MLD 102 A

Getting Things Done: Management in the Development Context

Syllabus
August 14, 2025

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Class Venue: L140
Class Times: 9:00-10:15am Monday and Wednesday
Teaching Assistants: To be added

Course Description

Many people come to HKS to learn how to design policies that effectively promote development (which I define broadly as 'good change'). Some want to be designers; others hope to be politicians, implementers or civic advocates working with designers. They commonly express the desire to engage in policy designs that transcend paper and impact practice, knowing that many policy proposals fail in this regard (sitting on shelves or being only partially implemented).

This course responds to such interest, aiming to help students reflect on the challenges of getting things done in development-oriented policy and create policy designs that better account for these challenges (or better equip implementers to manage the challenges).

The course content reflects an understanding of development policy work that has emerged over the last 15 years at Harvard's Building State Capability Program (BSC). This notes that:

- Development policy work is often complex—fraught with unknowns and risk and involving multiple stakeholders with conflicting (but only partially revealed) views
- This complex work requires processes—and policy design methods—that foster progressive, collaborative learning and iterative relationship building
- Dominant policy processes—and design methods—do not foster progressive, collaborative learning and iterative relationship building
- These dominant processes and methods assume that policy work is just complicated (involving many pieces and stakeholders, but with 'known' and 'controllable' solutions and 'manageable' stakeholder relationships)
- Designs that are suited to complicated work do not fit complex work, however
- As a result, many designs for development policy work fall short of getting things done (running into uncontrollable unknowns, unmanageable stakeholder disagreements, etc).

The course acts on this understanding by empowering aspiring designers (or people engaged with designers) to: (i) Determine whether the policy concern they are 'designing for' is complicated or complex; (ii) Appreciate the different policy processes they can propose in a

design (for complicated, partially complex, and overly complex policy challenges); and (iii) Incorporate the appropriate process orientation into their policy designs.

Participants in the course will be required to prepare for class (with readings and case analyses), participate in class (in discussions and activities), and complete assignments (which are designed for learning more than for assessment). Each participant will also be required to identify a policy issue to work on in the course, which (for MPAIDs) is often the same issue as that chosen for the SYPA. We will apply ideas from class to this issue throughout the course.

Class Approach

Classes will vary across the semester, depending on each session's topic. The general structure of each class will, however, involve an opening 10-15 minute presentation on learning objectives for the session, a 45 minute engaged discussion or activity (around a case study, applied game, or such) or outside talk, and a 15 minute presentation of class conclusions.

It is vital that participants be 'prepared, punctual, and positive-minded' when they come to class, as the attitude and engagement of each person is key to creating the most effective learning environment possible.

Academic Integrity, AI, and More

As with all HKS classes, participants are reminded of the importance of academic integrity. Everyone must do their own work. Period. This is key to any learning journey. Any participant who is suspected of copying work will face consequences as defined in the HKS handbook.

Using artificial intelligence in your work is acceptable where appropriate and helpful. We are all still working out how AI fits into the classroom, but I see it as valuable in many ways and encourage participants to avail themselves of AI where needed and appropriate.

All work that is submitted in assignments must, however, be the final product of participants. I will be using technology to assess AI content in assignments, and will act on any work that raises flags (where it seems that a submission emanated more from AI than the participant).

Class Evaluation

To be included later in August.

Class Schedule

Date	Session	Topic
Friday 9/5	1	Essential questions for policy design
Mon 9/8	2	Types of policy work and 'how' processes
Wed 9/10	3	Identifying a policy issue
Mon 9/15	4	You and your policy issue
Wed 9/17	5	The challenge of establishing purpose in policy design, 1
Mon 9/22	6	The challenge of establishing purpose in policy design, 2

Wed 9/24	7	The challenge of defining ‘what to do’ in policy design
Mon 9/29	8	The challenge of identifying ‘who’ in policy design
Wed 10/1	9	The challenge of ‘with what decisions’ in policy design
Mon 10/6	10	The challenge of ‘where and when’ in policy design
Wed 10/8	11	Incorporating ‘how’ into policy design, 1
Mon 10/13	No class	
Wed 10/15	12	Incorporating ‘how’ into policy design, 2
Mon 10/20	13	PDIA for overly complex problems
Wed 10/22	14	Designing a process for problem driven, iterative work
Mon 10/27	15	Designing PDIA’s people/organization side (Authorizers, teams, networks)
Wed 10/29	16	Designing for progression in PDIA (learning, leads, small wins, and exits)
Mon 11/3	17	Agile for partially complex problems
Wed 11/5	18	Designing the agile process
Mon 11/10	19	Designing agile’s people/organization side
Wed 11/12	20	Designing for progression in agile
Mon 11/17	21	Plan and control for complicated problems
Wed 11/19	22	Designing the plan in plan and control
Mon 11/24	23	Designing for control in plan and control
Wed 12/1	24	Designing for progression (and regression) in plan and control
Mon 12/3	25	Leadership to get things done, in all the processes
Wed 12/5	26	You beyond this course