



# Schools and school systems facing complexity: organisational challenges

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# No break, no bells in school of the future

It looks more like a smart corporate headquarters than a place for teenagers to learn. Anushka Asthana reports on a new academy in the vanguard of a fresh approach to education



**J**ared Downer, 17, stared in awe at the curved, concrete walls towering above him. Stepping into the open lobby, more than 15 metres high, he saw sweeping staircases, multi-coloured up-lighting and sound-proof glass walls. A striking, arched ceiling stretched above him with retractable panels and mirrors that reflected light back towards the centre-piece – a huge eye-shaped pod filled with computers.



'Mindblowing': head boy Jared

futuristic, wave school in Phila that doubled a McMurdo is ments. At Lea lege in Dudley subject lesson times lasting 'deep, immersi is part of the funded by the the state-fund where, prima Devon, opera allowing pupil from 7.45am to 4.45pm. In a shire, student evening or onl But not ever new style. Sor will not get the need and that too cutting edg has run a serie Andy Hibbe group the Parc academy was could be a mo ure. 'It is quite be hugely ben he said. 'But I v my children a Hibberd ar might be happ to have regula they might sto sure of exams Teachers w people need ti



# Governance: two definitions

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“The means by which an activity or ensemble of activities is controlled and directed” (P. Hirst, ‘Democracy and Governance’, 2000)

“The co-ordinative structures through which broad political intent is translated into specific programmes of action”

(C. Skelcher and N. Mathur, ‘Governance arrangements and public service performance’, 2004)

# Tensions in governance

- Coherence vs. fragmentation
- Autonomy vs. community/public interest
- Diversity of provision vs. social equity
- Competition vs. collaboration
- Central vs. local decision-making





# My central question

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How appropriate are current models of governance for meeting the needs of education in a complex and fast-changing world?







# Four models of governance

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- Competitive market (CM)
- School empowerment (SE)
- Local empowerment (LE)
- Quality control (QC)





# Competitive market (CM)

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## *Typical policies*

*Per capita* funding;  
More open enrolment

## *Main perspective*

Commercial

## *Picture of the school*

Small business

## *'Centre of gravity'*

Local competitive arena



# School empowerment (SE)

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***Typical policies***

Devolution to schools;  
School council

***Main perspective***

Political/managerial

***Picture of the school***

Participatory community

***'Centre of gravity'***

The individual school





# Local empowerment (LE)

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***Typical policies***

Devolution to locality;  
Community council

***Main perspective***

Political/managerial

***Picture of the school***

One of a 'family' of schools

***'Centre of gravity'***

Locality as a social unit



# Quality control (QC)

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*Typical policies*

Performance targets;  
Systematic inspections

*Main perspective*

Bureaucratic

*Picture of the school*

Point of delivery/local  
outlet

*'Centre of gravity'*

Central or other state  
bodies

# Forms of accountability 1

- **Contractual:** explicit or tacit contract, educators to achieve outcomes expected by audiences, often measurement-driven
- **Responsive:** educators take decisions in light of stakeholders' preferences, process rather than outcomes, focus on involvement, consent

(Adapted from M. Halstead, 'Accountability and values', 1994).





## Forms of accountability 2

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- CM: contractual (parents as 'consumers')
- SE: responsive (school community)
- LE: responsive (local community)
- QC: contractual (central or state)



# Modes of accountability

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CM: consumerist

SE: 'dual' (professional and lay)

LE: 'community forum'

QC: hierarchical

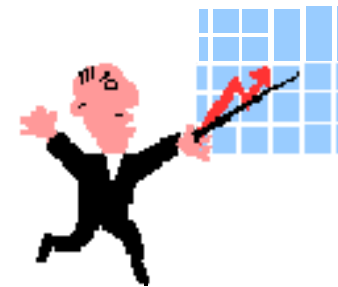
# Purposes of performance measurement

CM: inform consumer choice

SE: provide information for improvement

LE: 'benchmark' across local schools

QC: monitor and develop system





# Key school leadership roles

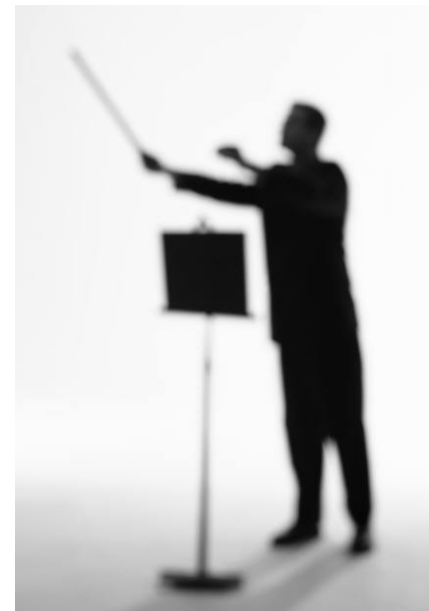
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CM: entrepreneur

SE: director and co-ordinator

LE: networker

QC: production manager







# Impact of 'policy eclecticism'

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"School leaders can be excused for feeling that they are being pulled in many different directions simultaneously. They **are** being pulled in many different directions simultaneously"

(K. Leithwood, 'School leadership in the context of accountability policies', 2001).



# Barriers to system-wide innovation

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CM: standardisation

SE: fragmentation

LE: inconsistency

QC: maintenance






# Treating experiments as solutions

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Experiments in the social field usually fail. They fail because:

- On average, new ideas are poor
- Incompetence in implementing new ideas makes even good ideas less productive
- New ideas are likely to be oversold, leading to excessive expectations.

(Adapted from J. March, *The Pursuit of Organisational Intelligence*, 1999).



# From learning organisation to learning system?

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- Openness to new ideas
- Tolerance for divergent points of view
- Failure valued as a source of learning
- Questioning of basic assumptions
- Speculative thinking about future states
- Search for connections, systemic coherence

(Adapted from K. Leithwood *et al.*, *Changing Leadership for Changing Times*, 1999).



# Learning system model (LS)

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*Typical policies*

'Reform by small steps';  
Evidence-informed P & P;  
Manage conflicting objectives

*Main perspective*

Developmental

*Picture of the school*

Creative, linked unit within  
wider system

*'Centre of gravity'*

Connections between groups  
and levels



# Implications of LS model

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- Need for system leadership
- Emphasis on lateral communications
- Moderate and incremental decision-making
- Respect for evidence
- Understanding practicalities of change



# The motor of change

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“Change comes from small initiatives which work... We cannot wait for great visions from great people, for they are in short supply... it is up to us to light our own small fires in the darkness”.

(C. Handy, *The Empty Raincoat: Making Sense of the Future*, 1994).

