

Reclaiming Development – Session #4

Individual Behavior and Strategy Building

Comprehensive Reference Guide – Prepared on February 25, 2026

I. Resources by Issue discussed

1. Core Behavioral Foundations

Sen, A. (1977). Rational fools: A critique of the behavioral foundations of economic theory. *Philosophy & Public Affairs*, 6(4), 317–344.

Contribution: Challenges the assumption that individuals act solely as utility maximizers. Introduces the idea that moral commitments, identity, and social reasoning shape decision-making—foundational for questioning traditional development economics.

World Bank. (2015). *World development report 2015: Mind, society, and behavior*. Washington, DC: World Bank. Chapters 1–3.

Contribution: Synthesizes behavioral science for development policy. Explains automatic thinking, social thinking, and mental models as core drivers of institutional and policy outcomes.

Kahneman, D. (2011). *Thinking, fast and slow*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. Parts I, III, IV.

Contribution: Introduces dual-process cognition (System 1 and System 2), cognitive biases, and overconfidence—critical for understanding limits of rational planning in reform contexts.

Thaler, R. H., & Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. Yale University Press. Chapters 1 & 5.

Contribution: Develops the concept of choice architecture. Helps connect behavioral science to institutional design, while also inviting critique of technocratic behavioral fixes.

Mullainathan, S., & Shafir, E. (2013). *Scarcity: Why having too little means so much*. Times Books. Chapters 1, 4, 7.

Contribution: Demonstrates how scarcity narrows cognitive bandwidth, producing tunneling and short-termism—central for understanding behavior under poverty or institutional stress.

Haidt, J. (2012). *The righteous mind: Why good people are divided by politics and religion*. Pantheon. Chapters 7–8.

Contribution: Explains moral foundations and identity-driven polarization. Useful for understanding why democratic erosion and climate debates are often resistant to evidence-based persuasion.

2. Social Norms & Ecological Systems

Bicchieri, C. (2017). *Norms in the wild: How to diagnose, measure, and change social norms*. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1–2 & 4.

Contribution: Defines social norms as conditional expectations (empirical and normative). Provides tools for diagnosing and shifting harmful norms—directly applicable to governance reform.

Heise, L. L. (1998). Violence against women: An integrated, ecological framework. *Violence Against Women*, 4(3), 262–290.

Contribution: Introduces a multi-layered ecological model (individual, microsystem, exosystem, macrosystem). Provides a structural lens for understanding behavior beyond individual-level explanations.

Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development*. Harvard University Press. Chapter 1.

Contribution: Foundational ecological systems theory linking individual development to layered institutional and cultural environments.

3. Networks, Diffusion & Collective Change

Centola, D. (2021). *Change: How to make big things happen*. Little, Brown Spark. Chapters 1, 4, 6.

Contribution: Shows that behavior spreads through reinforcement clusters rather than simple exposure. Reframes scaling and coalition design for development reforms.

Granovetter, M. (1973). The strength of weak ties. *American Journal of Sociology*, 78(6), 1360–1380.

Contribution: Differentiates between information diffusion and behavioral reinforcement. Helps explain limits of awareness-based reform strategies.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). *Diffusion of innovations* (5th ed.). Free Press. Chapters 6–7.

Contribution: Classic model of innovation adoption. Provides language for adoption curves and institutional uptake.

4. Strategy, Power & Institutional Change

Porter, M. E. (1996). What is strategy? *Harvard Business Review*, 74(6), 61–78.

Contribution: Defines strategy as positioning and trade-offs under constraint. Central for reframing development strategy beyond operational planning.

Green, D. (2016). *How change happens*. Oxford University Press. Chapters on systems thinking and power.

Contribution: Integrates power analysis and systems thinking into development change processes.

Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., & Woolcock, M. (2017). *Building state capability: Evidence, analysis, action*. Oxford University Press. Chapters 1 & 5.

Contribution: Introduces Problem-Driven Iterative Adaptation (PDIA). Emphasizes local learning, experimentation, and capability building under uncertainty.

5. Cultural & Political Framing

Mackinac Center for Public Policy. *The Overton Window* (briefing paper).

Contribution: Explains how ideas move from unthinkable to policy. Useful for understanding cultural permission structures in reform.

Godin, S. (2008). Tribes: We need you to lead us. Portfolio. Chapters 1–3.

Contribution: Highlights status, belonging, and leadership in shaping collective behavior.

Godin, S. (2018). This is marketing. Portfolio. Chapters 3 & 5.

Contribution: Introduces positioning logic ('People like us do things like this'). Helps translate behavioral insight into strategic coalition-building.

II. Structured Reading Pathway for Practitioners

Level 1 – Foundational Orientation

- World Development Report 2015 (Chapters 1–3)
- Kahneman (Part I)
- Porter (1996)

Level 2 – Understanding Social and Institutional Complexity

- Mullainathan & Shafir (Chapters 1, 4, 7)
- Bicchieri (Chapters 1–2)
- Bronfenbrenner (Chapter 1)
- Centola (Chapters 1 & 4)

Level 3 – Advanced Strategic Application

- Andrews, Pritchett & Woolcock (Chapters 1 & 5)
- Green (Systems & Power chapters)
- Godin (Selected chapters on tribes and positioning)

This pathway is designed to guide practitioners progressively from behavioral foundations to applied strategic design in complex institutional environments.