

**David Apter**, Yale University, Henry J. Heinz Professor Emeritus of Comparative Political and Social Development, and Senior Research Scientist, Yale University

**Moderator:** Caby Verzosa, The World Bank

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**Caby Verzosa:** If I were in the shoes of a developing country reform manager and you tell me that everything is contextual, I will take away that first of all I need to have a really good understanding of the issue, and of the context, and the culture. But then could you walk me through practical steps that I might then take so that I will have some systematic approach through this whole big messy reform program.

**David Apter:** I wish I could really give you a formula to answer that but I can't. I would say two things. One is, the more concrete the problem and the more visible to all concerned, the easier it is to deal with. A second thing I would say is that the danger is that you can be effective where the conditions are the best, but where the conditions deteriorate, you can't be very effective. That seems to me a built-in obstacle that is extremely delicate and very difficult to deal with. I think it does require a sufficient neutral language, a professionalized language, which has meaning and can be translated into local terms. So that is really the job of framing of theory and that is where the academic side can come in, and perhaps in conjunction with people who are working on the ground find the suitable languages as ways of making a common discourse. So that's my particular interest in how do you do that and what kind of language is appropriate for mutual meaning and mutual comprehension.

**Caby:** Are there tools that you would offer these developing countries reform managers? We certainly have the concepts and the contextual frame, is there a tool you would like them to use more effectively?

**David:** I have to say I'm a skeptic. The fact is that after all is said and done about theory and framing and everything else, if you don't have the right people to do the job, you are not going to get it done.

**Caby:** So individuals matter.

**David:** Individuals matter.

**Caby:** So maybe that's the first lesson, find the right individuals, to lead the reform?

**David:** Yes, but I have a certain ambiguity about that. When people say find the right individuals they tend to be very anti-theory and suspicious of general frameworks. I think that's wrong. I think you can't do without that because that's like losing a piece of your mind. You have to understand, have a conceptual understanding, because otherwise you don't see the forest for the trees. You don't know what's going on really. But, on the other side of that argument is that people who have formulaic solutions that derive from theories and so forth, they don't recognize the extraordinary impact individuals can have, they look for a situational fit so to speak, or models, and the models never fit in any real life situation and that's where people really do come in. And one must recognize also that the same person who is an enormous success in one area, may fail in another area. It's not just an exceptional individual, it's someone who really has an understanding of the nuances and can develop modalities of action that people can agree on and be not only persuasive, but enter into the situation, be a participant who is accepted. You create the situation in which you then participate.