Governments in the 21st Century act increasingly in a complex and fast-changing environment. They are under pressure to increase their decision-making capacity by learning from good practices. But to what extent are governments capable of and willing to learn? And if they are, what are they supposed to learn—and how? Is the way they learn different from the way individuals or organizations learn? Under what conditions do they learn best, and to what extent can learning events enhance their capacities to govern? This lecture introduces the Governmental Learning Spiral, a methodology to enhance learning in complex political systems. It recognizes that learning in governments is taking place in a unique societal environment, performed by a distinctive type of learning actors, who are expected to learn a highly volatile and continuously changing set of knowledge. Its practical application will be exemplified on an initiative launched by the Swiss Government in collaboration with The Carter Center in early 2014. The project aims to address human security issues in mineral-rich areas of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and by doing so to visibly improve peoples’ lives in the region.
Dr. Raoul Blindenbacher is a Senior Fellow at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva and Co-President of the Blindenbacher Borer Consulting Ltd., an enterprise dedicated to the consulting, teaching and research in the field of governmental learning. His clientele covers a wide range of international organizations such as the World Bank Group, United Nations Organizations and the OECD as well as national, sub-national and municipal governments. He was Vice President of the Forum of Federations in Ottawa and Executive Director of the Second International Conference on Federalism. From 2007 till 2010 he was the advisor to the Vice Presidents of the World Bank’s Independent Evaluation Group and the World Bank Institute in Washington DC. Raoul Blindenbacher developed a new interdisciplinary theory of governmental learning, which he published for the first time in the book The Black Box of Governmental Learning (for free download see: https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/2474). He earned a doctorate in education, organizational sociology, and political science from the University of Zürich and holds a master degree from St. Louis University.

The Governance Innovation Lecture Series

The Governance Innovation Lecture Series is an initiative from the University of Ottawa’s Centre on Governance, Faculty of Social Sciences. The main objective of the series is to create a space for thinking about innovative solutions to address contemporary problems and challenges faced by governments. Senior Fellows, visiting researchers and faculty associated with the Centre on Governance will be the first asked to contribute to the series. The series focus on applied, concrete and targeted innovations and will aim at fostering dialogue between the academic, the government and the non-governmental sectors. The selected governance innovations should focus on public governance, public management, and public policy along with relationships between the government, the private sector and civil society in public policy design and public service delivery. The target audience is the academic community, civil servants, public and non-profit actors and the general public.

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