How Government, Professions and Citizens Combine to Drive Successful Educational Change

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For much of the twentieth century, the story of education systems in developed countries was one of expansion – universal elementary education, then universal secondary education, and finally major growth in post-secondary and higher education. Details of how this occured varied from country to country, but no one doubted its importance. Underlying economic and social imperatives drove it forward. Even unskilled work in developed industrial economies benefitted from universal education. As the century unfolded, the nature of work became more technically demanding and more specialised, resulting in a demand for higher standards of basic education and a capacity for individuals to specialise and keep on learning.

From the late 1970s onwards, the technological revolution and globalisation accelerated the demand for an educated workforce, and from the early 1990s, with the end of the Cold War, these forces intensified. The premium for an individual of a good education and for a country of a good education system became ever more apparent. Governments, from the 1980s onwards, began to demand more of public education. They were no longer interested just in quantity; they wanted quality. Where once they had asked about numbers of places, now they asked about results.

Furthermore, changes in the economy also limited the extent to which governments could go on raising taxes to provide public education systems. Increasingly governments wanted improved results without necessarily a commensurate increase in investment. In any case, these economic pressures coincided with social pressures. The growing evidence that achievement was strongly correlated with social class (in England, for example) or with race (in the US, for example) led to demands from many quarters for improved performance. Thus, by the end of the twentieth century, in ways that had not been true 50 years earlier, the social and economic drivers of educational change reinforced each other.

Public education systems struggled to respond to these pressures. They had, after all, not been established with change in mind; still less with any sharp focus on

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A. Hargreaves et al. (eds.), *Second International Handbook of Educational Change*,
Springer International Handbooks of Education 23, DOI 10.1007/978-90-481-2660-6_15,

results. When the then British prime minister James Callaghan made a speech about education in 1976, he felt obliged to explain himself because at the time it was an unusual thing to do. "There is nothing wrong," he said, "with non-educationalists, even a prime minister, talking about education now and again." His main point was clear:

> In today's world higher standards are demanded than were required yesterday and . . ..therefore we demand more from our schools than did our grandparents. (quoted in *The Learning Game,* pp. 33–34, Indigo, 1997)

In England, the need to understand educational change can be dated from that moment. In most of the developed world, it can be dated from around that time. Since then we have become much better informed than we were about the ingredients of successful educational change. The development of this knowledge began at the level of school.

In the 1980s, a series of major reports from outstanding academics, such as Rutter et al. (1979) and Mortimore (1988), gave us for the first time a clear definition of school effectiveness. The picture they painted then has been refined somewhat in the decades since but has not been substantially altered. Then, in the mid-1990s, the focus shifted from school effectiveness (what an effective school looks like) to school improvement (how to achieve effectiveness). Since then we have moved on again. Now research about whole education systems, not just individual schools, is reaching a similar point not least as a result of the development of well-founded international comparison. We are becoming much clearer about what effective systems look like. The current picture will surely be clarified and refined in decades to come, but the central question of educational change is this: What kind of reforms and what approaches to implementation will be most successful in enabling systems to *achieve* effectiveness? This debate is only just beginning, and there is much more to learn.

In this chapter, I will set out some admittedly early thinking on the question of system improvement based in part on the research, in part on debates of education reform in more than 20 countries around the world, and in part on my direct experience in England with both managing reform of the school system (from 1997 to 2001) and leading the prime minister's Delivery Unit (from 2001 to 2005) for Tony Blair, which provided the opportunity to learn about reform of other large public systems such as health and policing. The value here is that while some of the knowledge about improving education systems will, of course, come from within education research, much, I believe, will also come from examination of the reform of large public systems in general. What they have in common may well be more important than their differences. In this chapter, I will do the following:

- Describe the three paradigms of public service reform – "twenty-first-century solutions" – which I have put forward in previous and recent publications, relating them throughout to education reform and giving examples from around the world.

- Extend the argument by analyzing the relationship between government and professions, a central issue in all education reform and one that the three paradigms on their own do not sufficiently explain.
- Draw some conclusions both for government and for leaders of education systems.

The first two sections draw heavily on my pamphlet *Three Paradigms of Public Sector Reform* (Barber, 2007), while the third and fourth parts draw similarly on the postscript in my book *Instruction to Deliver* (Barber, 2008a). This essay is also a refinement of my chapter in *Change Wars* (Barber, 2008b). The aim is to arrive at a first sketch of a complete theory of educational change.

Twenty-First-Century Solutions

How do we go about ensuring that the public services, especially education, are good enough that increasing numbers of wealthy people still choose them, thus binding them to the system and thereby securing the support to generate enough revenue to ensure both steadily improving performance and increasing equity? Successful efforts to create effective education, health, policing, and social security systems suggest that there are three paradigms for reform in large-scale systems, that each is suitable in different circumstances, and that, regardless of which approach is selected, the government at the centre of the system has a crucial role to play. I should say at the outset, therefore, that full-scale privatization has not been included as an option. While it is theoretically feasible, no government of a developed country has applied it to education for the good reason that while it might in theory deliver efficiencies, it would be entirely inconsistent with equity.

Three Paradigms for Large-Scale Public Service

There are three paradigms for the reform of any large-scale public service: command and control, devolution and transparency, and quasi-markets. Figure 1 shows these three paradigms.

Command and Control

Command and control is often the first choice of governments that want urgently to enact change – and to be seen to be enacting it. As the phrase implies, it involves top–down management approaches and conveys at least an impression of government taking charge. If executed well, it can be highly effective. Good examples of this paradigm include the UK government's National Literacy Strategy from 1997 to 2001 and its approach to reducing health service waiting times from 2000 to 2005. It should be noted, however, that there is nothing worse than command and control incompetently implemented.

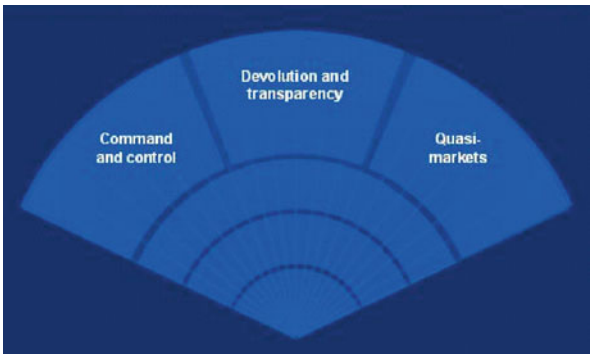

Fig. 1 Three choices for large-scale system reform

A refinement of this paradigm is also top–down, but it is built and designed much more explicitly in consultation and potentially in collaboration with other key stakeholders, such as teachers and local authorities. Perhaps, rather than top–down, it should be described as "government-led." A good example of this is the education reform in Ontario since 2003, where educators have been successfully led by the government to pursue the moral purpose of higher standards of literacy and numeracy.

The danger of this variation is that it becomes a soft, pragmatic compromise and can therefore be ineffective. In Ontario, the existence of clear targets, strong emphasis on capacity building, and the fact that the strategy was a reaction to a period of bitterness and conflict have all contributed to avoiding such an outcome. The question faced there is whether in the next phase the government can build effectively on the strong foundations already laid, because as performance improves, further improvements may depend on greater specification of teaching approaches – always a sensitive issue in relations between the teaching profession and the government.

Quasi-Markets

The second paradigm is quasi-markets. Given the stunning gains in productivity and customer services brought about in recent decades by the global market economy and the difficulty governments have had in delivering improved public services, the idea of applying market forces to public systems without full-scale privatization has obvious attractions. Quasi-markets make the introduction of elements of the private sector feasible by introducing options such as retaining public control of the commissioning of services but having private or voluntary-sector providers deliver them. Examples include many IT systems in governments around the world and the use of independent-sector providers of routine operations in the UK health-care system, and private providers of public schools in Philadelphia, which, recent evidence suggests, have been modestly successful.

However, applying marketlike pressures within a public service is not always straight forward. One must be able to define a clear customer, offer customer choice, bring in new providers, and ensure that the use of money reflects the choices made by the customer. Charter school programs in New York State and California and voucher programs in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and Florida are examples of quasi-markets in action. Evidence of impact is so far mixed, however, and success seems to depend on the precise design of the program. For example, Swedish education reform, which has brought in new providers and offered much greater choice, appears to have had modest positive effects, while the radical restructuring of England's National Health Service along quasi-market lines is bringing increasing evidence of positive impact. Meanwhile, evidence from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) – Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) international comparisons of education systems in the developed world are neutral on the benefits or otherwise of quasi-market reforms.

What of situations in which a government wishes to reform a service without resorting to command and control, but where the conditions for the success of quasi-markets are not present? For example, in the provision of prisons, courts, or policing, it is either not possible or not desirable to define a customer and offer choice from a range of providers. In relation to education, a government may seek a means of improvement, but for political, ideological, or indeed pragmatic reasons, it may reject market thinking.

Devolution and Transparency

In the third paradigm, devolution and transparency, the government can devolve responsibility to the frontline units delivering the relevant service and then use transparency – making public the results in a way that allows comparisons to be made – to drive performance. Units that succeed can be rewarded and potentially expanded; failing units can be made subject to interventions and ultimately shut down. To work, this model depends on genuine devolution of operational control along with accountability. The benefits have been limited at best in some US school districts where accountability has been devolved to principals without offering them commensurate operational flexibility. The New Zealand school reforms of the early 1990s, those in Victoria, Australia, under the Kennett government of the late 1990s, and those in England from 1988 onwards are examples of this philosophy being applied to public education systems.

The model can operate in a fully public system – the most famous example being the New York City Police Department, where the Compstat process generated competition between precinct commanders – or within a service in which a mix of public and private providers compete on equal terms. "Compstat" became the term used for generating weekly data on each crime type for each precinct and then using that data to hold precinct commanders to account for their performance. This can also be done by separating payer and provider and encouraging competition for contracts offered by the government or its agencies. This approach has been widely adopted with

significant success in a variety of public services. Examples include the use of private prisons and the contracting out of local education services in the UK. It seems clear that this approach can only work if, in those cases where performance is very poor in specific schools or local systems in education, the government has both the will and means to intervene effectively. This is by no means straightforward, and many American states are struggling with this challenge as the impact of the No Child Left Behind legislation is increasingly felt.

Where fully applied, the devolution and transparency model has proved sufficiently beneficial that some informed commentators have suggested applying it fully to all government services (see Osborne & Hutchinson, 2004). Moreover, it has the advantage that it can be applied in combination with the quasi-market approach. For example, while the quasi-market approach has been put in place in some public school systems, it is important to acknowledge that it has limitations in this sector. In a true market, the customer may change providers regularly. But parents are naturally reluctant, for good reason, to change their child's school often. For this reason, market pressures on schools tend to be weak. If, however, as is the case in England, New Zealand, and Holland, devolution and transparency are also introduced, pressure for school improvement tends to be significantly strengthened. The evidence from OECD–PISA international comparisons, particularly its most recent report published in November 2007 (OECD, 2007), suggests that moves in favour of both devolution and transparency are generally associated with better performance – though of course much depends on the precise detail.

To some degree, these paradigms will be familiar to any government, and there is intense ideological and political debate about the merits of each. The truth is that each model is appropriate in different circumstances, and all may be deployed within a system, with the balance between them changing over time.

Changing Approaches for Changing Performance

In *Good to Great* (2001), Jim Collins explains the characteristics that distinguish great companies from good ones. More recently, in *Good to Great in the Social Sector* (2005), he explains that similar characteristics apply to all good organizations, regardless of whether they are in the business or social sector. Unfortunately, some organizations, including many of those that have historically been insulated from the pressures of the market, cannot yet call themselves "good." In the UK prime minister's Delivery Unit, we developed an extended, four-point scale designed to encompass the full range of performance for the various public services whose improvement was sought (Fig. 2). The scale also suggests what the consumer reaction is likely to be at each point on the scale.

This categorization is crude but useful. Generally speaking, when services are "awful" and users are exiting the system, command and control solutions are appropriate. This is certainly true in a crisis, but it also applies in circumstances of endemic underperformance. In such cases, the public, and even the workforce

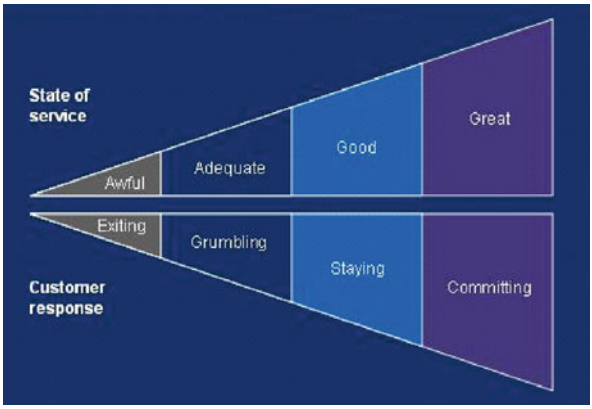

Fig. 2 A four-point scale for public services

within the service, will usually accept (albeit perhaps reluctantly) strong government intervention as long as it is effective. This is, after all, how the market handles bankrupt companies and how CEOs deal with underperforming companies. England's National Literacy and Numeracy Strategies, for example, were justified by the fact that elementary school literacy had barely improved in the 50 years leading up to the mid-1990s and the country's math standards lagged behind those in comparable countries.

Once adequate performance is established – which in itself is a huge task – the benefits of command and control are less clear. Governments find it hard to sustain the focus and drive on which command and control depends. Frontline leaders find themselves constrained by government regulation. Moreover, while shifting performance from "awful" to "adequate" is a substantial achievement, it does not satisfy the consumer, who continues to grumble until performance improves substantially. In the end, achieving "great" performance in the public sector requires unlocking the initiative, creativity, and motivation of leaders throughout the system, rather than just those at the top. This cannot be done without substantial devolution and/or providing the freedoms of a quasi-market. In short, as Joel Klein, Chancellor of the New York City School system, says, "You can mandate 'awful' to 'adequate,' but you cannot mandate 'greatness'; it must be unleashed" (Barber, 2008a, p. 337).

The Role of Government

Reforming a large public service is a sophisticated challenge. Whichever paradigm is chosen, it will work only if three underlying roles are performed by government (Fig. 3): capability, capacity, and culture; performance management; and strategic direction.

Fig. 3 Three necessary underpinnings for reform

The first requirement relates to the capability, capacity, and culture of the service in question. This means that the people who provide the service must have or must acquire the right skills, sufficient resources must be allocated to get the job done, and an appropriate performance mindset must be established among those providing the service. The precise nature of the required mindset will differ depending on the stage of reform. The final section of this chapter debates this issue in depth.

The second requirement is that the government secures rigorous performance management. None of the three paradigms can work without it. Performance management starts with information: data on performance are essential so that service providers can see how they are doing and can benchmark their performance against others. The public, the ultimate funder of the service, also needs to see the return it is getting on its investment. Neither parents nor patients can exercise choice without good information. And as governments move away from command and control, the capacity to intervene when part of a service is underperforming, remains crucial. Again, this cannot be done without reliable, up-to-date information on performance. This explains why currently the development of refined and high-quality data systems is high on the list of priorities for many education systems.

Third, because public-service reform is complex and only possible over several years, strategic direction is necessary. Developing a good strategy is a sophisticated challenge for a large business. In a political environment, with all its attendant pressures, this challenge is even more daunting. A small, well-qualified, courageous group – a kind of "guiding coalition" (Kotter, 1996) must oversee the sequencing and implementation of reform. The group that oversees the education reform in Ontario is a fine example. Given the controversy such reform often generates, only a sustained, well-thought-out strategy will work. Moreover, those responsible need to learn as they go because not all outcomes can be anticipated. This means designing by learning rapidly what is working, what is not working, and how the environment is changing. In short, what the literature calls adaptive leadership (see Heifetz, 1994) needs to be exercised by this group. The support for the strategy should build over time, both within the public service itself and among the public.

Building on this kind of thinking, the UK prime minister's Strategy Unit in its recent document on the next stage of public service reform (Cabinet Office, 2008) suggests there are four essential roles for government.

1. Leading change
2. Guaranteeing standards and fairness
3. Investing for the long term
4. Capacity building and connecting

Leading change, the document explains, is similar to the description above of setting strategic direction. Guaranteeing standards and fairness describes a role for government in which, even in a largely good or great system, it would be willing to intervene to secure a minimum acceptable standard of performance or to guarantee fairness among different interest groups or sectors of the population.

Investing for the long term is an argument for ensuring the funding is in place not just for the current year but also for the strategic period ahead. There is no doubt that an investment perspective is critical to enabling long-term strategic change and funding systems that depend on sources of income liable to wild fluctuations (e.g., property taxes) are likely to be less successful. Similarly, the process for the allocation of funding is also critical – transparency and steadiness help.

Finally, capability building and connecting builds on the points made above about capacity, capability, and culture and emphasises in addition the important role government can play in connecting across service boundaries or between education and business, for example. In a democracy, government has a legitimacy in making these connections that no other actor has. The more it is able to develop trust-based relationships with key stakeholders, the more likely it is to succeed. Its store of political capital at any given moment will also be a factor influencing its ability to succeed.

Government and the Teaching Profession

The most critical relationship of all for successful educational change is that between government and the teaching professions. For example, there was some frustration among many teachers in England in the 1990s and early 2000s as the education reform unfolded, though it has now diminished. Even now, much more could be achieved if the relationship between the teaching profession and government was one that – in the word of the 2008 Ontario Education White Paper – "energized" all those involved.

The state of affairs in England's education system in the late 1980s and early 1990s was unacceptable; performance fell short of both public expectations and the demands of the economy, so reform was necessary. There is no doubt government made mistakes along the way – governments always will. But despite mistakes, the education service significantly improved in England, not just for pupils but also for teachers and other staff because of, not in spite of, the government's efforts. Test

scores are higher at primary level. Secondary school performance are also much improved. There are also far fewer pupils failing schools. Moreover, teachers are better supported, better trained, and better paid than ever before. No one faced with the facts can dispute this, but it does not solve the problem of the strained relationship between the teaching profession and government over that 20-year period; the question is whether we can learn from that experience – and parallel reform efforts elsewhere – to develop a conceptual framework for thinking about this relationship, which is at the heart of education reform.

Unless the relationship between teachers and government is soundly based, it is a problem for everyone. Such a strained relationship is a problem for government because the credibility with the public of a teacher will always be much higher than that of a minister or a civil servant and, more importantly, because well-motivated teachers will do a better job. It is a problem for the professionals themselves because if they are dissatisfied, their careers will be less rewarding than they might have been, and by suggesting to people that reform is not working, they undermine the long-term prospects of fully tax-funded services. Above all, it is a problem for citizens because even if it does not affect the quality of their services – which in some cases it might – they will often feel a sense of confusion about what is happening and where the services for which they pay their taxes are headed.

Part of the answer to this problem lies with globalisation and technology, which are transforming services of all kinds everywhere. Those who work in media and communications or financial services, for example, have seen their working lives and organizations transformed since the 1980s. This is true for many professions in the private sector – architects, accountants, and lawyers, for example – whose working methods have been changed utterly. Globalisation and technology influence services such as health, policing, and education, which are in the public sector, just as much as they shape those in the private sector. The difference is that in the public services, the changes that result are inevitably – precisely because the services are public – mediated through government. When governments urge educators to be "world class," they are giving voice to what the global market demands in other services. When doctors struggle with the impact of technology on medicine, they are facing what the market drives in other sectors. When police try to keep pace with organized crime, they are competing directly with an endlessly innovating – albeit in this case illegal and immoral – global business.

Charles Clarke, former education secretary of England, makes this case in his chapter in *Public Matters: The Renewal of the Public Realm* (2007). He argues that technological and scientific innovation, empowered and assertive consumers, and growing concern about professional standards have dramatically changed the rules of the game and contributed to a mutual lack of confidence between government and the professions.

So when public service professionals complain that government has driven too much change, often the drivers (hidden though they might be) are these wider forces. This does not excuse a government from coming up with too many initiatives or making mistakes, but it does help to explain why governments around the world

generally want more change while simultaneously public service professionals complain about overload. Moreover, while it is true that there has been immense change in many education systems since the 1980s, it is not true that it is more than in many other sectors; indeed, it may overall have been less.

For example, one of the most glaring gaps between the public and business sectors is in the attitude to customers. Public service professionals still too often take customers for granted and expect them to be grateful; very few professionals in the business sector can afford to take this attitude. In another example, in relation to the widespread availability of information, many people are now able to be their own lawyer or doctor or teacher up to a point, thanks to the Internet. It is easy for the professional, once revered specifically for his or her expertise, to feel threatened or defensive in these circumstances – but in fact the existence of many better-informed citizens or customers is potentially a major gain. The challenge for teachers is to build unshakeable partnerships for performance with those they serve – that is, pupils and parents.

Consider performance data: Most teachers and head teachers I know hate published performance data, but this is the era of global media and freedom of information. University vice-chancellors do not like published data either, but *The Times* does, student websites do, and so do several outlets on a global basis. In Berlin recently, I saw that the front-page headline on the city's main paper related to a website which enabled schoolchildren to rank their teachers across the city. Comparative data will out. Moreover, citizens and customers demand data and will not give it up. The only question, therefore, for teachers is whether they would prefer government to organize and provide reliable, published comparative performance information – in which case there can be an ongoing dialogue with them about what is included and how it is presented – or a major media organization to do it instead – in which case there will be no such dialogue.

I emphasize this point because I believe that the two main drivers of teachers' frustration in England, as in theUS, since the 1980s have been the pressures of accountability and the pace of change, yet both of these are ultimately spurred on not just by government but also by globalisation and technology. When government makes mistakes or suffers "initiative-itis," it compounds the problem. Government hugely influences how these forces play out, so of course it bears huge responsibility. But unless this bigger picture is understood, we will never unravel the complexities of the relationship between government and professions.

The central issue, therefore, beyond the competence of government, is how to construct a more effective relationship between government and teachers – one in which they develop a deeper understanding not just of each other's views of the world but also of the profound forces that are reshaping everyone's world and the implications of these forces for education.

In the first broadly successful phase of Blair's education reform between 1997 and 2000, one of the government's mistakes in relation to the teaching profession was, in the words of John Kotter, "undercommunicating the vision by a factor of 10 (or 100 or even 1,000)" (Kotter, 1996, p. 4) To be sure, the government wrote what was widely recognized to be an ambitious white paper and promoted it. It

consulted widely in its formation, too. It sent out pages of regulations and guidance on everything from the far-flung corners of school governance (unimportant) to the sequence of teaching phonics (vital). In what was widely seen as an innovation (remarkably), ministers and officials visited schools all the time. Alongside these efforts to communicate directly with the school workforce, government also ran a largely successful media strategy aimed, of course, at parents and taxpayers rather than teachers. The message here was that performance in the education system was not good enough, failure would be tackled vigorously, and poor schools would be closed. Parents and taxpayers heard and generally warmed to the message. The error was a simple and obvious one: Teachers read the newspapers like everyone else and heard the government's message to parents loud and clear; understandably they did not pay as much attention to the guidance and white papers so they did not necessarily understand the strategy or its moral purpose.

The government understood this challenge soon enough and began to respond. It reduced the paper going into schools dramatically, but obviously this did not convey the vision in the way Kotter suggests. It realized that in order to do this, it needed intermediaries. Government could not communicate directly with more than 400,000 teachers, so it focused on head teachers. For example, in September 2000, it took a road show around the country: five cities in 5 days, five hundred heads in each venue – like a band on tour. Ministers, leading officials, and successful head teachers explained the vision and the strategy and debated them vigorously with the very engaged participants. These events were a great step forward and valued greatly by those who attended, but what about Kotter's point? This was the boldest direct communication exercise ever attempted by the Department for Education in England up to that time, yet that week just 10% of head teachers in the country participated in the events.

The government needed the following: briefer, clearer, more memorable messages that resonated; to spend even more time than it did on the road; to integrate the media and direct communications approaches; to sustain the same messages for longer period; fewer distractions; constant, genuine interaction; and more intermediaries. The purpose, after all, was a better society – not, as many teachers understandably thought, hitting government targets. Others in addition to head teachers should have been effectively mobilized, such as local authority chief executives, chief education officers (now called Directors of Children's Services), and heads of university schools of education. Not all of these people would have agreed with the government by any means, but it would have greatly helped if they had understood.

I have spent some time discussing these communication efforts to make a more general point about the need to invest in much greater, deeper communication between professions and the government. Moreover, communication needs to be two way, interactive, and sustained. Much of policy in England from 1997 to 2000 was of the "shock therapy" variety. The government had set out to jolt a system from its comfort zone and deliver some results. It was largely successful, but could it have achieved what it did with a different approach, investing more deeply (and inevitably more slowly) in two-way communication early on? Or would it have lost

momentum and found the cutting edges bevelled off its policies? There is no easy answer to these uncomfortable questions.

This takes us back to the idea of a guiding coalition. It is necessary to have a small group at the centre of a change who know what they want to do and how they plan to go about it, but over time this group must widen. This is why Michael Fullan and I talk about "ever-widening circles of leadership;" the guiding coalition can stay at the centre, but it needs consciously and constantly to build leadership capacity throughout the service for which it is responsible. In Ontario's education reform, this has been done well.

In the second Blair term, Estelle Morris began and then Charles Clarke and David Miliband completed a process of building a social partnership with teacher leaders. In return for active involvement in the policy process, the unions (all but one of them) agreed to greater flexibility in working practices. This inspired the foundation of something that could be much more radical; imagine a joint declaration that, for example, the teaching profession and government would strive to achieve world-class performance – defined and specified – with both accepting their share of responsibility for achieving it. This points the way to the next phase of my argument: What is needed is not just better communication, but a shared understanding of what is required to achieve world-class public services and a shared commitment, given the huge investment over the past decade in England (and still flowing, albeit more slowly, in the next decade), that this is what this country needs to see delivered. Making this happen will require courageous leadership – not just in government but also in the professions. Whether it will emerge remains to be seen, but given that the alternative, over a generation, could be frustration, conflict, disappointing performance, the flight from the public realm of those who can afford the private alternative, and thus a residual set of poor public services for poor people, it must be worth a try.

Moving Towards World-Class Education

In this final section, I want to set out a conceptual framework that might provide an underpinning for this long-term shared understanding between government and the professions. The basis of the framework is that the nature of reform and therefore the nature of the relationship between professions and government needs to change and adapt as services improve.

The starting point is the scale presented in Fig. 2. As discussed previously, this crude scale establishes four states: awful, adequate, good, and great. In terms of reform, it establishes three phases or transitions: (1) awful to adequate, (2) adequate to good, and (3) good to great.

My argument is that as systems pass through these three transitions, the nature of the relationship between government and the professions needs to adapt and the dialogue between them needs to develop accordingly.

To take a large education system through these three transitions is a major task by any standards. To take them all the way from "awful" to "great" is surely at least a decade's work. Any government, along with its allies in the professions, needs to be committed for the long haul. Indeed, given the vagaries of democracy, it is always possible that governments of differing parties will be involved, as in the 1990s in education reforms in England, Texas, and North Carolina. Given the long timelines, the key is for those leading the reforms to have two timetables in mind: one leading to short-term results, and the other leading ultimately to world-class performance. Both are essential; the former because without short-term results, neither those within the system nor those using it will have any confidence that progress is being made, and the latter because world class is the ultimate goal. Thus, in the awful-to-adequate phase, it is right to emphasize reducing outright failure and achieving a jump in the next year's test results, just as the management of a failing company must first stop leaking cash and then build some confidence among investors. The key, though, is to take these sometimes drastic actions in a way that does not undermine progress towards the long-term goal. For example, Michael Fullan and I emphasize in our conversations the importance of building the underlying capability and capacity of a workforce and a system through *every* policy (Barber, 2008a, p. 375).

Since 2003, the Government of Ontario has consciously modelled its strategy for improving literacy and numeracy in schools on our experience in England between 1997 and 2001, but it has also consciously varied the strategy, with greater emphasis on partnership, less prescription, fewer "distracters" (as they call them), and a language about capacity building and sustainability. They still have targets, but the government does not publish league tables (it leaves that to the newspapers), which means it can deflect this criticism. Interestingly, the results so far in Ontario are very similar to that in England – really substantial progress beginning to plateau, but so far not enough to hit an ambitious target. The test will be whether in the next phase they can avoid the long plateau seen in England. I believe they have a strong chance, partly because performance in Ontario was already better than in England when they began, so shock therapy was not judged necessary, and partly because leaders there have been careful to bear the long term in mind throughout the first phase. It will depend whether it can sustain partnership as the strategy becomes more precise and specific. Certainly, the dialogue throughout with the teacher unions, principals, and school boards has been focused on building partnership and appears to have developed and sustained a shared sense of moral purpose.

This is just one interesting contrast. On the basis of education reforms such as these in other countries and my own experience in England in health and policing as well as education, it is possible to set out a framework for the changing nature of the dialogue that moves the conversation on as the system goes through the transitions towards world class. The basic premise is that awful-to-adequate phase may involve shock therapy and therefore a top–down approach, but the further you move towards world class, the less a government's role is prescriptive, and the more it becomes enabling. Meanwhile, the professions need to move in the other direction to, at the world-class end, leading or driving the reform.

Table 1 How the relationship between government and professions could transform public service

Phase of development	Awful to Adequate	Adequate to Good	Good to Great
Chief focus of system	Tackling under-performance	Improvement	World-class performance
Role of Government	Prescribing	Regulating	Enabling
Role of profession	Implementing	Accommodating	Leading
Nature of relationship	Top-down and antagonistic	Negotiated and pragmatic	Principled and strategic
Time horizon	Immediate	Medium-term	Continuous
Chief outcomes	Reduced failure	Uneven improvement	Consistent quality
What citizens think	Reduced anxiety	Growing satisfaction	Active engagement

At the outset, though, we need some understanding of what it takes to be world class. In education, we have this knowledge from a series of international benchmarking studies. What marks out the best systems in the world is that they recruit great people into teaching and invest in their skills effectively both at the start of their careers and throughout them so that they teach lessons of consistently high quality.

This consistency is crucial, and it begins and ends in teachers' classrooms. In other words, it can only be brought about by frontline professionals who share the mission, benefit from excellent management, and are given the tools and incentives to deliver consistent high quality by an enabling government. With this background, then, the framework described in Table 1 can be developed as the starting point for dialogue.

At the very least, a framework such as this could provide a common language for the dialogue between government and the professions. That alone would be a major improvement on talking past each other, which has seemed so common in many countries. Two factors should enable it. The first is that even when a system is awful, there are plenty of head teachers and teachers who are doing an outstanding job. Right from the outset, government needs to foster a strong relationship with those in any service who are out in front. If these school leaders can express impatience with the slow pace of change, it helps to counterbalance the drag effect of those who want to slow things down. Indeed, this alliance with successful leaders is a key part of that process of building ever-widening circles of leadership, as previously mentioned. The second enabling factor is the vastly improved information

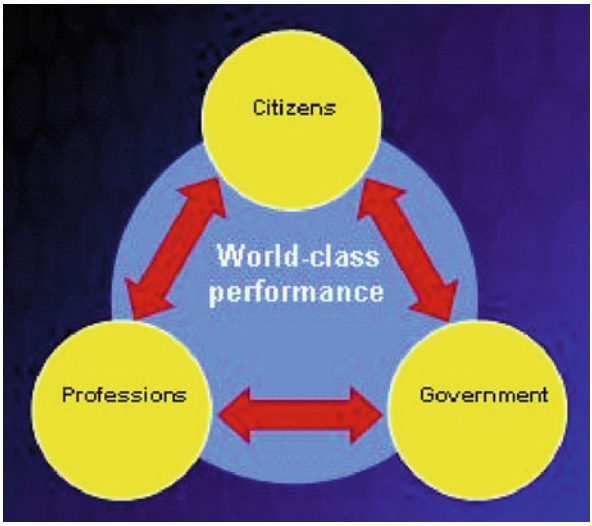

Fig. 4 World class performance

available about the performance of public services. These data – everything from the published performance data to the growing range of international benchmarks – provide (and in the future will provide even better) the evidence base on which to have this conversation. Charles Clarke, former secretary of state for education in England, argues that part of the new relationship would need to be long-term pay settlements, which are both more flexible and more explicit about professionals' responsibilities to develop their skills continuously, with government accepting responsibility for making this possible. The 3-year pay settlement for teachers in England announced in January 2008 may point the way. In Ontario, similarly, a long-term (4 year) pay deal was agreed upon in 2005 as a conscious step towards removing a "distracter."

New insights into this set of questions appear in a recent publication (Cabinet Office, 2008) from the prime minister's Strategy Unit in the UK, which establishes a conceptual framework for the next stage of reform of the public services in the UK, as illustrated in Fig. 4.

The document argues powerfully that whereas in the last decade the relationship between government and professions has been the chief focus of reform, in the next decade the relationship between citizens and professionals will become central.

To quote, *Excellence and Fairness* argues:

> "We know that services need clear standards but that, following our first phase of reform, persisting with too may top-down targets can be counterproductive; we know services must value professionals if we are to foster innovation and excellence; we know that while central government must be a key player in driving better public services there are limits to what it can achieve and if it seeks to do too much it will stifle local initiative; and we know that vital though user choice is, it needs to be complemented with other approaches if we are really to empower citizens. So our established strategies now need to be accompanied by a new phase of reform:

- Developing new approaches to *empowering citizens* who use public services: both extending choice and complementing it with more direct forms of individual control, such as personal budgets in areas like care; opportunities for people to do more themselves, such as manage their own health; stronger local accountability, such as directly-elected police representatives; and providing greater transparency of performance.
- Fostering a *new professionalism* across the whole public service workforce, from the dinner lady to the head teacher, from the hospital porter to the consultant. This combines increased responsiveness to users, consistent quality in day-to-day practices and higher levels of autonomy from central government wherever those at the front line show the ambition and capacity to excel and greater investment in workforce skills.
- Providing strong *strategic leadership* from central government to ensure that direct intervention is more sharply concentrated on underperforming organisations, while the conditions are created for the majority to thrive more autonomously."

Whether this precise mix is appropriate for every country, the direction is likely to be similar across the developed world and will increase the need to establish a principled relationship between government and public service professionals. The demand for public services of real quality that are available to all is overwhelming; those who work in the public services would surely prefer to be more motivated and more successful (rather than less), while governments in the next decade will find they need to sign up to this vision too if they are to succeed in meeting bold aspirations. Without something along these lines, we are likely to see public education systems collectively – government and the school workforce – fail to implement reform successfully or to communicate to the users and to those who pay for the services where they are heading and how they are doing. As a consequence, a spiral of decline would set in. If government and the teaching profession aim their messages only at each other and appear to be at loggerheads, then the public will inevitably be both sceptical and confused.

If instead they combine in implementation and communication, they could be unstoppable. Easy to say, but very hard to do in practice, since this will require major culture change all round. It will require professions that embrace transparency, recognize the value of consistently high-quality and reliable processes, as well as personalization, and instead of saying "slow down," they would promote greater urgency. It will require governments to engage in constant, informed dialogue, stick to priorities, avoid gimmicks, and admit mistakes. Delivering sustained system improvement and consistent world-class performance will be an exacting challenge for whole systems. System leaders around the world are just beginning to understand what it will take.

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