

Please record yourself reading the following excerpt of a script from this animation:



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIRkipQ7nPw>

Script

I guess you could say I'm a technologist now, but before that I worked for an aid agency. My job was to get harried aid workers to think about new ways of doing things. That is not an easy job to have.

"Thing future is here!" I would shout, to a workshop full of baffled, grumpy, hard-bitten people who had spent their professional lives doing difficult things in tough places. "We should try this thing!" Somehow, my enthusiasm was not contagious and it seemed the future never quite got to where we were.

While working with Frontline SMS, I have had a lot of time to ponder why this happens, why if you make it work in one place, it's so hard to make it work in other places or with other types of work. ICT for Development has come a long way. We're no longer trying to work out how we ourselves can get a technology to work, we're trying to make it work in broader contexts, more sustainably and aiming for quality outcomes.

But as we move up from pilotitis to scale-up fever, many people are asking: "What are the barriers to making things work at an organizational level? Why is this so hard?" At Frontline SMS we have spent seven years trying to make software that is usable by real people. We thought that would be enough - that making software easy to use, by making it free and simple

to get a hold of, would mean that anyone can use it anywhere. And it helps! But we have learned that it's not enough.

We've worked with people trying to do things with SMS, in everything from election monitoring to climate change activism to running rape crisis centers to providing legal services and they all come across the same problems. They are real, they are intractable, they involve difficult trade-offs and they are headache-inducingly many!

Perhaps you're the person in your organization who's charged with finding these innovations and promoting them to your colleagues. Perhaps you're the field officer, who wants approval and a bit of start-up funding to try something new. Whoever you are, technology can be terrifying.

There is a multiplicity of platforms, operating systems, devices and service providers to choose from, without even thinking of where, in all this, actual project design fits in. It's complicated terrain and there is no map.

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