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Reply on RC1

John Conallin et al.

Author comment on "A review of the applicability of the motivations and abilities (MOTA) framework for assessing the implementation success of water resources management plans and policies" by John Conallin et al., Hydrol. Earth Syst. Sci. Discuss., <https://doi.org/10.5194/hess-2021-545-AC1>, 2021

Response to reviewers' comments for initial submission

Paper: hess-2021-545

Referee 1 General comments

I think the authors have delivered a good addition to the development of the MOTA framework and they are thus very well contributing to the discussion and development around this framework. I think the paper can be published with minor revisions. Although I do want to give some further thoughts to the authors.

I thank the authors for their interesting contribution to develop and refresh the interest to implementation, as implementation is as stated crucial.

Authors' response and changes

We thank Referee 1 for their constructive comments, and believe that they have made our manuscript much stronger .

Minor revisions

- I advise to get rid of "building" in consent building and especially capacity building. The term building (esp. in development studies) is regarded old-fashioned assuming, you do it from scratch, and if there is no capacity yet. Development, is considered a better term (although also contested for the same arguments), some prefer capacity enhancement/strengthening. Also has a lesser feel of 'social engineering' and that you can top-down change this from external sources.

Authors' response and changes

We have changed the old-fashioned terms of 'consent building' and 'capacity building' to 'consent strengthening' and 'capacity strengthening', respectively.

- Section 2.1: the authors base this on the work of Phi et al (2015) , but it is not very critical on the body of work in policy analysis that Phi overlooked. For example Contextual Interaction Theory (Bressers, H. T. A. (2004). Implementing sustainable development; how to know what works, where, when and how. In W. M. Lafferty (Ed.), Governance for Sustainable Development: The Challenge of Adapting Form to Function (pp. 248-318). Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar) and later Owens (Owens, K. A. (2008). Understanding how actors influence policy implementation. A comparative study of wetland restorations in New Jersey, Oregon, The Netherlands and Finland. Enschede: University of Twente.) who applied Contextual interaction theory in quantitative assessments. These also take formal governance systems more in account and power relations between actors.

Authors' response and changes

With respect, we did highlight the need for MOTA to gain further insight into the relationships between different actors, in section 5 (Areas for further research). But we didn't highlight MOTA's gaps concerning policy analysis and formal governance systems.

So we have now highlighted this in our review after considering the references that Referee 1 provided. Thanks for this suggested improvement.

Specifically, in the second paragraph of section 5, we have changed 'These include further enhancing the quantitative basis of the framework, evaluating its effectiveness in a broader range of water resource management contexts, greater inclusion of social dimensions, and using MOTA as a water resource planning, implementation, and evaluation tool.' to:

'These include further enhancing the quantitative basis of the framework, evaluating its effectiveness in a broader range of water resource management contexts, greater consideration of social dimensions, policy analysis and formal governance systems, and using MOTA as a water resource planning, implementation, and evaluation tool.

Also, for the second last paragraph in section 5, we have replaced:

'Social context is a critical consideration in plan implementation since it is key to understanding not only subjective norms but also behavioural control.' with:

'Policy analysis, formal governance systems and social context are all critical considerations in plan implementation (Bressers, 2004; Owens, 2008), but have been largely overlooked by the existing MOTA framework. Social context, in particular, is key to understanding not only subjective norms but also behavioural control.'

The new references have also been added to the reference list accordingly.

Further thoughts

- It appears that the authors (maybe unknowingly) have positioned themselves in the

community that has the view that if we plan more precise (better), are more aware of that will result in improved implementation (lesser overrun of costs, more timely, less conflict). While our experience in implementation (especially when implementation happens via projects, which is often in water infrastructure development) is based on incidents, muddling through, very contextual dependent, very experimental (we try this see, we start and find out along the way); implementation is a continued renegotiation of what was planned (on the goals, the resources, allocation and distribution of costs). The MOTA framework does not much include experiential knowledge of implementers and target groups on what works on how to cooperate and renegotiate implementation in the field. It still rationalizes the process of implementation being a logical follow-up of planning, while implementation itself is highly political and a continuation of negotiations and (dis)agreements.

Authors' response and changes

MOTA does have a feedback loop (Fig. 1) that could be fed back into any of the framework's stages to assess how stakeholders' attitudes, motivations, abilities and relationships change through the implementation process, and to make recommendations on any modifications that are needed (see Section 5).

Nevertheless, we completely agree that, in the real world, implementation is a continued renegotiation of what was planned, and that MOTA does not currently offer much scope to incorporate experiential knowledge to effectively implement plans and policies in the field.

To acknowledge this limitation, we have updated the last paragraph of section 5 to:

'MOTA has been used as a water resource planning tool in the different contexts described above, but there is also an opportunity to continue to (re)use MOTA throughout the implementation and evaluation phases. The MOTA steps could be revisited and information gained as implementation occurs to evaluate if changes (e.g. motivation, ability) are occurring among the different stakeholders as capacity strengthening and consent strengthening programs occur. Indeed, in the real world, implementation is a continued renegotiation of what was planned. It is well understood that stakeholders' attitudes, motivations, abilities and relationships change through the implementation process for various reasons (Sterling et al., 2017). MOTA has a feedback loop (Fig. 1) that could be fed back into any of the stages to assess these changes and make recommendations on any modifications that are needed. Nonetheless, there is still much scope to further incorporate the experiential knowledge of implementers and target groups to achieve successful cooperation and renegotiate implementation in the field.'

- Being more precise in predicting motivations and abilities for a plan can actually result in more problems in implementation. As stakeholder support is very difficult to predict (as it is a heterogenous group) and elements of a plan can be rigid due to legal/contractually binding promises in the plan. As this paper is part of a special issue on transdisciplinary approaches rethinking their own position as rational planners is thus welcomed. The following essay relates to these two camps of planning more

precise and planning less and learn more from the practice of implementation: Kreiner, K. (2020). Conflicting notions of a project: The battle between Albert O. Hirschman and Bent Flyvbjerg. *Project Management Journal*, 51(4), 400-410.

Authors' response and changes

While both Hirschman and Flyvbjerg have contributed immensely to current thinking around project planning and management via their opposing ideas, we argue that the MOTA framework is more in line with Flyvbjerg's philosophy, which aims to "get projects right from the outset" (Flyvbjerg 2017, p. 13). This greater alignment with Flyvbjerg doesn't detract from the acknowledgement that there are uncertainties, unintended consequences and experiential learning within project management.

We have now acknowledged this in section 3.3.3, by changing 'This is likely to save planners and policy-makers much time and money, by equipping them with the capacity to address the issues and revise the plans at an earlier stage of the planning process' to:

'This is likely to save planners and policy-makers much time and money, by equipping them with the capacity to address the issues and revise the plans at an earlier stage of the planning process, with the aim of getting plans or policies "right from the outset" (Flyvbjerg, 2017, p. 13). However, this improved planning phase may still result in unintended consequences in implementation.'

The new reference has also been added to the reference list accordingly.