

Improving Public Sector Management at Scale?

Experimental Evidence on School Governance in India^{*}

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Abstract

We present results from a large-scale experimental evaluation of an ambitious attempt to improve management quality in Indian schools (implemented in 1,774 randomly-selected schools). The intervention featured several global “best practices” including comprehensive assessments, detailed school ratings, and customized school improvement plans. It did not, however, change accountability or incentives. We find that the assessments were near-universally implemented, and that the ratings were informative, but the intervention had no impact on either school functioning or student outcomes. Yet, the program was perceived to be successful and scaled up to cover ~25,000 schools in the state we study (and over 600,000 schools nationally). We find (using a matched-pair design) that the scaled-up program continued to be ineffective at improving student learning. We also conduct detailed qualitative interviews with frontline officials and show that, mediated through bureaucratic incentives for the *appearance* of activity, the main impact of the program on the ground was to increase required reporting and paperwork. Our results illustrate how well-designed programs, that are scaled up based on looking good on paper, may be ineffective in practice.

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