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# Managing major educational change: Is the Cyclical Integration Model the answer?

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## Abstract

Where minds meet, there lies the change vector. I have for a long time been fascinated by the way in which change, and specifically educational change, is managed. More often than not it seems, minds fail to meet in a crucial change-space. They either unwittingly zip past each other, deliberately avoid one another, or worse still, collide with excruciating force. This paper examines the interrelated role of government, the public service and teachers in successfully transitioning major change. It is argued that unless these bodies operate in synchrony, change negotiation is likely to be hampered. To this end, a model of 'cyclical integration' is presented and supported by driving questions for each of the three agencies facilitating the change process. Although it is considered that these questions are sufficiently broad to encompass change management across any number of enterprises, what is being considered in this paper is the arena of education.

**Keywords:** change management – policy – Australia – education

## 1. The Challenge

I have a friend, Ken, recognised as an excellent teacher who left the profession several years ago citing a very disturbing reason for his exit. He claimed that he was leaving because he was fed up with "all the outcomes-based education bullshit that has been dumped on us from on high". Although I share his sentiments about outcomes-based education *per se* and have said so publically (Berlach, 2004; Berlach & McNaught, 2007), his comment provided a catalyst for deeper thinking about the nature of change itself. Why did he think that something that came "from on high" was best described by an expletive? How did he see himself in relation to the amorphous "on high"? Why did he express powerlessness in the form of "dumped on us". We shall return to Ken later, right now, let us plot a different trajectory.

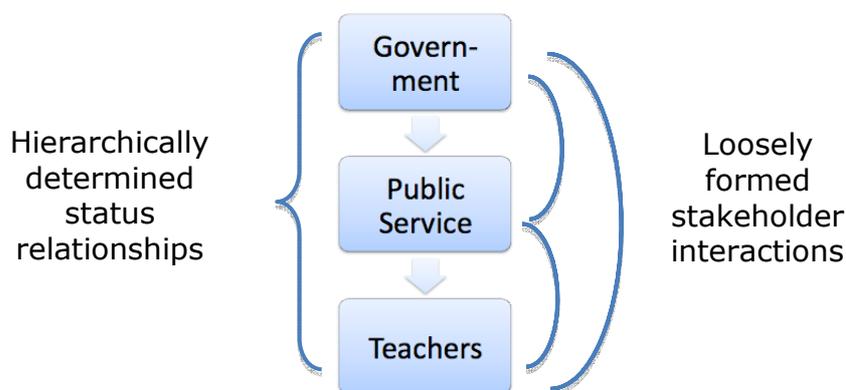
According to respected change management theorist Michael Fullan (2007), not too many people relish the thought of change. With a touch of irony, Fullan suggests that "if people were given the literal choice of 'change or die'..." (p. 42), societal evidence suggests that the likelihood of choosing change is nine to one against them. Fullan's grim view of change, as cited above, is unlikely to come as a revelation to those who have been involved in the enterprise of managing educational change for any extended period. Whenever change is mooted, securing universal agreement regarding its necessity is rare. What is not rare,

however, is resistance, often encountered in the form of direct attack, passive-aggressive posturing, or begrudging acquiescence.

Half a century of research in motivational theory has verified that change comes in one of two ways, as a response to a stimulus presented in either the external or internal environment. Response to an externally mediated stimulus normally results in extrinsically motivated behaviour in the form of compliance; whereas an internally generated stimulus results in intrinsic motivation in the form of desire. It has been shown that both forms of motivation are powerful and highly efficacious for human endeavour (Bandura, 1986; Barry & King, 1998). It is the intrinsic form of motivation, however, that tends to be the more enduring as it is more closely aligned with personal goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Schunk, 1995; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2003). Essentially, change from within the individual (self-motivated) is less stressful, more highly motivating and more enduring than change which is externally mediated. In Rotter's (1954) terms, if the locus of control is internal, change is likely to succeed for, in the language of deCharms (1972, 1984), the driver sees him/herself as the origin rather than the pawn in the transaction. Given such an understanding, externally imposed change is likely to be a potentially unpalatable motivator.

The further individuals are from the source of a change decision, the greater will be their psychological alienation and associated angst (Hargreaves, 1998; Rosenholtz, 1989). Education is not immune from this general principle. Decisions are typically generated by government, regulated by the public service and implemented by teachers. This hierarchical model is represented in Figure 1. Although informed communication between these stakeholders is often attempted via focus groups, committee representation, individual and group submissions and the like, there is normally little continuing effectual dialogue once each agency has attended to its designated task. Decisions are made, policy is drafted and consequent implementation expected.

*Figure 1.* Change agent relationship: Hierarchically-based model.



Such a top-down model typically begins to fracture as decisions are moved further and further down line, as people lose sight of origins and begin to feel like pawns. The reasons for potential hierarchical fragmentation are perhaps

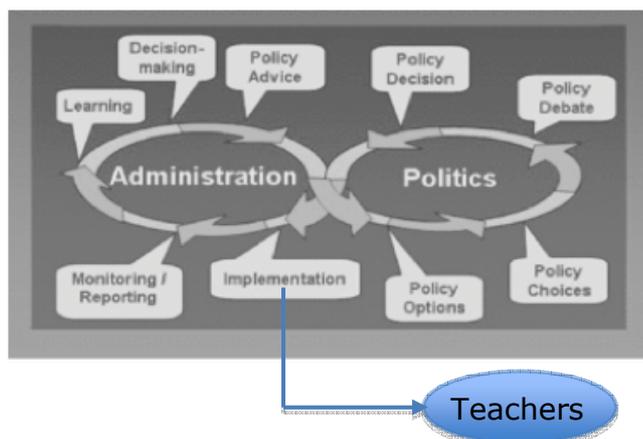
self-evident. Nevertheless, key factors are worth highlighting. In the first place, politicians are by definition political creatures – they play the public image game necessary for holding government at the next election. They have a confident approach, are full of optimism, and use the sort of jargon (often illusory) that tends to suggest they know what they are talking about and really do have the answers. By way of example, we can quote verbatim the inspirational language peppered throughout a recent speech to Teaching Australia given by the Australian Federal Minister for Education:

committed to improving... improvement in quality... collaborative reform... new era of quality and reform... share responsibility for educational outcomes... teacher quality... raise achievement in disadvantaged school communities... Improving our schools... higher impact and performance... rigorous shared evaluation... for every child, in every school, in every community... Education Revolution... transparency and openness... better education system (Gillard, 2008).

Unlike politicians who make pronouncements, public servants are expected to administer the process of turning a ministerial statement into implementable policy. This is an unenviable task, for it is invariably the public service (department) that will be the proverbial meat in the sandwich – politicians pushing down (deadlines, budgets, accountability) and teachers and their professional associations pushing up (policy criticism, workload and remuneration issues).

Given the nature of the interplay between politics and the public service, hierarchical fragmentation may not be an unreasonable expectation. Bourgon's (2008) representation of this interplay details the intricacies of the decision making process (Figure 2). The diagram shows that although the work of the two bodies intersects in the middle of the 'figure eight', each by-and-large operates in its individual world. Policy so produced is then presented to teachers for implementation.

Figure 2. Bourgon's (2008, p. 395) interplay between administration and politics. [Model embellished with a loop to Teachers]



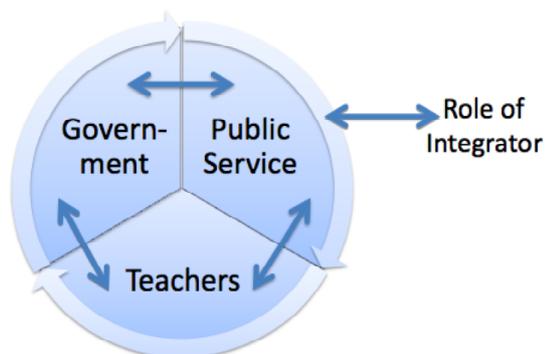
It is often at this point of 'now do it', such as in the case of the outcomes-based education scenario mentioned previously (Berlach, 2004; Berlach & O'Neill, 2008), that a grass-roots outcry erupts. Research literature suggests that it is not unusual for teachers to feel "dumped upon from on high", to use my friend Ken's words, when encountering implementation directives for which they feel no ownership (Conley & Glasman, 2008; Fullen, 2001, 1993; Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Horsley, 2009).

Fragmentation *en route* from idea to policy to implementation has the potential of torpedoing any initiative. Success at the point of delivery is always the best indicator of an effectively managed change process. Bourgon (2008) is insightful when she writes,

A good public policy is one that achieves the intended results at the lowest possible cost to society while minimising unintended consequences. While policy decisions receive most attention, *policy implementation is where success is defined*. This is where we can see the difference between grand ideas with no future and good ideas that generate long term benefits for the country (p. 394, italics added).

Given that the hierarchically-based model has the potential to suffer from down-line fragmentation, change management based on a more stable foundation may yield better results. The alternative presented here is the Cyclical Integration Model (Figure 3). Following Fullan's (2007) lead that modern theories of change management lead "inevitably to the conclusion that working on 'coherence' is the key to dealing with the fragmented demands of overloaded reform agendas" (p. xii), the model as presented acknowledges the unique contributions of the three stakeholders under consideration – government, the public service, teachers – while at the same time attempting to strengthen the relationships between them. How this is undertaken, together with an investigation of the role of the Integrator, is now considered.

Figure 3. Change agent relationship: Cyclical Integration Model.



## 2. The Cyclical Integration Model of Change Management

The model presented in Figure 3 is comprised of an integrated operational component (government, public service and teachers; as encountered earlier) and one external Integrator having an executive function. The operational component is created to deal with introduction of significant change initiatives.

We will return to the notion of what may be termed as significant later. More immediately, the discussion revolves around the function of the operational component and then moves to a consideration of the role of the integrator.

The model is organic in nature in that rather than operate in a push-down fashion, members of the operational component are engaged in collegial dialogue during the formulation of a proposed change. Government still sets agendas, the public service still produces policy documents which teachers still implement, but each does so in an environment of ongoing dialogue and mutual cooperation (Figure 3, arrows). Each party's representatives sit together at the discussion table armed with what I have termed 'framing questions' rather than with predetermined objections, premature solutions or prepared ideologies. The framing questions are big picture in nature.

The kind of change management being advocated in this paper is premised on consensus rather than dictum. Framing questions for guiding the process have been developed for each of the key stakeholders (Tables 1, 2, 3). These are not exhaustive but more illustrative of the kinds of questions that need to be considered when major change is being contemplated. Attention to the matters raised in the framing questions may go a long way to helping alleviate the angst often associated with change. It may also lead to fewer ineffectual policy decisions and concomitant implementation failures occurring (such as Western Australia's ill conceived foray into outcomes-based education; and the recent federal government policy of distributing laptops to secondary students without giving preliminary thought to matters such as hardware storage, technical support, and software updates).

The framing questions for government (Table 1) focus on big picture issues, while at the same time recognising the importance of national priorities and international trends. Considered answers to questions such as these is likely to result in establishing greater jurisdictional respectability, providing a clearer project rationale, and leading to a more satisfactory outcome.

*Table 1. Framing questions for government as an agent of change*

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### **Enterprise Focus**

Does a clear understanding exist of precisely what is meant by the term 'compulsory education'? If not, why not; if yes, how does the proposed change fall within defined parameters?

### **International Respectability**

Does the proposed change model have any international pedigree? Are countries who are performing strongly on measures such as TIMMS<sup>1</sup> and PISA<sup>2</sup> adopting/considering similar changes?

### **Driving Agency**

What hard evidence is there that this change ought to be considered? If little, should a report be commissioned? If so, how will objective committee representation be guaranteed?

### **Budgetary Possibility**

Is a report being commissioned to buy political time or is funding available to implement report recommendations?

### **Clarity of Purpose**

Is the primary aim of the change to gain political leverage or to secure real, beneficial and lasting educational advantage?

### **Public Service Achievability**

Given other tasks currently being undertaken, are sufficiently experienced personnel available in the relevant government department to do 'due diligence' to this task at this time? If not, how will the issue of required personnel be addressed?

### **Change Evaluation**

How will 'bang for the buck' be evaluated? How will it be determined whether or not tax payers' money has been appropriately invested?

### **Integrator Profiling**

Given the expertise on both sides of the House, who is in the best position to take on the role of Integrator for this particular project?

<sup>1</sup> Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study.

<sup>2</sup> Programme for International Student Assessment.

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Whereas the government framing questions are change policy related, public service questions (Table 2) focus more on the change process. Giving serious attention to such questions is likely to result in a better coordinated approach, fewer resolutions later proving to be unworkable, and greater receptivity by teachers.

*Table 2. Framing questions for the public service as an agent of change*

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### **Theoretical Justifiability**

What theory with an established track record is being used to interpret the proposed change? What proposed model is being considered?

### **Conceptual Coherence**

How is the change being conceived of in terms of resourcing, responsibilities, professional development and implementation timelines?

### **Structural Integrity**

In line with developmental learning theories, is content sequenced and incremental in presentation? Is the proposed change so structured that its various components sequenced and integrated?

**Linguistic Clarity**

Can the proposed change be understood in 'plain language'? Is it free of jargon, spin and embellishment? Is it accessible to the general public?

**Psychometric Validity**

Are evaluation regimes easily comprehensible or does one have to hold a PhD in statistical analysis to understand how children are being assessed?

**Empirical Veracity**

Prior to being adopted for system-wide implementation, have field trials shown the proposed change to be efficacious?

**Courageous Humility**

If field-failure is evident, is there a preparedness to go back to the drawing board rather than press on regardless?

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The framing questions for the teaching profession (Table 3) centre on implementation imperatives. At the heart of these questions is an overarching question which asks 'what could possibly hamper policy delivery?'. In the ultimate sense, as identified earlier in this paper (Bourgon, 2008), policy without successful delivery is ineffective, frustrating and for many individuals, psychologically and emotionally costly.

*Table 3. Framing questions for teachers (and their professional associations) as agents of change*

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**Industry Support**

Do the arms of the profession potentially affected by the change see it as being desirable and generally advantageous?

**Professional Integrity**

How does the proposed change generally align with the nature of "teachers' work" (Connell, 1985)?

**Workload reality**

How much extra time will teachers be required to give to implementing the proposed change? What will be the overall impact on workloads?

**Curriculum Viability**

Will the proposed change impact further on the crowding of the curriculum? Is it a replacement for something or an addition?

**Pedagogical Integrity**

Are teaching methods expected to change as a result of the initiative? If so, have the proposed methods been tested?

**Provision of Professional Development**

What and how many PD events will be required to resource teachers prior to the change being implemented?

### **Practicability Feasibility**

Given the nature of the school year, is the change achievable within the timeframe proposed?

### **Transition Arrangements**

How will students be transitioned so that their learning will not be negatively affected by the change?

### **Parental Acceptance**

Are parents likely to see this change as positive and have they been provided with sufficient information to make such a judgement?

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These are big questions which are undergirded by four assumptions. The first is that each member of the operational component has a genuine desire to put children's educational needs ahead of their own professional posturing. The second assumption is that ongoing dialogue in a spirit of collegiality produces greater internal motivation leading to results superior to those obtainable by forced compliance. A third assumption is that the earlier in the process that participation occurs, the greater will be the sense of ownership and the lower the resistance to change. In the words of my friend Ken, the less chance of feeling like one is "dumped on". The final assumption is that all members of the operational component accept accolades for success and responsibility for failure, as a unit. In other words, no one plays the "blame game" – the unit either succeeds or fails as one body. Such an assumption acts as a powerful success motivator.

The proposed model necessitates risk-taking on the part of all parties – the risk of accepting the underlying assumptions; the risk of surrendering the power that comes with status; the risk of having to accept compromise; the risk of operational component failure despite the genuine efforts of all parties. Leaders need to see such risks as worthwhile if taking them is likely to result in more favourable outcome for end users, namely students. In a significant – in terms of size and scope – meta-analytic study relating to learning undertaken by Leithwood *et al.* (2004), it was found that successful leaders displayed three sets of core practices: setting directions, defined as providing clarity of purpose; developing people, defined as creating shared ownership regarding the direction to be taken; and redesigning the organisation, defined as delivering change which makes something obviously better. The model being advocated here allows for all three core practices to be engaged.

A second platform of the proposed model is the function of an Integrator (Figure 3) and this will now be considered. This individual's role is one of consulting, after a scheduled meeting, with parties who have indicated that they would appreciate an independent and objective view on anything that may have transpired during the course of the meeting. The arrow heads on the outside

circle of the model (Fig 3) represent the fluid environment in which the Integrator operates. S/he is available to all parties but is not aligned with any. The Integrator listens to concerns and after due deliberation (possibly following discussion with other members of the operational component), proposes a way forward. S/he may be able to provide a different perspective on a particular impasse or stalemate that the group as a whole has encountered. Who should fulfil the role of Integrator? The counsel of Bourgon (2008), provides direction in this regard,

We need to find ways to engage ministers in the decision-making process surrounding risks, innovations and experimentations. This is obviously lacking at this time in many of our countries... (p. 401).

The recommended approach in the present model is that a politician, but not a minister, accept responsibility for the role of Integrator. It is probable that for any significant change measure the Minister (or minister assisting the Minister) will be a member of the operational component. Accordingly, it is recommended that the role be undertaken by a parliamentary backbencher. There are a number of reasons why a member from the backbenches (from either side of the House) would fill this role admirably. The first may be represented by the words of Fullan (2007) who writes,

If we are to achieve large-scale reform, governments are essential. They have the potential to be a major force for transformation. The historical evidence to date, however, suggests that few governments have gotten this right (p. 236).

In the present model lies an opportunity for governments, and future governments, to make a difference, to be a force for transformation in a bipartisan fashion. Secondly, an Integrator selected from either side of the House, has a greater chance of being seen by all parties as an apolitical appointment. Thirdly, as a member of the parliamentary fraternity, such an individual is less likely to be intimidated by the government representative of the operational component. Fourthly, backbenchers have the requisite experience as they sit on and chair numerous committees on a regular basis. Finally, there is a strong likelihood that they will still be around after the next election, although not necessarily holding government, thereby providing continuity of process.

### **3. Epilogue**

If change management was to be approached differently, it is likely that outcomes too would be different. In terms of teacher retention, for example, evidence exists showing that the profession is hemorrhaging teachers. A national report titled *Top of the Class* (House of Representatives, Standing Committee on Education and Vocational Training, 2007) cited statistics which indicated that it is,

...estimated that up to 25% of teachers may leave the profession within five years. In the recent survey of beginning teachers by the Australian

Education Union, 45.6% of respondents did not see themselves teaching in 10 years time (p. 9).

The Cyclical Integration Model of change management presents an opportunity for major stakeholders to formulate ideas in a collegial environment with the counsel of an experienced but operationally uninvolved parliamentarian, in a fashion that will make a real difference. It provides an opportunity for doing things differently. Bourgon (2008), President Emeritus at the Canada School of Public Service, whose insights have been cited earlier, is adamant that a fresh perspective on change management is required. She writes,

These days, the hierarchical model of government increasingly co-exists with the management of networks. Modern government entails the management of the traditional power structure and of non-hierarchical, non-traditional relationships (p. 396).

Perhaps now is an opportune time to take a closer look at models which favour “non-hierarchical, non-traditional relationships”. Perhaps this could result in change being managed in a way that is more palatable to those affected down-line – teachers. Perhaps Ken would be the first of many change-damaged teachers to return to the profession.

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