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The Role of an Intermediary Agent in Technology Integration Within Developing Countries: A Film Industry Perspective

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Abstract

The Bangladesh Film Industry has been attempting to move from traditional analogue film production to digital production during the last decade without much success. One major problem is that the digital technology has to be acquired from international donors in advanced countries and the Government's public procurement policy stipulates that this transfer of technology from the donor to the recipient must be expedited by a local 'intermediary agent' (e.g. business entrepreneurs). Our research findings have confirmed that the local film industry (recipient) requires support with installation of technology, film distribution/ exhibition, and maintenance (production level) and some management tasks. All of which is not usually provided because of incompetency on the part of the intermediary agents and because of limitations in the public procurement policy for this industry sector. One policy implication is whether government procurement policy should target more direct B2B contact between the technology recipient and the international donor. This could help upgrade innovation capabilities of local industry. Our empirical research findings are based on direct insights gained from six semi-structured face-to-face interviews with key respondents based in Bangladesh (e.g. Directors and Senior Management staff of the Bangladesh Film & Development Corporation and other key respondents). **Note:** findings reported here are from a larger study of 40+ interviews on the theme of digital technology integration in Bangladesh film industry. We report that policy makers should direct policy toward the development of technological system, infrastructure and technical training in the long run, rather than mainly focusing on boosting foreign technical assistance, which does not appear to help support manufacturing processes in film making to make a smooth transition from analogue to digital technology use. There should also be a sterner public evaluation body that pre-evaluates and post-evaluates the success or otherwise of the technology integration process.

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1. Introduction

This paper will focus on the problem of limitations (or gaps) in a host LEDC's (less economically developed country) relatively young innovation policy, which seem detrimental to the development of a major industry sector in Bangladesh, which is the film making industry.

The Bangladesh Film Industry (BFI) has been attempting to move from traditional analogue film production to digital film production during the last decade or so without much success. Part of the problem is that the digital technology has to be acquired from international donors in MEDCs (more economically developed country) and the Bangladesh government's public procurement policy stipulates that this transfer of technology from the donor to the recipient must be expedited by a local 'intermediary agent' (e.g. business entrepreneurs).

This paper is based on the following main objectives:

- (a) to briefly review some key literature that helps us to understand how technology integration implementation is often affected by issues like social capability and role of key institutions that may help or sometimes hinder the technology integration process.
- (b) to analyse some key challenges faced by the BFI when attempting to move towards digital film production and the role of intermediary level agents, which instead of facilitating the process, have actually ended up hindering the process of technology integration.
- (c) to analyse some practical implications for the film making industry, for policy makers and other key actors.

2. Literature insights

Social capability is often embedded within the political and economic subsystems where workforces can grow with skills, entrepreneurs can raise their business and organisations can excel operational equilibrium to mobilise developments (Huq, 2004). Stocks of social capital, such as trust, norms, and networks, tend to be self-reinforcing and cumulative. Virtuous circles result in social equilibria with high levels of cooperation, trust, reciprocity, civic engagement, and collective well-being. It is often through innovation, strictly (hard) technological and (soft) organizational, that key deficiencies in social capability can be made up (Putnam, 1993; Dyker & Radosevic, 2001).

As the social capability level amongst the MEDCs and LEDCs usually vary, it could be assumed that the progression of technology integration can be delayed or even failed from the donor to the receiver country (Xu, 2000; Intarakumnerd, 2005). The BFI does not possess the capability to originate and implement a new digital technology in replacement of traditional analogue technology in its film production, distribution and exhibition phases. According to Khan (2014) this might be attributed to the fact that underlying interventions such as political or bureaucratic corruption may well impede the capability of organisations like the BFI as this is not an uncommon social phenomenon found in many organisations inside LEDCs like for example Bangladesh and Pakistan.

With the recent increase of digital technology (DT), not only are the media industries facing challenges to integrate new technology in order to remain competitive, but are also facing the challenge of training a new media workforce. Workforce development (WFD) is a complex issue, that involves identifying the skill shortages to satisfy the demands of a range of new professions, by picking out the learners and the trainers acquainted with the new technology, and deciding how the development process can be accomplished (Bustamante, 2004). The complexity of WFD can be particularly multifaceted in developing countries such as Bangladesh, where political, economic, social, technological, environmental or legislative factors may impede progress.

Here we can learn from some insights from the innovation management literature regarding the role of intermediary agents (or brokers), which as reported in our findings later in this paper, is something that was missing within the services offered by the intermediary agents in the Bangladesh film industry sector. Howells (2006) states that intermediary agents who facilitate innovation in any industry sector can be described as organizations (or

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