

Obsessive Measurement Disorder or Pragmatic Bureaucracy?

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Obsessive Measurement Disorder or Pragmatic Bureaucracy?: Coping With Uncertainty in Development Aid Relations

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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Preface

It seems that the world is becoming increasingly complex by the minute, and that, as a consequence, decision-makers in every field must learn to cope with the uncertainties involved when tackling grand societal challenges. Considering these urgent needs, we are truly grateful to the Swedish Research Council for the two generous grants that have enabled us to study and share insights gained on when, how, and why measurements become counterproductive or lead to so-called obsessive measurement disorder (OMD). We have studied how the true experts in this regard, aid bureaucrats, respond to uncertainty while facing great and often unrealistic demands for certainty.

Following the everyday efforts of these aid bureaucrats to find and forge paths through the dense administrative jungle has left us, as researchers and fellow citizens, both humbled and hopeful. For we have been pleasantly surprised to find more of what we call “pragmatic bureaucracy” than of the dreaded obsessive measurement disorder.

We would like to extend a heartfelt thank you to all of you who in one way or another have enabled and supported our research journey. First and foremost, to all of our generous informants for taking the time to reflect and share – thank you! Thanks also to our brilliant colleagues, students, and practitioner advisors for taking the time to read drafts and for your constructive ideas and suggestions. And to the team of transcribers, the anonymous reviewers and the supportive team at Emerald for your encouragement! Thanks to our eminent language editor Kelly Olsson for improving both our English and our arguments, and to our wonderful research assistant Alice Tunfjord for everything. And last but not least, a warm thank you to our families and friends for the love and day-in day-out support necessary to complete a book project!

In the end, although there is seldom a clear-cut recipe for decision-makers in highly complex settings, let us not forget that development aid should be more about developing people and societies, than developing measurements.

Stockholm, Sweden, June 2023
Susanna Alexius and Janet Vähämäki