Research Article

Consultants as Intermediaries and Mediators in the Construction of Information and Communication Technologies for Development

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Abstract

This article considers the role of one actor that is in the ascendancy in the development sector, namely the multinational management consulting organization. Drawing on science and technology studies concepts, we argue that such consultants are increasing and important, yet relatively invisible intermediaries and mediators in the development sphere that justify critical examination. Empirically, we draw on secondary data relating to the shape and nature of consulting in the development sector and focus specifically on a report by a multinational consulting organization to illustrate our argument. Our discussion argues that consultants can be treated both as intermediaries, relays in a network of development provision, and as highly political mediators that seek to expand and stabilize their position in the development network and, in so doing, actively shape what we take development to be. Overall, we suggest that understanding the ways in which such actors engage in the development sphere are important to current and future discussions and developments in information and communication technologies for development (ICT4D).

1. Introduction

Within the development studies literature, and to a lesser extent the information and communication technology (ICT) and development literature, there have been an increasing number of contributions that examined the ways in which significant upstream actors such as donors and NGOs shape the ways by which specific projects are put in place and how development is understood (Hayes & Westrup, 2012b; Mosse, 2013). These accounts look at what development does and how development is practiced, addressing both the objects of development practice and the practices themselves. In this article we specifically consider the role of one actor that is in the ascendancy in the development sector, namely the multinational management consulting organization, with the aim of setting out the importance of further research in this area. Such organizations have been central in providing management and IT consulting services in the private and public sectors in developed countries over the preceding decades, and we suggest they are positioning themselves as important actors in the development sectors. We focus specifically on organizations such as KPMG, PWC, and Accenture, multinational in scope, domiciled in developed countries with employee numbers well over 100,000, rather than small development consultancies or individual consultants.

Crucial to understanding how multinational consulting organizations may influence the nature of development is looking at some dominant conceptions of development. Focusing on the practices of development quickly shows development is a global activity in which we all are implicated (Hayes & Westrup, 2012a). Let us take two viewpoints. The first, and historically the earliest, regards development largely as a postcolonial

legacy, in which *developed* countries attempt to assist *developing* countries to become *developed.* This development administration approach, widespread until the 1980s and still practiced today, came under criticism for how it was practiced rather than the assumptions of development it contained. The well-worn critique is "governments are mismanaged at best and corrupt more often than not, therefore avoid them and use other means." This, at first, applied primarily to countries receiving development aid, but more recently has led many donor governments to rely more on other actors, often consultancies, to deliver aid as well. The second viewpoint largely takes the issue as one of efficiency. If the state is ineffective, then use the market or the non-governmental sector (NGO) or both. This new development management valorizes measurement and management and subtly removes politics in all its formulations as at best an irrelevance (Dar & Cooke, 2008). This is the world of neoliberalism and partnerships (Geldof, Grimshaw, Kleine & Unwin, 2011). Both views of development can be seen to be increasingly market-centric, and as such, multinational management consultancies can closely align themselves with such assumptions and, thus, conceive of how this may become a market to which their services are suited. Does understanding the ways in which different actors are shaping the possibilities for development matter for ICT and development? Yes, it does, because, though we may laud ICTs as drivers and symbolic of progress, they are products and aspects of the practices of these understandings of development. Ignore these understandings, and ICT for development (ICT4D) as an area of inquiry tends to focus on case studies and to identify successes and failures without investigating the ways in which actors shape themselves and are configured to enable specific projects to be put in place. Embrace them, and the area (re)turns to considering the significance of politics, power relations, resource allocation, and the promises of livelihoods now and in the future.

This article addresses the following research question: How might multinational management consultancies be implicated in shaping ICT4D? Our aim is to set out the importance of further research in this area. We argue that these consultants and their technologies are increasing and important, yet relatively invisible intermediaries and mediators in the development sphere that justify critical examination. We suggest that understanding the ways in which such actors and technologies engage in the development sphere are important to current and future discussions and developments in this area. Our article is structured as follows. The next section reviews the academic literature on how international development actors have placed increased emphasis on management and IT consultants. We then review critical literature on consultancy. The following section outlines the secondary empirical data. Following this, we outline our theoretical basis. We then develop our discussion relating to how consultants and their technologies are central to shaping the development sector. The final section outlines implications and our conclusions. Here we call for the area to take up analysis of the practices of consultants and their role as mediators in international development.

2. International Development Actors

There has been a growing interest in the changing role of donors within the ICT4D literature over the last decade or more (Hayes & Westrup, 2012b; Kleine & Unwin, 2009; Madon & Sahay, 2002). Here, literature has examined the changing priorities that donors have had for development. Most recently this has taken the form of donors becoming more focused on seeking to better specify their priorities and on putting in place measures to account for their funding. This focus on measuring outputs has led to donors becoming increasingly powerful actors in the development domain. While attending to impact is clearly important, critics have suggested that it leads to projects becoming donor-centric rather than beneficiary-centric (Lewis, 2008). They argue that more attention should be placed on understanding how donors' priorities are shaping what can and cannot be done (Hayes & Westrup, 2012b).

Increasingly, donor funding is channelled to large NGOs such as Save the Children and ActionAid. Not only does this increase donors' control over how NGOs spend their funding, it frames NGOs as implementers of development (Madon, 1999). This extended control that NGOs are required to accept in return for funding is claimed to have reduced the degree to which NGOs feel able to perform their longstanding political advocacy role (Lewis, 2008). In addition to their focus on beneficiaries, it has shifted upward toward donors. Indeed, some have likened NGOs to government contractors (Hulme, 1994). The tension between upward and

downward accountability is crucial; if the two are not aligned, then how NGOs deal with the tensions has significant implications.

In times of austerity, NGOs and donors are under pressure to achieve far greater efficiency and accountability. There have been headlines that lambast the ways in which the development agencies and NGOs spend their money and their lack of accountability and success (Provost, 2012; Tran, 2012).

Management and IT consultancies are increasingly interested in the development sector, as it offers a new and potentially lucrative revenue stream. In the UK, for example, while public sector spending has been slashed, the international development budget has remained intact. In a recent Q&A article with a number of industry figures in *The Guardian* newspaper, Cummins (2012) highlighted that there are many new consulting organizations of varying sizes working in the international development domain. Indeed, Cummins (2012) questions the spending on consulting, noting that money was being diverted from the intended beneficiaries to consultants. For example, Provost (2012) claimed that the UK Department for International Development (DFID) funds hundreds of millions of pounds to a number of primarily UK-based consultancies, labelling them "Poverty Barons." She went on to highlight that many of these consultants used to work for DFID. However, such accounts in the popular press have been few and far between. Nor have they been plentiful in the academic literature.

Among the few that have, Mannell's (2010) study found that consultants see their work in international development through a "for profit lens." This lens leads them to perceive NGOs as inefficient. Further, she found that this managerialist lens was also sometimes shared even more strongly by NGO staff. She claims that this further strengthens the lens of consultants. As well as focusing on efficiency and value, consultants are seen as able to assist NGOs become more accountable and evidence-based in their work. Among the few critiques, Lewis warns that while evidence is required by donors, it should not be at the expense of innovation or of hiding some voices that do not fit in with the evaluation scheme (Cummins, 2012). Finally, Boussebaa, Morgan, and Sturdy (2012) highlight that in nonwestern contexts, consultants have been criticized for spreading ideologies and neo-imperialist ideas, "spreading white, masculine, North American rational ideas to alien contexts. Here, the underlying concern is more explicit—the integrity (and utility) of the local."

While the literature on management consultants and international development has been scarce, there has been a strong corpus of critical organization studies literature that has considered the role and nature of management consultants (Sturdy, 2011). One observation in this literature relates to their location, as 82% of fee income derives from the U.S. (49%) and the European Union (33%), with all but 8% of the EU income from the UK, Germany, and France. Thus, management consultancy is prevalent in only a few countries within the developed world, and certainly not pervasive within developing countries (Sturdy, 2011, p. 521).

The literature has also pointed to the ways in which consultants position themselves as central to a wide network of actors. Management consultants are keenly aware of the political economy and are well connected with key government and organizational figures in the sectors in which they operate. Consulting interventions, then, are usually highly political (Bloomfield & Danieli, 1995; Sturdy, 2009). Indeed, Sturdy (2011) claims this nepotistic nature of consulting is evident in the ways in which politicians, civil servants, and executives continually move in and out of consulting roles. This was reported to be similar in the development sector (Provost, 2012).

Management consultants act as legitimizers of specific types of knowledge (Bloomfield & Danieli, 1995; Fincham, 1999). Their centrality in an industry network provides a deep knowledge that few working for specific organizations are able to acquire. This sector knowledge provides consultants with great legitimacy in the eyes of their clients and is seldom challenged. It also means that staff, such as in NGOs, are more likely to accept the legitimacy of a change if it comes from an expert consultant rather than from an internal group (Sturdy, 2011). Crucially though, consultants are seldom accountable for their actions. Rather, it is the organization's staff who are held to account. As consultants position themselves as central in an industry network, this has led some to question their innovativeness. Wright, Sturdy, and Wylie (2012) claim that innovation amounts to consultants identifying ideas in one organization, commodifying them, then selling them to other organizations in the sector. Finally, future income is often tied to building their own interests into their relations with clients and, thereby, acquiring ongoing work.

3. Multinational Management Consultancies and the Development Sector

Given that the aim of this article is to argue that the recent engagement of multinational management consultants in ICT4D is an important area for research, this section draws on secondary data to develop this claim, although finding useful secondary data has been challenging. We first looked at all the large multinational management consultancies to identify what material they have made available publicly. While many of the large consultancies mentioned in their literature and on their websites that they consult in this domain, they had limited published material, perhaps due to the proprietary nature of consulting knowledge. Consulting frameworks and models are their intellectual property and, as such, are the very basis of their competitive position (Bloomfield & Danieli, 1995). We then considered any documents and accounts relating to the procurement of consultancy services by donors and NGOs. After reviewing this secondary empirical data we categorized it into a number of emerging themes and issues.

In this section, we first review the secondary data pertaining to the increasing emphasis that NGOs and development agencies have placed on consultants before we look more specifically at consultancies themselves and their offerings, namely their models and frameworks. Finally we focus on one management consultancy to give a sense of how it is actively shaping the development sector, based on the availability of material.

The significance of consultancy in the development sector is evidenced by the amount of money spent by development agencies and NGOs for their services. For example, in 2010–2011, DFID alone spent £468m on consultants. What is the rationale for donors and NGOs to spend such sums on consultants? One rationale relates to consultants' apparent objectivity and professionalism. An Oxfam report (Rowley & Rubin, 2006, p. 6) captures this, claiming that consultants provide "professionalism, transparency, and accountability of both government and non-government actors." A second rationale for their increasing inclusion relates to how donors and NGOs see consultants as having knowledge and skills in areas such as organizational development, capacity building, strategy, and evaluation, to the extent that DFID (ICAI, 2013) even used consultants to manage large strategic programs on the department's behalf.

One salient aspect of consulting—and the development sector is no exception—is the pervasiveness of consulting models and frameworks. In the development sector these have been most typically in areas such as design, change, and evaluation and impact. A relevant example for this article is DFID's April 2012 call "to establish a Global Evaluation Framework Agreement (GEFA) to ensure the provision of efficient and effective consultancy services for the design and implementation of evaluations across its programmes" (Leitch, 2012, p. 2). The work is being undertaken by a consortium that includes a wide range of consultancies such as PWC, Agulhas Development Consultants, GHK Consulting, Grant Thornton UK, and IMC Worldwide. Reading between the lines, this could be a response to the UK Parliament's ongoing questioning of DFID about the amount of the aid budget being spent on consulting organizations. While GEFA is a framework to evaluate consulting interventions, DFID has also procured consulting services to develop models more specifically concerned with intervening in development settings. For example, DFID commissioned an approach to managing development interventions entitled "theory of change." This framework is expansive and is intended to evaluate the impact of large-scale development programs and of their "design, monitoring and evaluation and learning" (Vogel, 2012, p. 13). The framework combines program management and impact evaluation as well as more participatory approaches to development (Vogel, 2012).

Many private-sector consulting organizations offer consulting in the international development sector. These are niche consultancies but, increasingly, many of the well-known global consultancies have become more involved with international development consulting. Companies such as PWC, KPMG, Atos, and Accenture actively market their development sector consultancies. KPMG's brochure on development consulting at the time of this writing (KPMG, 2014) spotlights its technology expertise, suggesting technology offers opportunities for African countries to leapfrog development stages. KPMG also offers services to improve accountability and to "transform organisational performance and service delivery" (2014, n.p.). It argues that multinational consultancies such as itself are crucial partners in development, partnering alongside NGOs, civil society, local organizations, and governments.

Development consultancies have proprietary models and frameworks they use to undertake their consulting interventions. As they are proprietary, it is difficult to report on many; however, we review some that are
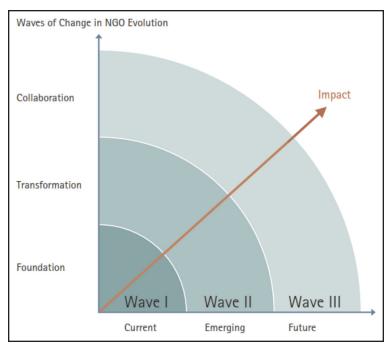
Figure 1. Waves of NGO Evolution (Accenture, 2010, p. 7).

publicly available. A recent framework has been published by Oxford Policy Management (Copestake & Williams, 2013), a long-established consultancy operating in the sector. It proposes a four-stage model for development consulting comprising:

Proposal development, prior to bidding for the work; project planning, having secured a contract; stakeholder interactions, that go beyond consultation with the client and contractual partners; output generation, including data analysis, report writing and revision, presentations, dissemination of ideas, internal evaluation and other follow-up actions. (2013, p. 4)

Each step is supplemented by detailed questions to be asked. A prominent aspect of the model and framework relates to the measurement and management of value. Brigham and Hayes' (2013) study highlighted how a multinational consultancy was developing a framework to manage value in this sector. This framework would become the basis of their future consulting interventions. The models reviewed are very much input/output–based models and privilege the effective and accountable management of development initiatives.

While the secondary empirical data provided in this section has given an overview of the rationales for and evidence of the prominence of private-sector consultants in the development sector, our subsequent discussion draws primarily on one company as an example of a development consultancy. Accenture is one of the "Big Four" accounting and consulting companies, employing more than 280,000 people in 120 countries and with revenues of $28.6 billion in 2012–2013 (Accenture, 2014). Since 2002, Accenture has had a program of development partnerships that provide consulting for NGOs in the development sector. Accenture is perhaps the best known development practitioner among the big consulting organizations and also provides the most detailed information on its development practice. A recent report shows how Accenture creates analyses that compare, contrast, and frame NGOs, which mirrors what consultancies have been doing with private companies (Accenture, 2010). As Lewis (2008) has shown, market-based policies have increasingly reshaped NGOs and been interpreted as requiring them to become more managerial. This process has been ongoing for the last 20 years, although Lewis (2008, p. 54) argues "it is difficult to find systematic data to show that levels of performance [of development NGOs] has improved." What Accenture shows is how models of managing NGOs are promoted to NGOs. One example is the *Waves of Change in NGO Evolution* in a paper by Accenture (2010, see Figure 1).

Accenture argues that "[m]ost international NGOs are starting to come to grips with the first Wave— and those that do not risk falling behind the pack" (2010, p. 7). The NGO's first Wave is characterized by attempts toward greater organizational efficiency and effectiveness but is dogged by poor policies, a lack of investment in how the NGO is organized and of management vision. For example, an NGO in Wave I has much less IT investment than do most other industries. The second Wave is one of transformation, where an NGO moves from addressing the symptoms of poverty to addressing their causes: reorganizing and seeking

partnerships and strategic niches in development, improving their training, and investing in technologies (Accenture, 2010, p. 17). These aspects of organizing are well known in consulting for private companies, and much of the emphasis on transformation arises from strategies of "stretching" organization and business process re-engineering that have engulfed the corporate world of high income companies for the last 20 years with mixed results (O'Mahoney, 2010). In Wave III, an NGO is organized to be able to collaborate in public/private/not-for-profit partnerships that provide development, which is assessed by outcome regardless of how it is delivered. This "convergence economy" (Accenture, 2011) is an excellent example of both how NGOs become the object of management and of how means and ends are decoupled to frame development as a depoliticized arena capable of management. Our discussion primarily relates to Wave II. Overall, in this example, we highlight the significance of consultants and their models and give a sense of how consultancies are not only intermediaries, they also mediate networks to frame development as an efficient management process, which we discuss next.

4. Intermediaries and Mediators

The turn to development as practice highlights the importance of development networks to which ICTs are becoming increasingly significant. Rather than restrict an analysis to well-worn arguments comparing states, NGOs, and markets as effective or ineffective agents of (and for) development, we focus on development networks. The science and technology studies literature informs us that the ability to act derives in linking different actants in a network of specified relationships (Callon, 1991; Latour, 2005). A key dimension of this relates to the ways in which intermediaries and mediators shape the international development sphere. Callon (1991, p. 134) considers an intermediary to be "anything passing between actors which defines the relationship between them." Here this includes not only human actors who are knowledgeable in a specific domain but also technical artifacts such as books, methods, and information technologies. Callon (1991) argues that intermediaries are entities which make no difference to the networks they are part of because they transport meaning without transformation and, thus, are often unnoticed as they designate others to act as a spokesperson on their behalf, noting that "[t]o speak for others is to first silence those in whose name we speak" (Callon, 1986, p. 217). Thus, intermediaries may be unnoticed, acting as relays we might say, yet highly significant in shaping social relations.

Mediators are also important in development networks, but mediators differ from intermediaries as mediators alter whatever they engage with. As Latour (2005) puts it, with an intermediary, an input leads to a known output; however, with a mediator the outputs are unknowable in advance and will be different in different circumstances. Thus, Latour argues that, although mediators may be relatively hidden, they are important in actively transforming and shaping what they engage with. The importance of considering mediators and intermediaries is captured clearly by Latour, who explains that "[a]s soon as actors are treated not as intermediaries but as mediators, they render the movement of the social visible to the reader" (2005, p. 128). In contrast to intermediaries, mediators can bring about unpredictable outcomes as they actively translate their interests into the network with which they are engaged (Latour, 2005).

Thus, mediators in development networks shape what is development and, therefore, development outcomes. This tension between the shaping of networks and their relays is important to understanding how consultants are portrayed. One stance is that consultants act as intermediaries—their primary purpose is to provide expertise to carry out specific functions without longer-term cost obligations. The other is that consultants are also mediators that promote new ways to do things, reshape development and the role of ICTs, and perhaps, improve the delivery of aid.

5. Discussion

The literature review and the discussion of the secondary empirical data pertaining to consulting in the development sector suggest that, while multinational management and IT consultancies are increasing their involvement and, in so doing, reconstituting the development domain, consultants represent a largely underdiscussed

actor in the ICT4D sphere. This section argues that consultants can be treated both as intermediaries, as relays in the development network, and crucially, as highly political mediators seeking to expand and stabilize their position in the development network and, in so doing, to actively shape what we take development to be.

Objectifying Consultancy

A first argument relating to the positioning of multinational consultancies in the development network pertains to their apparently objective position. The literature review indicates that consultants, as external third parties, are often considered to be neutral parties whose expertise allows them to offer objective assessments to organizations (Sturdy, 2011). Indeed, portraying themselves as professional and objective has been cited as one of the reasons donors recruit consultants within the development sector (Rowley & Rubin, 2006). Objectifying development processes and outcomes is considered a way to depoliticize development projects so as to provide a neutral perspective of the current situation and what needs to be changed. Consultants counsel development agencies and NGOs on policy, evaluate and measure outcomes, and advise on the allocation of future funding. Such objectivity is also important as it counters some widely held concerns about corruption within the development sector (Stark, 2012). Consultants occupying this role can be considered intermediaries, acting on behalf of donors and NGOs, using their expertise, models, and technology to offer advice and ensure that projects are carried out efficiently and in the ways that donors demand.

However, how objective are consultants? Their positioning in the network between local stakeholders and national and international NGOs and donors puts consultants in an important position. The literature on management consultancy emphasizes that consultants have a vested interest in securing and expanding their role in the development sector. Indeed, El Ghaziri argues that consultants perform a central role in allocating funds and reporting outcomes.

> Nor is it any exaggeration to say that a vast and growing army of consultants have also been the beneficiaries of trends to outsource policy and devise and measure technical fixes to complex economic and social problems. Governance is a highly lucrative industry for them. (2010, p. 138)

Such a view suggests that, through their interventions, consultants often seek to provide findings and advice that secure them future work. Thus, while the apparent objectivity of consultants may alleviate some concerns, it is important to recognize that their continued and increased involvement and the revenues this secures for them are predicated on their semblance of objectivity. This impression of objectivity derives from their unquestioned position as neutral and expert intermediaries rather than as mediators. We would argue that, as well as their apparently neutral intermediary role, through their provision of "objective" assessment and expertise, they also occupy a highly political role where they are increasingly acting as key mediators in the development network. Conceiving of consultants as mediators allows us to see the practices they engage in as actively stabilizing and strengthening their position in the development network.

Mediators and Liminality

A second and related argument that can be made in relation to the positioning of consultancies in the development network relates to the issue of liminality. The literature that has critiqued consulting sensitizes us to how consultants have often previously occupied senior roles in the public and private sectors and, thus, are well placed politically to gain access to senior decision makers (Sturdy, 2011). This is also claimed to be the case in the development sector where many consultants are former development agency staff, and vice versa (Provost, 2012). One recent example of liminality in the development sector has been the similarity of two change models for development: DFIDs Drivers of Change and the World Banks' Strategic Governance and Change Analysis (SGACA). This similarity was attributed to the consultant who worked on the SGACA model as the former chief advisor on governance in DFID (Hout, 2012). Not only does this highlight how consulting models are being replicated across the development sector, it also highlights how consultants move about among donors and NGOs. Networking with donors is especially important for consultants as donors typically commission and fund consultants. Further, as donors are relatively few in number (Bowbrick, 2013), such networking is especially crucial. Our analysis suggests that while such liminal practices have been largely invisible, they are

fundamental mediating activities for consultants and help us understand why some consultancies are engaged in donor-funded projects and why their ideas and approaches became dominant. Illuminating these hard-to-notice practices is central to understanding the ongoing shaping of the development sphere.

The literature also underscores how multinational consultancies that undertake such backstage mediating activities are likely to be based in the Global North, more specifically in Northern Europe and North America. Governments from these countries have increasingly required their development agencies to place conditions on any spending so as to use consultants located within their own country (Sridhar, 2010). As Radelet (2006, p. 7) explained, "[C]onsulting services financed by U.S. foreign aid in most cases must be purchased from U.S. firms." This is also the case for DFID in the UK. Others such as The Gates Foundation, a philanthropic donor, similarly privilege consultants from the Global North (Sridhar, 2010). In terms of our analysis of consultants seen as mediators, rather than as intermediaries, the geographical proximity and requirements for spending in-country make such liminal practices not only more possible due to well-established relationships and networks, but also nearly invisible. We suggest that it is through such networks that intermediaries shape and stabilize their position in the development domain (Chenhall, Hall & Smith, 2010).

Transforming NGOs

The Accenture report highlights a further hard-to-notice positioning in the network that emerges during Wave II, especially for large multinational consultancies, namely, not only their influence in mediating the outcomes of development projects, but also the transformation of NGOs. Consultancies' rationale is that consulting is to focus first on transforming the NGOs themselves before Wave III public/private/not-for-profit partnerships can be established. This positioning was evident in the Accenture (2010, p. 7) report where they argue that:

> NGOs in particular have a real opportunity to play a very important role in positively engaging with and harnessing the latent power of a private sector which is increasingly receptive to a more collaborative approach. However, to fulfil this important role they must firstly transform themselves to partner effectively as peers with their counterparts in other sectors.

Accenture argued that if NGOs are to better serve the developing world over the long term, they must invest heavily in their own ways of operating. They claimed that NGOs have lagged behind in terms of their operational efficiency and IT infrastructure. In other words, Accenture suggests that NGOs must become process-centric. Such claims have already been played out in relation to the ways in which consultancies have been central to modernization of the public sector, legitimated through the emergence of the discourse of new public management—represented by managerialist ideas and technologies (O'Mahoney, 2010). Importantly, such transformations include government development agencies themselves such as DFID and USAID. Recent shifts in the development sector suggest that such a process of translation is under way, and that consultants are undertaking a similar mediating role as they promote new ways to work within NGOs. Donors require NGOs to operate more efficiently and effectively and to be more accountable for the funding they provide (Accenture, 2010; Hayes & Westrup, 2012b). This donor view of consultants' legitimacy as experts in transforming public- and private-sector organizations is likely to support the claims that consultants can re-embed this expertise within the development sector, and in NGOs specifically. Such claims further strengthen multinational consultancies as mediators actively engaged in transformation of the development network.

Transforming NGOs also appeals to multinational consultancies due to their location. As NGO headquarters are also typically located in the U.S. and Northern Europe, geographic proximity means that consultancies' focus on transforming NGO operations, rather than work in developing contexts where they have few consultants, is sensible (Sturdy, 2011). Second, fee income is likely to be significantly greater and longer term when the work is to transform large NGOs rather than to work with/for NGOs on a specific development project. Wave II thus offers multinational consultancies the prospect of becoming highly significant yet relatively invisible mediators. Working backstage to transform NGOs leaves consultants far less visible than if they were working in specific development projects. Such NGO transformations will influence and control the ways that specific development projects are practiced. However, to what extent are such moves visible? Will this

transformation of NGOs lead to new assumptions about how the development may be conceived and put in place in development projects? These are crucial questions to consider.

Management Frameworks
In addition to the unnoticed practices of management consultants, our literature review and outline of the secondary literature on consulting in the development sector highlight the prevalence of models that have been developed by consultancies to manage the design, delivery, and evaluation of development projects. Such models promote and configure new ways to think about development, embed values, and structure the work that people can (or at least perceive they can) undertake (Brigham & Hayes, 2013). They are put in place to support the agendas and perspectives of the management consultants. Examples outlined earlier include DFID's Drivers of Change model (Hout, 2012) and its Global Evaluation Framework Agreement (Leitch, 2012). Hout illustrates this by claiming that "[t]he Drivers of Change programme typically led to the commissioning of analyses by DFID country offices from teams of independent local and international consultants. Altogether, consultants have produced some 25 reports that all followed the programme's conceptual model" (2012, p. 409). Hout further explains that what was assumed is that "good governance reforms are a prerequisite for further development and transformation in aid receiving countries. The main issues appeared to be the sequencing of reforms and the identification of the change agents to bring about such governance reforms" (2012, p. 410). This can be seen as an example of a framework acting as an intermediary in the network, which reinforces the assumption of governance as an unquestioned value for development, and one that the mediators would like to bring about.

Returning to the Accenture model and Wave II specifically, while the model itself and the implications that may arise remain invisible to those working in an organization, they have profound implications for the ways in which NGOs will be designed and subsequently operate. These models act to configure the work of NGO staff and, crucially, then designate NGO staff to act as spokespersons on their behalf. Such methodologies and approaches to development work position consultants as significant, yet often unnoticed network mediators actively promoting new ways of operating and, in so doing, shaping the development sector.

Earlier we argued that consultants present themselves as neutral intermediaries; here we argue that consulting models also provide and reinforce a semblance of objectivity (Brinkerhoff & Brinkerhoff, 2010). However, it is important to recognize that consulting models provide mechanisms that place subtle pressures on those undertaking development work to conform in the ways that the models specify, while simultaneously delegitimizing other forms of work (Brigham & Hayes, 2013; Martinez & Cooper, 2013). As such, management models which structure the work processes in NGOs represent relatively invisible but highly political intermediaries, as they pass between donors, NGOs and specific development contexts and define what and how development work might be undertaken. Paraphrasing Wallace (2004), we suggest that such models might represent a Trojan horse for those mediators, such as multinational consultancies promoting the neoliberal agenda. One implication then is the need to question the consulting models' objectivity and to be attentive to the values that these intermediaries reinforce and, crucially, the values and assumptions that may be being subjugated. Research in this domain is scarce and would be a fruitful area to pursue.

6. Implications and Conclusions
The aim of this article is to stimulate debate in the ICT4D arena about how development is practiced and to raise the issue of how consultancy shapes the delivery of development. This section considers the implications for our research and sets out a research agenda for future work.

Development as a Practice and Networks of Development
The first implication arising from this article relates to the importance of viewing development as a practice. This contrasts with much of the ICT4D and the ICT and development literature that focuses on the outcomes of specific interventions or that provides development models. Both approaches are important, but understanding further how development takes place and exploring more fully how development outcomes are

arrived at offers the opportunity for engagement in debates that relate the specificities of ICT-enabled development to wider development issues. For example, exploring how the practice of development takes place is currently carried out by assessing the political and economic context of specific countries, although with mixed results (Hout, 2012). Further, such analyses lead to calls to reassess how development is practiced, such as moving to greater engagement with political priorities in specific contexts rather than relying on evidence-based approaches (Hickey, 2012). The argument put forward here takes these moves as important steps, but goes farther in arguing for analysis of a network of development, including how donors and their agents operate and for a deeper understanding of the context of development. Understanding these issues helps us become aware of how development is bounded and how it may be changed for the better. We have indicated that a network-based approach is helpful in identifying the relations which enable ICTs to work and where resources flow (Hayes & Westrup, 2012a; Latour, 2005). Along with donors and NGOs, consultants have become key components of networks of development. Much of these networks are invisible yet are crucial in shaping its ongoing formation. We suggest that addressing development as practice is a fruitful approach, as it can make visible the actors, often portrayed as intermediaries, whose role shapes and mediates development as much as delivers it. Development management in this formulation is political (although with a small *p*), not nonpolitical as its name might suggest, because it shapes how resources are identified, mobilized, and distributed (Dar & Cooke, 2008). Thus an important research agenda for ICT4D is to critically consider the development network, how the various actors are aligned, and how they shape the ways in which each accounts to others and the ways in which this works itself out in specific development organizations.

Consultants and the Shaping of Development Networks

A second implication of this article relates to the importance of considering how multinational management consultancies engage in the work that they do and how they shape the development sector. Consultants, we argue, rely on positioning themselves as both important intermediaries and mediators in the development network so as to gain a more significant share of development sector funding. Consultants can be considered intermediaries who provide their expertise through training, frameworks, and new technology implementation within specific development projects and with NGOs and donors. The use and critique of consultants used by donors such as DFID reflect this view (Hout, 2012). Crucially, they also act as mediators, actively engaged in altering and rearranging development networks, as the example of Accenture indicates above. Rather than focusing solely on consultants as intermediaries, albeit relatively invisible, we suggest that we need to view them as mediators who actively shape the development sector, treating development as an industry (Ferguson, 1994), whose aim is to gain increased consulting revenue. Such mediation is difficult to witness and requires further research, but it has and will have a profound impact on the ongoing shifts in the development agenda, as critiques of consulting in high income countries already indicate. As Latour (2005) highlights with regard to mediators, we can never be sure how this will work out and, as such, the shaping of development by multinational consultancies is uncertain. Thus, seeing consultants in this way is important in understanding a key aspect of the process of development: ICT4D is also a development industry in which issues of markets, profits, and framing development are juxtaposed with development programs.

The increasing presence of multinational consultancies is likely to shift the framing of how development is to be practiced toward what Dar and Cooke (2008) call "development management," in which issues of the efficacy of techniques become paramount and the question of how development is delivered is seen as a secondary concern. Some time ago Hulme (1994) pointed to the dangers of recasting NGOs as development providers to be measured by outcomes, and how that has implications for how NGOs act as advocates for local communities. The Accenture vision of a "convergence economy" in development, where private-public partnership is the norm, takes this position one step farther (Accenture, 2010). The failings of this new public management approach of competition, of incentives based on specific outcome measures, and of the dismantling of public-sector provision in high income countries are well known (Hood & Peters, 2004), but research in this area in terms of ICT4D needs to consider, for example, the salience of calls for digital-era governance in low-income countries (see Dunleavy, Margetts, Bastow & Tinkler, 2006).

A Research Agenda

Developments in related academic fields point to the fruitfulness of ICT4D research that delves more deeply into specific areas of ICT4D practice for both practical and conceptual reasons. As discussed earlier, the development studies literature increasingly points to the importance of research in how development is practiced (Hickey, 2012; Hout, 2012). In part, this is a reappraisal of the efficacy of existing practice and, in part, a call to take on a more nuanced understanding of the context of development and why it matters. A literature is established that recognizes the problems and paradoxes of management practice in high-income countries and their often-problematic or even unexpected outcomes (Fincham, 1999; Hood & Peters, 2004; Sturdy, 2011) which shows how such critical appraisal of development management is needed that includes ICT4D projects as well as development more generally (Dar & Cooke, 2008). In anthropology, too, a debate continues that questions development practiced as an expert activity—an antipolitics machine—and how the tensions of development are framed, given the prevalence of development as an industry (Ferguson, 1994; Mosse, 2013). For ICT4D, a literature is developing that seeks to appraise the complexity of development contexts (Avgerou, 2001; Hayes & Westrup, 2012a), but neglected areas are research on how development is delivered, on development as an industry, on the ways development management frames how development is understood, and on the significance of multinational consultancies becoming more actively involved in determining how development is to be managed.

This article seeks to give some pointers on the importance of these agendas; in part by showing how they are now or are becoming significant in the related areas of management, development studies, and the anthropology of development, although we acknowledge that our aim is to illustrate these arguments, not provide a systematic account of these fields. Conceptualizing development practice as a network of development is one approach we discuss here, which has the advantage of relating to theorization familiar in this field (Heffernan, Lin & Thomson, 2012). This approach itself can be criticized as downplaying political issues (Escobar, 2012). Other approaches are possible (see Mosse, 2013) and are important to encourage. ICTs help produce and are products of networks that shape and are shaped through the management of development. For the field, the call here is for further work in general on ICT4D as it is practiced and on understanding these practices as outcomes of networks of relationships. ∎

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