

Amplifying positive deviance with ICT enabling community development and interdependence

William D. Tucker

Abstract.

Positive deviance is a social mechanism whereby a beneficial practice that is not considered as normal gets taken up and spread within a community. This enables a community to solve its own problems aided by mentorship and facilitation. Through two long term case studies, we have identified positive deviants and are now learning how to leverage the ICT inherent in our interventions to cultivate and amplify positive change. We find both ourselves and beneficiary communities developing through various stages of dependence, independence and interdependence. We consider the latter a strong form of development. We now look at ICT4D projects as opportunities to identify positive deviants, and to amplify positive deviance with ICT. We posit that affordable, accessible and generic ICTs offer a way to do so, and that explicitly aiming to mentor and facilitate with such ICT offers a path toward community development and interdependence.

1 Introduction

In the ICT for development (ICT4D) space, e.g. IFIP WG 9.4, we generally aim to empower a community to look out for its own best interests, leveraging ICT that we develop, often in collaboration with beneficiaries. Herein lies the tension of applying ICT for development with indigent and/or disadvantaged communities: power relations rise to the surface all too often. For example, technical researchers design and develop code for a given project based on their technical expertise, often employing a participatory design method. How do we deal with this? Obviously, there are many strategies. Tucker [28] describes a continuum of participatory design from weak to strong, because in reality, participation, engagement and indeed empowerment varies. As with partial success and failures described by Heeks [11], ICT4D efforts can be viewed along a continuum of 'weak' to 'strong'. This paper contends that we can also do this by understanding the stages of community dependence, independence and interdependence as described by Kaplan [14]. As often noted, ICT4D community members are also beneficiaries, and our 'community' goes through those same development stages.

Amongst many failures, examples of successful ICT4D projects exist. For example, Toyama [27] contends that Digital Green, a project meant to improve food production in India, was successful largely because local farmers featured in movies that conveyed best practise

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