with bias for choosing which, among contending groups, require support; for not adequately judging who in the system needs what; for having insufficient or inappropriate resources to allow closure. Without the focus on enabling margin, however, negotiating and integrating processes will fail.

The critical point is that risk is central to learning, and to the process of negotiating new understandings between groups with different interests. Unfortunately, risk is also a very **public** event in most cases of multistakeholder negotiation:

*"None of these are conducted in the intimacy of the classroom or the board room, or the small back room, or a variety of areas in which...there is no public attention, in which...mistakes can be made more gracefully...because there is no one there except those in the room to record them."*

For policy coalitions participating in the processes of innovation involved in achieving and sustaining consensus on integrated policy, the margin for experimentation will be greatest at the periphery of their belief systems, where core values are not threatened, and basic cognitive structures are not under immediate attack.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Lindquist, p. 149

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On the other hand, it may be that people will only recognize that they have a margin for experimentation or feel ready to use or develop what margin they have always had, when their basic interests are threatened. When the fundamentals of assumptions and behaviour are challenged, it is easier to see that the margin for experimentation exists on the periphery of those assumptions.

How, for example, can those with power be motivated to experiment with policy development models which may empower others? The concept of margin may help explain the motivation of political leaders who agree to experiment with radical policy innovations, when they perceive that the problems they face will endanger their power base if not effectively addressed. Threats to basic interests can provide the catalyst for recognizing and creating room for experimentation. Those with power, by definition, probably always have the margin needed to experiment with new processes. Until confronted with major environmental, social or economic crises, however, they may not recognize that experimenting with policy processes poses less of a risk than ignoring the problem.

The workshop strongly endorsed the idea of government requiring substantial margin to accept the risk of open, multiparty negotiation of public policy. In the experience of most, the margin for experimentation for government and others is often provided by the fact of confrontation between interest groups, or between groups and the government. Confrontation can lead to the conclusion that there is less risk involved in innovation than in maintaining the status quo. As one participant said, "They have to realize that they risk being left behind if they do not participate". Said another, "When the state is not able to react properly, it is more willing to accept alternatives." Substantive dysfunctions, including the loss of environmental, economic and social options, provide government with the incentive to experiment.

**The issue for facilitators of change, however, is to recognize that margin is the space where people learn; it is not learning itself.**

Information, effectively and nonthreateningly presented, is one tool for the creation, extension and use of margin; skills development is another. It is necessary but not sufficient for those facilitating these complex negotiation processes to provide information, and to help those involved



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in policy negotiation develop the skills for interpreting and applying information to the policy development process. Participants need the opportunity and support to practise and learn new policy formulation behaviours.

Crises may therefore provide margin for experimentation to those with power, people who might not otherwise have been able to justify innovation and its attendant risk to their constituencies. As one government change agent said, " We react to an absolute need, or a compelling example....We react in desperation." Well-designed interventions can provide interest groups, including government, with the room to make mistakes without losing immense face, and, at least in the short-term, without losing power.

Government is in many cases both the provider, as well as the beneficiary, of margin. For example, it can offer guarantees of minimum payback and protection to all participants. And yet, while government can provide money and research support to decision making, without pressure from interest groups, it may provide neither.

*"Government simply will not produce information until it has to and it will not work together corporately unless it is forced to, almost publicly embarrassed."*

Such pressure, once again, can help government mobilize new margin for engaging in change, or to identify that margin for experimentation which already exists.

### ***Incremental Learning During Negotiation***

Innovations which are divisible are more easily accepted than those which are immutable, win-lose or "sturdy". They allow incremental approaches, negotiation and accommodation between new ideas and old -- the gradual adaptation of cognitive structures and operational paradigms in a process referred to as "incremental cognitive accommodation".<sup>13</sup>

As facilitators of negotiated policies, participants at the INTESEP workshop agreed that breaking learning into incremental steps helped build consensus, strengthen communication with constituent reference groups and increase

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<sup>13</sup>Bernard, 1990, p. 35.

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both understanding and trust in multiparty negotiations. Like learners in any situation, people participating in multistakeholder negotiations require positive reinforcement; the "small triumphs" of concrete and substantive achievements necessary to confirm their sense of ownership over the process and give them something to take back to their constituencies.

Incremental, iterative processes of "social conversation" during the negotiating process allow participants to test the ideas generated in the negotiating group in the context of their regular lives, and so maintain a transparent and congruent process of consultation and participation with their constituencies and colleagues. Breaking negotiations into workable increments gives people time to learn about their own and their opponents' core values and interests, and to learn where accommodations are possible.

The implication of course, is that government must participate in the process of incremental change, as the most influential of all groups. The corollary is that if government is not involved until the end of the process, its representatives will see no incremental change, and will not have internalized the logic of arguments developed through an iterative process. If government is presented with a *fait accompli* at the end of the negotiating process, it has no margin for incremental experimentation, and the likelihood of its adopting or effectively implementing a negotiated integrated policy will be substantially reduced.

### ***The Unpredictability of Negotiation Processes***

The paradox is that there is rarely time for those organizing multistakeholder negotiations to proceed in a careful, step-by-step fashion. Confrontation, negotiation, and action often take place simultaneously under the pressure of events. The experience of field-level practitioners confirms this:

*"I think it is fundamentally important as a learning exercise, to understand that it has to be that way, because people's experience is not fragmented into a series of steps."*

*"We know now that [the process] has to be concurrent. It's going to be messy, but it has to be concurrent."*

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What we are left with, therefore, is the need for intervenors to jump into the process, and to accept the fact that discussions will be iterative. Learning will proceed incrementally, but the increments will not necessarily unfold in a structured or logical sequence. The social conversation of negotiation and learning will proceed, however.

Chaos theory tends to reinforce the viewpoint that learning should be viewed as a continuing process, not as an output of some other activity. It suggests that while there may be an underlying order to apparently chaotic systems, such systems will remain intrinsically unpredictable because we lack the tools to measure the variables involved.

Human society is clearly a system which fits the unpredictable nature ascribed to chaotic systems. The processes implied in negotiating integrative policies reflect this unpredictability. Learning in any such context is going to be similarly "...unpredictable, both in occurrence and result;....(it) seems to be not a curve, but a series of iterations, in which if the outcome is recognizable, it is not predictable."<sup>14</sup>

The field practitioners agreed that "common ground" rather than a complete consensus is likely to be the most achievable outcome of a negotiation process in the midst of this uncertainty. While some general approximation of agreement to core recommendations coming out of the negotiation process is important, several workshop participants noted that intervenors have to be prepared to proceed even where unanimity is not possible. In situations where a commission must report, for example, the managers of the process must make it clear that a report will go forward based on "general approximations" of agreement, thus providing a motivation for all parties to continue to talk to each other. In cases described by workshop participants of multiparty negotiation where complete consensus on all issues was sought, the failure to achieve that complete agreement, led to abandonment of recommendations in even those subordinate areas where consensus had been reached.

The point is clear: win-lose situations and premature closure of discussions are inimical to negotiated policy; visible room for manoeuvre is a necessary condition for success of negotiation processes.

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<sup>14</sup>Thomas, 1994, p. 3.

### *Participation and Learning*

Flexibility in analysis and behaviour is therefore critical in the context of uncertainty and unpredictability, as counterbalance against the real risk and realistic fear of losing contact with conceptual structures and predictive analyses which have enabled effective action in the past. Certainly, all of the professionals participating in the INTESEP workshop agreed that flexibility of response to the unpredictable nature of the negotiating process was important to successful conclusion of policy negotiations.

If the learning process during discussions is necessarily incremental, a central question becomes one of **systematizing** the process in order to increase, if not its predictability, at least the capacity of intervenors and participants to manage it. In this context, the workshop stressed, it is important to keep in mind what the members of diverse advocacy coalitions in debate within a policy community are being asked to do. They are being asked to participate in multiparty negotiations within what are typically uncertain change environments; to develop new or revised capacities of analysis, synthesis and evaluative judgement; to consider the point of view of people with different core values; to seek, exchange and interpret new and often unsettling information in order to better define and solve problems; and to make decisions in different ways in riskier environments with untested parameters.

People participate to the extent that they choose, cognitively, affectively and physically, to engage in establishing, implementing and evaluating both the overall direction of a programme and its operational details. Choice, in this context, implies not merely an agreement to follow but an active decision to assume responsibility in considering the rationale, implications and potential outcomes of the programme....<sup>15</sup>

These are not easy learning tasks; they can only be learned through practice. Such practice can sometimes forge new social arrangements, and lead to the development of new subcultures composed of those who engage in the debate and in consequence build new rules for discussion and interaction --

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<sup>15</sup> Bernard, 1991, p. 37.

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sometimes without counting on or looking for directions from traditional hierarchies. The creation of these new negotiation subcultures can pose a risk for the managers trying to control the process, but may equally serve as an indicator of successful "take" of the change process.

"Empowerment" similarly assumes complex processes of agreeing to take on and delegate responsibility; to define, investigate and resolve problems; and to ***terminate participation when it is judged dysfunctional***. Again, these imply learned attitudes and skills, and opportunities for practice if they are to be integrated into changed behaviour. Individuals learn most profoundly what they experience, and they will learn the skills of empowerment as they experience them, not as they hear about them. If learning sometimes proceeds most effectively by increments, the experience of empowerment may have to proceed incrementally, building step by step upon the accumulated experience and levels of competence of the negotiating community. The increments in which learning occurs will have to accommodate the different states of readiness for learning, different capacities for learning and the different rates at which individuals learn.

Interventions by change agents trying to forge policy consensus among disparate groups are, therefore, learning events. One implication of this is that the intervenors themselves, the advocates of integrated policy who convene these events, become in effect "facilitators of learning". They can only be effective in this to the extent that they understand what they are asking others to do and recognize the necessity of an explicitly facilitative function.

**They must, therefore, go through the process of learning with the communities with which they are working, and they must expect to be challenged as part of the learning process.**

The role of professionals (e.g. the experts providing specialized economic, environmental or social information during the integration process) is ambiguous. While information is necessary to the creation of margin for learning and to empowering of local communities, how it is acquired, defined, valued, its credibility and the uses to which it is put, will ultimately determine its utility in the change process. Managing these issues is key; to intervene effectively, to attain the credibility necessary to coordinate and facilitate, managers must be prepared themselves to engage in the learning process, to suffer the uncertainty and risk of

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shared control, and to adjust their "visions" in conjunction with increasingly capable target communities.

Ironically, managers and professionals are cited by some as among the most difficult of groups to engage in profound change processes, inhibited perhaps because the very rules of their disciplines and power of their positions constitute the core values by which they define themselves. These, too, must be re-examined during the policy integration process.

### ***Implementation of Innovations***

Attempts to negotiate integrated policies are an innovation to the political system.

It is clear from research on the diffusion, adoption and subsequent implementation of innovations that the adoption of any innovation, whether an idea, a consensus on policy or a new technology, is not the end product of a learning process, but one stage in what is a continuing cycle of adaptation, implementation, reexamination and reinvention. The factors which influence adoption of an innovation, and those which lead to sustained use of that innovation during implementation -- through adaptation -- are related, but not necessarily identical. They include:

- a) flexibility in the organizational structure;
- b) a decentralized decision-making process;
- c) autonomy of local decision-makers;
- d) high levels of personal communication in the group;
- e) shared, rather than hierarchical, decision-making;
- f) incentives for risk-taking;
- g) organizational slack, or access to extra resources (i.e. the margin required for experimentation);
- h) absence of vested interests in established practice.

Learning takes place during the decision to adopt any new practice, such as a consensus on the formulation of integrated policy. But further learning must occur during the process of implementation, by testing the innovation against the realities of day-to-day use. While ambiguity may actually facilitate adoption, by permitting competing advocacy groups to gloss over differences of opinion about the details of an innovation or policy, it may make adaptation and thus implementation problematic, as the details of difference will invariably emerge in practice. Old or hidden conflicts will emerge as ambiguity dissipates.

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The "adoption motivation"<sup>16</sup> behind a decision to try out a new idea, innovation or policy, is crucial to what happens to that innovation during implementation. An "opportunistic" adoption motivation (i.e. the decision to try an idea because doing so brings in money or other resources) reflects a basic lack of interest and commitment by those adopting; an indifference to activities and outcomes of the intervention which will, in the end, produce no real change. What is learned in this case might well be how to use the system to sustain old behaviours (single-loop learning) rather than the intrinsic merits of integrating new attitudes or practice (double-loop or deutero learning).

Policy change, like any innovation adopted with this motivation, is unlikely to be sustained in a manner satisfactory to the initiating vision. The innovation, essentially, is discarded, coopted into existing practice or simply ignored. What is also often learned in these cases is cynicism and a lack of interest in further change processes. This is an example of the incidental, unplanned, and possibly (from the perspective of the intervenors) dysfunctional learning which experience can generate.

Adoption motivation based on a problem-solving orientation, however -- where participants are involved in defining, adapting and assessing the policy innovation and through that coming to believe in its value -- has a much greater chance of producing sustained change.

If we accept that learning is a process, and that policy systems as a part of human society meet many of the characteristics of a "chaotic system" where apparent unpredictability is inherent, then the only road to sustainable implementation of a policy innovation lies in a **continuation of the learning process during implementation**. Implementation becomes not a "fact" achieved, but a process of testing, redesigning and adapting the innovation to changing participants and changing circumstances (or changing perceptions of circumstances).<sup>17</sup>

Successful implementation does not necessarily mean the replication of the original innovation or policy. Case studies of implementation practice have demonstrated that

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<sup>16</sup> Berman and McLaughlin, 1976.

<sup>17</sup> See Fullan, 1993, for a detailed discussion.

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those policies or innovations which go through a process of "mutual adaptation" between the innovation and the users are most likely to survive and have continuing utility.

All of the factors which affect learning during the process of reaching or adopting a policy consensus will also affect the process of implementation. **Implementation is, essentially, a continuation of the policy or innovation process, not the end result of that process.** Adaptive planning, planning which permits and encourages variation, is a necessary condition of its success.<sup>18</sup> In the same way, sustainability is a process and not a product. The contributors to the sustainability of policies -- social, economic, political, psychological or physical -- will change over time. Ultimately, maintaining the balance necessary for sustaining the effectiveness and relevance of policy change is a process assuming continuing participation and active learning.

### ***Implications for Programme Evaluation***

The fact that implementation is a process -- not a product, but a function of continuing renegotiation -- has direct and practical implications for how integration processes are evaluated. The INTESEP workshop revealed an almost unanimous frustration among those coordinating integrated policy negotiations, over the difficulties of assessing whether such processes are actually happening and what difference they are making.

The most important intermediate and even many of the final outputs of integrated planning processes are intangible: increased trust in government or in planning processes, better prospects for sustained integration of policy during implementation, cultural change in the bureaucracy, and the radiating impacts of all of these factors on interest groups and sectors throughout society. Evaluation processes and standards usually applied to other interventions or policy operations are probably inappropriate, and could be dysfunctional, for integrated activities.

Cost-benefit analyses of such programmes may be of particularly dubious benefit, as one of the practitioners of integrated policy negotiation said:

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<sup>18</sup> See Berman and McLaughlin; Havelock and Huberman.



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*"What are the costs of not engaging in these activities?...How do you evaluate it? How do you compare the cost of running these [new] procedures and developing policy and writing reports, to the cost of instability in the system, lack of investment....The cost of sending people to jail for disobedience, the whole social cost of bad feeling, the polarization in society?"*

The negotiation of integrated policies is a political process, and political processes take time. A realization of this is particularly important where international aid agencies are providing assistance, as two of the workshop participants noted:

*"This runs completely counter to the whole question of evaluation of the effectiveness of aid money.... As a learning exercise, one of your products, your most important products, is mistakes...and those are not looked on fondly....so there's a great temptation [for funders] to pull the plug on investment just at the point when you are analyzing the mistakes and what you've learned."*

*"In a learning organization you are going to make mistakes...and mistakes are lessons, they are not failures. But if the problem you are trying to solve...is one with high visibility, if it has a certain amount of drama and conflict to it, everybody is watching you. Transparency is wonderful, but everybody is watching you, and boy are they watching you carefully. Everybody's got an opinion on it at this stage."*

Types of evaluation questions identified by the workshop as practical and valid:

1. Did you identify the problem?
2. Did you address the problem?
3. Did you develop workable solutions?
4. Did people use the solutions?
5. Did participants see the process as fair and solutions as useful?

In general, however, all participants agreed that much more work needs to be done on the development of evaluation paradigms appropriate to negotiation processes. They stressed

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in particular the need to be concerned about *internal formative evaluation* of organizational and inter-group performance, particularly in terms of the more amorphous issues. Transparency, for example, was identified as a factor essential to the credibility of these processes, but one complicated to assess as both cause and consequence:

**If evaluation, "is the process of making the implicit, explicit", then the design of the evaluation is of the highest importance to the creation of a transparent process.**

The workshop stressed, too, that evaluation must include all those implicated in the change process in evaluation design and execution. Several people noted that while change agents often bring with them evaluation tools, they typically ignore the existence and efficacy of indigenous methods of evaluation, particularly in societies with low levels of literacy. This further reduces the relevance of both the programme and the evaluation to local problems. For deuterio learning (learning how we learn), evaluation of process and product at all levels must be the concern of all participants:

*"Any organization that is withholding information from its donors, participants, grantees or boards, is not a learning organization. It is using knowledge as power and is on a different mission than learning."*

### *Sustaining Interventions*

Interventions which support only the early stages of the learning processes involved in the development and implementation of complex policies, are likely to fail. Facilitating change in the initial stages of problem identification or programme design is a necessary but insufficient condition for intervenors who want to ensure the level of "ownership" of the policy innovation which finally defines sustainability. Implementation will be successfully realized only to the extent that implicated policy actors continue to participate in decisions on adaptation, develop confidence in the innovation where it is testable against the reality of the situation, and iteratively adapt it to meet the changes it generates in that context.

Sustainable integration of policy, in this sense, refers not to the articulated policy *per se*, but to the capacity of

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the policy "system" or community, to assess and *change* policy in increasingly satisfying ways.

What learning theory, research on adaptation and implementation of innovations, and practical field experience developing sustainable integrated policies all agree on, is that the process of challenging existing values, attitudes or practices is neither easy nor quick. While it is clearly possible to influence the direction which learning takes during these processes, it is not possible to control it. Attempts to rush the process will typically fail outright or produce only superficially desirable results. Rushing the process may prove dysfunctional in the long run, because what may ultimately be learned is not a readiness to engage in change, but a determination to avoid it.

The workshop strongly endorsed the requirement for a long-term commitment to open and transparent consultative processes for the success of policy development and its sustained implementation. It may be that the sustainability of relationships and consultative processes are the most important outputs of the process, because it is these which will facilitate both the revision and the renewal of policies which is at the heart of sustainability in changing environments.

### **IV - CONCLUSIONS**

It is clear that developing integrated policy is a complex process. Integration is required between governments of different levels, between departments of the same government, between interest groups in society, and between government and the civil society.

#### ***a) Government as Participant***

The workshop agreed that government itself must be brought to the negotiating table as one actor among many, not as the ultimate arbiter of social demands, but as a participant putting its power and its expertise to the test of public discussion. Strategies which ignore the power of government will pay dearly; even the most independent of organizations requires a process of communication with existing systems of power. Even though "it may not feel very comfortable with you; [government cannot be] totally against

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you", according to one participant, if change is to be meaningful and durable.

One implication of this is that governments, or other agencies with the power to make decisions about implementation of policy, must participate. They cannot simply delegate participation to surrogates (eg commissions), though this may prove an effective intermediary measure. Sooner rather than later, they must buy into the process of negotiation; help form the policies; and come to appreciate the context and the logic of the arguments being made.

The learning involved in negotiation processes cannot concern simply the most effective policy conclusion, but must also encompass an understanding of where the decision comes from, the interests at stake, the positions compromised, and the implications, in terms of conflict, if the common ground discovered during negotiations were to be later abandoned. Government agencies, because they do not themselves effectively integrate policy development, will have the same problems as other interest groups at the negotiating table and it is important to other participants, and to the process, that they bring their expertise and their interests clearly into the open:

*"They bring to the table reasonable expectations about fiscal and policy expectations as they build a consensus with the other participants. Therefore, the expectation is that if they reach consensus on any point, it will be implemented, because they have been there as a party supporting it. They have also been represented corporately in that government, whether federal, provincial or local, has been forced to sit at one seat at the table and therefore it has forced them to coordinate their internal conflicts in a more effective way."*

One case described at the workshop, of a multistakeholder policy formulation process where the government did not participate (but instead waited simply to receive the recommendations), faced substantial delays, significant stakeholder disillusion and limited impact when, in its handling of the recommendations, it essentially fell back on its own system of closed and linear review:

*"How to build congruence is still a puzzle to me because it is very clear that the government*

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*organizations and institutions, or bureaucracies that are established, for the most part don't fit the principles of integrated policy [development]. How to...in the longer term, transform that government system in a way to house the new view of what policy or society is, is a huge challenge."*

### ***b) Broadening the Base of Participation***

The scope and time dimensions of the changes implied by integrated policy making processes will affect how interventions are organized well beyond government, of course. As one practitioner observed:

*"If one sees policy as learning, and one sees culture as the context for learning...and action as an outcome, then suddenly, at least from my perspective, the issue becomes much broader than government. By focusing on adults' learning, I think there is a somewhat implicit statement that our focus is still on government. In other words, we can make short-term connections. On a broader plane, if one says what we are after is cultural change, we want to set up new values and attitudes that will, in time, even reform government, then why are we exclusive...?"*

To sustain long-term change, this practitioner said, it is necessary to broaden the processes of discussion, negotiation, participation and education beyond the government and the powerful, and beyond the immediate situation, to include marginal groups and youth, those who must live with the long-term implications of change.<sup>19</sup>

### ***c) Reporting Back***

From a different perspective, broadening the base of participation also concerns the relationship between those negotiating change and the groups they represent. While

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<sup>19</sup> How to encourage different ways of thinking about relationships among "communities of interest" at the school and community level was not on the agenda of the workshop. The participants agreed, however, that long-term social change must focus on this issue.

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representatives of policy coalitions with conflicting interests go through a learning process at the negotiation table, building trust in each other and the process, their constituencies do not. There are often incongruencies therefore, between the mandate given to interest group representatives going into negotiations and the arrangements which emerge.

If the process of policy development is to move smoothly into the processes of adoption and implementation, congruence requires that representatives at the bargaining table return to their constituencies and implicate them actively not just in the results of negotiations, but in the process. Interest group representatives must communicate clearly to their constituencies, in a participatory setting, how and why negotiations are proceeding as they are. The trust built by the open processes of multiparty negotiation must be matched equally by a trust between the groups "back home" and their negotiating representatives. This requires transparency of the negotiation process, an absence of secret deals, and interactive channels of communication to the general public and to specific constituencies. It requires that field-level agents who will be responsible for implementation of any agreements know the backstage thinking of how and why decisions are made. What the discussion on stages of learning makes clear, is that this reporting must be in a language, media, and pacing which make the process accessible to all interest groups.

### ***d) Provision of Margin***

The workshop agreed that top-down processes of policy consultation alone will not result in sustainable integrated policy. Government is a necessary, but not sufficient, provider of the margin needed for experimenting with policy systems as it guarantees the acceptability of the process and use of its products. What is needed for policy integration, said the leader of one very large and institutionalized negotiation process, is a marriage of top-down leadership and genuine grass-roots participation, with mechanisms to sustain both.

Activities must be indigenously motivated, and must have access to information and expertise which goes beyond that available to most participants. Governments and international donor agencies can provide critical support for the creation

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of margin, but if this is done, it must be within a framework which facilitates stakeholder ownership and does not usurp it.

### *e) Implications for Governance*

Tolerance of unpredictability can be built into the consensus and implementation processes by accepting the reality that learning is a complex process, that the initiators of policy and the professionals brought in to influence the building of consensus have as much to learn in the process as other members of the policy community and that, as chaos theory suggests, adaptive systems are more likely to survive than rigid ones.<sup>20</sup> Learning theory indicates that we learn from error. A system of governance which embraces the learning opportunities which policy failures produce is the most likely to sustain itself in a chaotic and unpredictable environment.<sup>21</sup> Tightly controlled strategic planning is unlikely to be effective in coping with such systems. Planning should aim not at controlling the details of operation, but at facilitating the adaptation required to deal with chaotic systems.<sup>22</sup>

A learning approach to government and governance thus implies that policy integration will ultimately "work" only where it is recognized as a matter of learning, requiring negotiation of goals, risks and rewards as a permanent feature of the system as a whole. Implementation of integrative policies requires recognizing and involving stakeholders as learners in an unavoidably complex and chaotic environment, responsible, themselves, for *recreating* the governance mechanisms implied by the integrative innovation, and accepting error as a necessary component of the innovation cycle.

The advocacy groups which comprise a policy community are built around shared internal core beliefs and conceptual schemata which may differ in substantial and significant ways from one another.

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<sup>20</sup> Levasseur and Albert, 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Michael, 1992.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed discussion of implementation theory and integrated policy development, see Armstrong, 1995.

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The challenge lies in both reconciling "data bases", so to speak, and managing conflicts among different "rules of the game", as defined by different constructions of social reality. The task for government, then, becomes not the attainment of consensus - though this is worthwhile when possible - but, realistically, the bounding and guiding of multiple consensi.<sup>23</sup>

One way of encouraging, but by no means guaranteeing, continuing attention to the processes of decision-making, policy formulation and reformulation during implementation is to create institutions which will have as their function the continuing fostering of these processes. The career self-interest of the staff attached to such institutions may ensure that issues of policy process, as well as product, remain on the table.

A learning approach to efforts to achieve and sustain policy consensus helps deal with a fundamental paradox of governance: that social systems produce complex and often unpredictable problems, but that human nature seeks predictability. Only through permitting experimentation with different means of coping with an unstable environment will individuals and systems involved in policy change learn the capabilities and acquire the confidence to sustain the change process. The implication of learning theory for governance is clearly not that the world can be made any more straightforward or controllable as a result of policy intervention, but that the individuals (and systems) involved **can** become increasingly more skilful at adapting to the consequences to intervention, more secure in the expectation of being able to continue that learning-adaptation cycle, and thus more prepared to engage in the kinds of policy negotiation implied by integration.

All of this implies the need to focus research and intervention not on the sustainability of any given "integrated" policy, but on the **sustainability of the adaptive and flexible systems** necessary for forging and implementing such policy.

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<sup>23</sup> Michael, p. 128



**Appendix 1:  
Summary of Learning Propositions**

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**Proposition 1:**

Practitioners involved in developing both the initial integrated economic, social and environmental policies, and the structures and processes to sustain effective implementation, are involved in the process of helping adults from diverse communities to learn, by acquiring information, developing skills of analysis, challenging old values and attitudes.

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**Proposition 2:**

Incidental or unplanned learning which occurs during the process of achieving and sustaining the implementation of integrated economic, social and environmental policy, may be crucial to the success, failure or redirection of attempts at integration.

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**Proposition 3:**

People learn different skills at differing speeds, and may differ in their stages of readiness for learning. Intervenors should attempt to assess the different stages of readiness for learning of the different participating groups in the policy process, and to accommodate these differences in the pace and timing of interventions.

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**Proposition 4:**

If intervenors can gain approximate understanding of the cognitive structures governing learning, values, expectations and behaviours of the different groups with which they work, then they will be able to anticipate more effectively, the stages of learning which will be required to achieve consensus among groups with disparate interests, and to maintain this consensus during implementation.

**Proposition 5:**

To effectively achieve and later to sustain consensus on complex integrated policy issues, there must be congruence between the espoused theory of encouraging participation and empowerment of diverse groups, and the theory in use which governs how open the policy consultation and development process really is. Because the most powerful learning is derived from experience, the experience of those participating in the policy process must be congruent with stated goals. People will only be empowered and participate, if they practise problem definition, data collection, analysis, debate, and experimentation with new policies themselves.

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**Proposition 6:**

Heterogeneity will be a positive force for learning during multistakeholder negotiations. Conflict, which may result from heterogeneity, can be used in some cases as a positive force for learning, in the development and sustaining of complex integrated policies, as long as it does not reach the point of violence.

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**Proposition 7:**

If all parties to the process of integrating policy are to be motivated to experiment, intervenors in the policy process need to identify the margins for experimentation and learning which exist for each group, or to find ways to create that margin.

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**Proposition 8:**

It will be easier to move towards and to maintain consensus, during discussions on integrated policy, if the activity is taken in small, incremental steps.

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**Proposition 9**

If intervenors can identify areas on the periphery of belief systems, or those core values of different policy coalitions which overlap, permitting the identification of common margins, experimentation with policy innovations and new implementation strategies will be more readily facilitated in those areas.

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**Proposition 10:**

It is important, in creating a recognition that the margin for experimentation exists, to help all parties differentiate their core (and less flexible) interests and beliefs, from more negotiable, secondary interests.

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**Proposition 11:**

Unpredictability should not be viewed as a negative factor in the process of learning how to forge integrated policy. Facilitators of learning interventions should build room for unexpected learning outcomes into the process.

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**Proposition 12:**

Because innovations or policies must be subject to reexamination during implementation, the measure of success of a policy should not be how closely the implemented policy matches the original formulation, but how closely the reformulated policy meets the needs of those affected by it.

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**Proposition 13:**

Intervenors and change agents must take the time required to continue to provide both the learning opportunities and the supports required for learning to all members of a policy community, beyond the period required for achieving consensus on integrated policy. Community participation, an openness to adaptation of the policy, and supports to learning are essential throughout the implementation process.

**Appendix 2:  
Implications for Action**

1. Differences in literacy levels must be accommodated in the planning, implementation and communication of results of multistakeholder negotiating processes.
2. Any government or private agency which will be required to implement any element of integrated policy must be directly involved in the iterative process of policy negotiation.
3. Reporting to constituencies must be open and frequent, and must reflect the participatory processes being undertaken in multistakeholder negotiations themselves.
4. International or national agencies can productively provide resources to create the "margin" for experimentation in the creation of integrated policies, but if these external resources are to be productively applied, there must be a recognition that the negotiating process will be messy and time consuming. There are no "quick fixes" for external intervention.
5. External resources for the creation of margin, should be flexibly applied, positively reinforcing negotiation by supporting small-scale and achievable pilot stages. Neutral research resources should also be offered on an equal basis to all participants.
6. Intervening and donor agencies must develop evaluation paradigms relevant to the realities of conducting complex multiparty negotiations of integrated policies.
7. Governments and international donor agencies must adopt long-term programme support policies if assistance is to be relevant to integrated policy development activities.

**Appendix 3:  
Questions for Research**

1. How can a broader, longer-term learning perspective, including the education of children, be incorporated into the development and implementation of sustainable integrated policies? What changes would need to be made at the level of education, community development and governance systems to emerging processes of multistakeholder negotiation, and implementation of policies, to incorporate this point of view?
2. What values and attitudes differentiate political leaders or representatives of interest groups who participate actively in cooperative multistakeholder negotiating processes, from those who do not?
3. What cultural change is required, and what intervention strategies will bring political representatives of different parties, of different levels of government, or of different factions within government to the negotiating table, as genuine participants, rather than as observers, "hiding in the weeds", as one person put it, to ambush the process, if they disagree with it?
4. How can intervenors plan for a learning cycle which may take decades? What are the practical implications for governments (which may change at much more frequent intervals) and for funding agencies?
5. How do difference in learning styles or cognitive strategies, in people from different subcultures and with different levels of literacy, affect the intervention strategies necessary for negotiation and implementation of integrated policies?
6. How do successful processes of multiparty negotiation relate learning in the negotiation group to communication with constituent reference groups?
7. To what extent must conflict be proactively sought, identified, and released before implementable and sustainable integrated policy can be formulated?
8. At what point does conflict become dysfunctional to the process of building integrated policies? At what stages of the process is it most likely to be functional or dysfunctional?

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9. How do cultural differences, including those of religion, language and status affect reactions to heterogeneity, the definition of conflict, and its utility?

10. What factors will result in government responding to crisis by turning to multiparty negotiation of integrated policies, rather than pursuing more conventional policy processes?

11. What sequences of learning can be applied to multistakeholder negotiations in a) conditions of immediate crisis and b) situations where there is time to proceed slowly?

12. What criteria and processes of evaluation are relevant to multiparty negotiation processes?

13. How can potential incongruence between the requirements for open and transparent negotiation processes be reconciled with requirements for external evaluation?



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