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It is symbolic that the first animal that scientists cloned was a sheep – the famous ‘Dolly’. Sheep are extremely obedient animals, easily controlled, compliant, and behave in quite predictable ways. A sharp bark from an assertive and single-minded sheep-dog directs the sheep in whatever predetermined direction the dog’s owner dictates. The sheep-dog is the ultimate technocrat. It is single-minded, and uncompromising in responding to its master’s bidding, methodical, intense, controlling and meticulous in the execution of its duties.

Sadly, the mind of the technocrat appears to drive the current standards/standardisation agenda that has infected educational jurisdictions world wide, and has propagated a type of leadership that is more interested in producing politically attractive test scores than enhancing students’ learning. Technocrats choose the technical side of an issue over the social and human consequences and want passionately for reason to crush emotion. Pamela Pitcher¹ has developed a composite picture of the organisational technocrat based on extensive research in an international corporate conglomerate. She produces a portrait of technocrats who value followers like ‘Dolly’ who never question authority, obediently follow orders and adhere to ‘standard operating procedures’. Technocrats always feel the past was simple and their own times more complex so they distrust the experiences of others who do not share their values. They know the management literature better than anyone and can use the rhetoric of decentralisation, empowerment and ‘participative management’, but rarely decentralise, empower or allow meaningful participation. They are strategic about human relations. Technocrats if they value anyone value other technocrats, so they produce organisational leadership clones, and when things go wrong as they inevitably do, the fault always resides with someone else. The ascendancy of the technocrat in education has paralleled the emergence of New Public

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Management (NPM) as the dominant model of policy development in many western educational jurisdictions.² By looking at New Public Management in relation to two other policy trends that have dominated the past thirty years we can begin to understand the evolution of different educational leadership approaches.

Traditional Public Administration

Until recent times, those of us who have worked in publicly funded education were part of large, highly centralised organisations such as school districts or Local Education Authorities. Administrators, including school leaders who worked within what might be described as Traditional Public Administration (TPA), were 'rule-driven bureaucrats executing and maintaining norms of integrity ... in a neutral way with the common good in mind. This perspective emphasises reliability, consistency, predictability and accountability'.³ These bureaucracies focused on the common good of all children and were organised to promote the consistency and reliability of results. Like most educators up until the early 1990s, I spent most of my working life within a traditional management structure.

Central government, in my case the government of Ontario, determined student diploma requirements and teachers' and principals' certification standards, produced curriculum guidelines, and contributed to a greater or lesser extent to the funding of schools. The actual administration of schools fell to a school district directed by a locally elected policy board (Local Education Authority or school district) that through its appointed officials fashioned second generation detailed curriculum documents, hired and fired principals and teachers, allocated resources, and interacted with the district's community. Principals, for example, were accountable to the senior officials above them in the hierarchy and these senior officials were in turn accountable to the elected school board. A major focus for these systems was on equity and a concern for the common good. For the most part, all schools were treated the same. The school district allocated money on a per student formula, paid teachers based on seniority, and assigned principals as determined by the system and an individual school's needs. Where these demands conflicted, system requirements usually prevailed.

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Changes tended to be incremental and schools did not stray too far from district procedures. Schools that became too innovative such as model or lighthouse schools usually regressed to the mean in short order.⁴ As long as schools and school leaders adhered to approved processes and procedures, the system allowed their leaders considerable leeway in the daily operations of the schools.

While it is dangerous to generalise, educators for the most part saw themselves as public servants who tried to balance the needs of individual students and parents and the collective aspirations of the larger community. For example, as an area superintendent⁵ with responsibility for a number of schools, one of my greatest challenges was to administer the school system's optional attendance policy. This policy required students to attend their neighbourhood primary or secondary school for their first year of enrolment. After one year they could move to any other school in the system with no questions asked. The theory behind the policy was that a student or parent could not know a school until the student had at least attended that school. It was believed that only then could they make an informed choice. Once students attended their designated school, we found that they almost invariably stayed. From a system's point of view this policy enabled administrators to balance enrolments so that all schools could offer broad academic, athletic and arts programs for all students, not just programs for an elite.

It was the job of the area superintendent to adjudicate parental appeals for exemption from this policy. My colleagues and I tried to weigh parental needs against those of the school and the total student population. I would on occasion get a parental request for a son or daughter to attend a non-designated school that, according to the parent, had a 'better class of students' – which could be translated as, 'I want my child in a school without students from minority backgrounds'. If I had acceded I would have created a stampede of 'white flight'. From my point of view a negative decision in a case of this nature was rather easy, but many situations were not so straightforward. One of my upper-middle-class schools offered Latin as an option. A number of parents used this as a reason to get their son or daughter into the more socially prestigious school. It was much harder to decide whether the student really wanted to take Latin or whether this was a ruse to 'beat the system'. I suspect in this age of 'the customer is always right' that my example sounds like

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bureaucratic interference, but the rights and opportunities of all the students and their parents seemed to me to be a more defensible and more ethical operating principle. As slow-moving and rule-bound as school systems might have been within TPA, there was a genuine attempt to attend to the needs of all parents and students, not just the affluent, the knowledgeable, the pushy, or the influential.

While these bureaucracies may have moved slowly, they did change, especially as regards the role of leaders. In my early years in education as I worked my way up the hierarchy, school districts tended to look for leadership candidates with strong managerial skills, especially at the secondary level where school leaders had to construct timetables. In the 1970s as the politics of education became more turbulent, the school districts expected their administrators to possess not only managerial and organisational skills but also people and political skills. The pervasiveness of the school effectiveness and school improvement movements in the 1980s meant that leaders now must also have expertise in teaching and learning. The term 'instructional leader' became current, and school systems expected their leaders to assume this mantle. In my own school system an effective schools project⁶ and the University of Toronto Learning Consortium⁷, among other professional enriching programs⁸, involved leaders in supporting each other by addressing ways to enhance students' learning. Like many school districts in Ontario in the 1980s, this focus on student learning was beginning to provide significant payoff.⁹ By the mid-1990s, however, these innovative and professionally enriching activities came to a screeching halt, as school jurisdictions turned to New Public Management (NPM) as a way to energise purportedly moribund educational systems.

New Public Management

Born during the Thatcher years in Britain and the Reagan years in the United States, New Public Management promised to usher in a new era of low-cost educational reform, and a remedy for the long-held belief that TPA was ineffective and too slow-moving to respond to the pressures of a globalised economy and the shrinking of time and space through technology. While few would argue with this appraisal of TPA, the solutions offered by NPM, were to say the least,

problematic. The renowned management expert Henry Mintzberg¹⁰ has described NPM as merely a new label for “old corporate values”. Government he adds ‘is not business; treating it as such demeans it. As for treating us like customers, I expect a lot more from my government than that, thank you. I am a citizen, not a mere customer.’ NPM in education promised significant improvements in educational results while offering dramatic savings in taxes through market driven accountability. It was argued that competitive business markets successfully produced excellent, low-priced products, therefore, why not apply this market technology to education? Similarly, governments adopted the prevailing business philosophy that advocated decentralisation of decision making based on the premise that the best decisions are made at the level in the organisation where the decisions have to be carried out; budgets should be devolved to schools through site-based management (or local management of schools in the UK).¹¹

The final cornerstone of NPM in education was community involvement. To this end, some jurisdictions, like New Zealand and New Brunswick in Canada, totally eliminated school districts (LEAs) or, as in the cases of the United Kingdom and Ontario, reduced their powers drastically and devolved considerable responsibilities previously held by school districts and their administrators to councils of locally elected (or appointed) school governors. Some of these local councils, such as school governors in the case of the UK, have the power to hire and fire, reward and discipline principals (school heads)¹² and teachers and can wield considerable influence on daily operations within schools. While the rhetoric of these moves has focused on local democracy, a more cynical view is that the elimination of school districts removes a strong political impediment to a central government’s agenda. How democratic these local councils are is also a matter of dispute. As Mortimore and his colleagues found in their study of British primary schools, local elites of more affluent parents often dominate these local councils and create divisions in the school community between ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’.¹³ For school leaders and particularly principals, this move has required them to develop or polish their political skills and spend more time in ‘the care and feeding’ of local politicians and less time attending to teaching and learning in their schools.

As NPM became the policy process of choice, governments across

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the western world initiated a wave of reform in the late 1980s and well into the 1990s. Educational jurisdictions engaged in a race to impose a new educational orthodoxy¹⁴ on their schools that demanded new and tough curriculum standards for students to ensure that these nations, states and provinces were economically competitive in the globalised economy. Lurking behind this agenda was a distrust of educational professionals in general and their unions in particular, and a view that any opposition to or criticism of this 'orthodoxy' was the work of self-serving interest groups.

While few people would oppose the goal of improved educational achievement, in reality these standards have tended to become standardised into national, state or provincial curricula, supported by standardised tests to ensure accountability and customer information to help 'consumers' make informed choices about schools, and including increasingly standardised teaching strategies or 'best practices'. This very rational, linear and technocratic approach to educational change has run into one fundamental roadblock however – the students are non-standard, and teaching and leading are often non-rational activities. As a colleague once proclaimed, "the parents keep sending the wrong kids." Not only do students' needs, interests, abilities, learning styles and learning rates differ, but also so do their genders, ethnicities, religions, first languages, and cultures. Somehow, teaching to 'Norm', that mythical student who sits firmly in the middle of the class and achieves better than half of his classmates and not as well as the other half, is no longer appropriate.

Related closely to this standard's paradox is a push for 'deep learning', learning for understanding – undoubtedly an admirable goal.¹⁵ Like the focus on high standards, 'the devil is in the details'. Let us suppose a jurisdiction needs a new curriculum for the middle years (ages 11 to 13). Most jurisdictions design curriculum by committee and send specialists off to different settings to decide what students in the example of the middle years should learn. Since these committee members are specialists who are steeped in their subjects and look at the world through their unique prisms, they design with their particular passions and prejudices in mind. This results in courses of study that when aggregated are so 'stuffed' with content that students are subjected to a 'hurried' curriculum that does not provide the time for students and teachers to explore topics in depth. To compound the problem, schools organise these various subjects into neat little pack-

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ages of time for all subjects, regardless of what amount of learning is required in each, and then at the end of the day schools expect students to integrate their learning. I have worked with committees containing some outstanding subject experts who have found the challenge of integrating curriculum very, very, difficult, yet schools expect students to do what the professionals find quite complex. In turn, teachers challenged by their need to cover the curriculum to ensure students are ready for high stakes tests race through the mandated curriculum with little time to contextualise “students’ learning in what they have learned before, in what other teachers are also teaching them, and in students’ own cultures and lives.”¹⁶

A related but no less ‘unintended consequence’ of the new ‘educational orthodoxy’ produced by NPM is a contraction of the curriculum for the most challenged and marginalised students. School jurisdictions have logically zeroed in on literacy and numeracy as key building blocks for future learning. For example, the British government has poured millions of pounds into its literacy and numeracy strategies. Similarly, the Bush government’s No Child Left Behind policy in the USA has attacked issues of literacy and numeracy through more testing of students, accountability for teachers, and a reward and punishment strategy for a school’s performance. The high stakes nature and political profile of both of these strategies, however, has forced teachers to focus on short-term literacy and numeracy goals for their most challenged students, and in the process has narrowed the curriculum for students who probably need such subjects as the arts, vocational programs and physical education as much, if not more, than more advantaged students. It seems paradoxical that the most needy students get the most sterile curriculum. As Bracy¹⁷ states in his report on American education in 2004,

far too many news stories this year began with sentences like this “To give her third graders an extra 50 minutes of reading daily, the principal has eliminated music, art, and gym.” “Raymond Middle School lost its two art teachers last year. Home economics was eliminated along with most foreign language classes and some physical education classes.”

NPM also valorises neutral measurement of educational efficacy, usually expressed in terms of numbers. If in business the sharehold-

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ers can keep score of their investments, then the educational shareholders, the taxpayers, should be able to determine just as easily how well their educational investments are paying off. This simple logic has appeal, but determining the payoff on educational investments is long term and not easily defined and measured in the short term like quarterly profits. This is not a defence of the status quo. Most educators want to be held accountable, but they don't want to be held responsible for things over which they have no control such as poverty, inadequate budgets, run down school buildings, and transient students. They also recognise the importance of assessment in promoting student learning, but not just the assessment *of* learning but more importantly 'assessment *for* learning' and assessment *as* learning.¹⁸ Recently educational scholars have corroborated what good teachers have always known and called for a paradigm shift that focuses educational assessment on 'supporting learning rather than on sorting and selecting students'. They argue that most educational measurement specialists still operate from a dated behaviourist perspective with little consideration of contemporary theories of learning and cognition.¹⁹ If educators are to be held truly accountable for teaching and learning then the indicators of their efforts must be more sensitive to the nuances of teaching and learning and the non-standardised nature of the students they teach, rather than the obsolete, blunt but inexpensive instruments that allegedly measure students' learning at that moment.

In line with the demand for accountability that is inherent in NPM and the need for a 'bottom line' that is simple and easily interpreted, governments internationally have blitzed schools with standardised tests. Standardised tests can provide excellent information on the strengths and weaknesses of a curriculum, help schools address general programming issues, and if used effectively by teachers, inform instructional decisions. The overuse of assessments in many jurisdictions however is approaching a 'pathology of intensity'.²⁰ This occurs when society takes something that is useful, and overuses it to the point that it becomes ineffectual, such as penicillin in the treatment of SARS and some forms of syphilis. High stakes assessments *of* learning have become so numerous and pervasive that their effects have become increasingly short term and anti-thetical to sustainable long-term changes.²¹ The international obsession with assessment *of* learning undermines the intellectual

growth of students because it consumes an inordinate amount of time in checking for growth that could be used for supporting growth – ‘deep’ learning and assessment *for* learning.

My grandsons have both recently participated in the Educational Quality Assurance Office’s (EQAO) large scale testing for grade 3 and grade 6 in the province of Ontario.²² For both boys and for many like them, capable middle-class students, it was a non-event. For most of their teachers in the leafy suburb in which they live, it was an inconvenience. For teachers in a nearby inner city, however, where poverty is endemic and special education needs under-served, it was an ordeal and a threat. On most standardised tests or assessments such as those set by the EQAO, one third of the students are like my grandsons and will pass without difficulty, one third will fail and learn early in life that they are failures – which leaves the one third that can go one way or the other. So the argument is about how do we boost this middle third to make a school look good? In Ontario, EQAO only interrupts two weeks of the children’s learning. In some places, however, there is so much time given over to preparing for tests and then writing them up, that I wonder when students have enough time to learn something more important than becoming a good test taker.²³ If life required the skills necessary to perform on most multiple-choice or recall tests then the investment of time, energy and money that goes into standardised testing might be worthwhile. But the last time I looked, the world was a pretty complex place and students need rather sophisticated problem-solving skills.

Government pressure on school leaders to make this flawed system work forces them to attempt to motivate reluctant teachers to work harder and achieve more in a climate of politically biased, systemic, cleverly orchestrated criticism and humiliation in many educational jurisdictions. For example, without any verifiable evidence a former Chief Inspector of Schools for England and Wales glibly announced that the country had 15,000 incompetent teachers. This number proved to be wonderful fodder for the right wing press, and only served to make the job of school leaders much more difficult.²⁴ In Ontario from 1995 until 2003, a Progressive Conservative government took every opportunity to criticise teachers and their unions. The province’s Minister of Education declared to his officials that we must ‘create a crisis’ by exaggerating the problems of the school system in Ontario as a way to promote the government’s agenda. In

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this climate, public officials entreated leaders in the brave new world of NPM to become 'instructional leaders'. Leadership was seen as something that people with formal power do to people without it. The role of leaders was to attend to "the behaviours of teachers as they engage in activities directly affecting the growth of students."²⁵ Heroically, the leader, usually narrowly defined as the principal (or school head), had to know how each teacher was teaching and how to help each one to teach more effectively. Effectiveness, however, has many meanings depending on context. Some educational divisions, particularly in the USA, define effectiveness almost exclusively in terms of how well students achieve on standardised tests. England determines effectiveness through a combination of external testing and central government inspections that determine effectiveness based on a government template of efficiency, effectiveness and economy. With little discretionary time and a need to respond to external pressures, 'instructional leadership' for many principals means using various appraisal systems, including performance pay in some places, to pressure teachers into ratcheting up student performance as determined by high-stakes tests.

Ironically, within the technocratic world of New Public Management, governments have centralised the very 'stuff' of education – the 'what', 'when', and 'how do we know' – and downloaded budgets, repairing toilets, hiring and firing custodial staff, and organising transportation routes to the schools and their leaders in the name of site-based management. With the demise of intermediary agencies such as schools districts and Local Education Authorities that often performed these tasks under TPA, school leaders have assumed responsibility for all of the related management and administration of their establishments. Many school leaders have willingly bought into this model because it is a great deal easier to arrange for a new roof than to work with the mediocre teacher who is just good enough to avoid being fired but not good enough to truly inspire students' learning. Besides, that new roof is a visible symbol of a leader's legacy, but the modest improvement of the mediocre teacher is often very difficult to display and extremely hard and frustrating work. It is more rewarding and much easier to manage things than to be an 'instructional leader' or a 'leader of learning'.

School leaders within NPM must not only be managers who can ensure the smooth operation of their schools, they must also

become excellent marketers of their schools, facilitators of quality teachers' lessons, agents for improved student outcomes, and sophisticated politicians who can work effectively with empowered local councils. School leadership has become 'greedy' work because organisations now make "total claims on their members and attempt to encompass within their circle the whole personality."²⁶ This view of leadership is enshrined in numerous policy documents in many educational jurisdictions that list the competencies or 'standards' for school leaders.

Best practice: a technocrat's dream

Around the world there appears to be a search for a 'Holy Grail' of 'best practice' in leadership: what I described elsewhere as a technocrat's dream.²⁷ My attribution is that technocrats create lists of 'best practices' to emphasise the technical conceptions of a problem or activity to avoid addressing the human and social consequences of their policies, and use these lists as benchmarks for the recruitment and assessment of 'designer' leaders.²⁸ For example, Ken Leithwood and his colleagues from the University of Toronto surveyed leadership standards from Australia, New Zealand, the UK, and the USA and listed 121 leadership practices that are necessary for leaders to succeed in the contemporary policy environment.²⁹ The 'lists' or 'templates' that do exist seem to require people of heroic abilities to lead schools. Principals are not only required to lead, manage and attend to culture along with structure;³⁰ they must unite their school through "inspiring visions"³¹ that empower others by "distributing" leadership among colleagues.³² This pressure has led to feelings of "overwhelming responsibilities, information perplexity, and emotional anxiety."³³ New principals are described as "frightened" by the challenge of principalship.³⁴ Since most of us are merely mortal, such lists simply promote guilt (at not being able to achieve everything on the list), martyrdom (from trying to do everything) or the compliant messenger ("I'm just doing what they tell us to do" – the Albert Speer defence). Paradoxically, at a time when policy makers place so much importance on leadership, it would appear that many reform policies actually inhibit leadership and oblige school principals and other educational leaders to become little more than the managers of exter-

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nally mandated changes. As a beleaguered principal in the *Change Over Time* study exclaimed, “sometimes the rules change, day by day in terms of what we can and can’t do.” He added, “no sooner are we ... moving forward in the direction that we believed we need to go, other changes and outside pressures have been imposed on us as well. So things that you want to do have to take a back seat sometimes and that can be quite frustrating.”³⁵

As a result, leadership succession has become an increasingly urgent issue in many western educational jurisdictions in recent years as the aging ‘baby boom’ generation moves on.³⁶ Equally worrying is the growing disenchantment of many potential leaders with the changing nature of leadership roles as a result of the standards/standardisation agenda.³⁷ One of the Ontario principals in the *Change Over Time* project, a woman in her early forties engaged in her first principalship, expressed her frustration with the pressures to ensure that her school complies with government reforms when she declared, “I feel like I am responsible for the whole world”. There is increasing evidence that she is not alone.³⁸ In the USA, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (2001) reported that the average age of principals in 1993–94 was 47.7, with 37.0 per cent over age 50, 53.6 per cent between ages 40 and 49, and 9.5 per cent age 39 or under. Half of the school districts surveyed in 2000 reported that there was a shortage of qualified candidates. “This shortage occurred among rural schools (52 per cent), suburban schools (45 per cent), and urban schools (47 per cent). These shortages of qualified principal candidates also occurred at all levels: elementary (47 per cent), junior high/middle (55 per cent), and senior high (55 per cent)”.³⁹ The NASSP attributes this failure to attract quality leaders to:

increased job stress, inadequate school funding, balancing school management with instructional leadership, new curriculum standards, educating an increasingly diverse student population, shouldering responsibility that once belonged at home or in the community, and then facing possible termination if their schools don’t show instant results.⁴⁰

A similar pattern exists in Canada and particularly in Ontario. A study by the Ontario Principals Council (OPC) shows that close to 60 per cent of principals and 30 per cent of assistant principals in ele-

mentary and secondary schools in public school boards will retire by 2005. By 2010, more than 80 per cent of principals and about 50 per cent of assistant principals will retire. The study forecasts that 1,900 Ontario schools out of about 3,200 in the English component of the public system will have a new principal by 2004. Moreover, the study reports that close to 8,000 teachers with principal and assistant principal qualifications are likely to retire by 2005, while only 715 teachers on average have acquired principal qualifications each year between 1997 and 2000.⁴¹ In England, 45 per cent of the 25,000 school heads (principals) are over 50 and will retire before 2014.⁴²

Love it or loathe it, New Public Management has profoundly affected the working lives of principals, teachers, and other educators. In particular it has changed the focus on 'inputs and processes' under TPA to 'outcomes and results'. This is a significant paradigm shift for educators. I have sat on both sides of the bargaining table during teacher contract talks. In addition to money, the conversations invariably focused on class sizes and pupil-teacher contacts. The argument I made as a union agent and that I heard as part of a management team was "we can do a much better job if we just had fewer students in our classes". It seems to me that optimum class size was always five students fewer than existed at any given moment. When we had 40 students in our classes we used to say, we could do a really good job with only 35. Since teachers' unions could offer little proof of improved student achievement they had to rely on the logic of their argument and trust in the profession. Unfortunately, for whatever reasons, the logic failed to convince and society stopped trusting and began to demand observable, measurable results. Education is at a crossroads. TPA is dated and obsolete and NPM has failed to deliver on its promises, and now many governments internationally are pouring resources into state education in an attempt to resuscitate bruised and battered educational systems.

The learning community

Added to the mix in recent years, are the scholars and business gurus who have begun to talk about another approach to organisational management and public policy development which is called 'organisational learning'. Popularised by Peter Senge⁴³ in the early 1990s,

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organisational learning (OL) recognises the turbulence of our times, and the need for organisations to build their internal capacity to respond to an unknowable future. Definitions of organisational learning range from organisations in which the individual can learn, to organisations in which people learn together as a team. Mulford has synthesised the literature of organisational learning in schools and identified four attributes of schools in which OL is operative – a trusting and collaborative culture, a shared and monitored mission, a risk taking climate and on-going and relevant professional development.⁴⁴ Increasingly scholars have extended OL to develop a rich body of educational literature⁴⁵ on ‘Learning Communities’ that has incorporated and expanded the idea of organisational learning to encompass the many stakeholders involved in education. The idea of a learning community (LC) includes not just the professionals but also parents, students and the community at large in dialogue and shared learning about the purposes, practices and policies of a school and a school district.

My colleagues and I described six processes that not only help define the idea of a Learning Community but also operationalise it.⁴⁶

- 1 *Community dialogue* refers to what Senge describes as “the capacity of members of a team to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine ‘thinking together’ ... allowing the group to discover insights not attainable individually.”⁴⁷ It is through dialogue with all stakeholders that schools and districts arrive at a shared sense of meaning which is crucial to their ability to respond to changing contexts.
- 2 *Self-evaluation* involves the entire school or district community keeping the organisation under review. Results of assessments and inspections should not be a surprise. The organisation uses whatever data and evidence available, to both problem solve and problem seek.
- 3 *Team Learning* provides opportunities for groups of professionals and other involved partners in education to engage in the planning of a school or district’s immediate and long-range goals and policies. Such teams can be as few as two teachers planning a unit for seven year olds on a cross-curricular topic, to a secondary school history department of eight teachers developing a

theme on historical causation, to a school-wide team of 20 teachers, parents and students developing cross-curricular approaches to 'assessment for learning', to a district-wide committee determining that district's goals for the ensuing years. Great teams in schools are like great athletic teams or musical groups or political campaign teams. As some coaches are fond of saying, and it is true 'there is no "I" in team' – individuals sacrifice their personal goals and aspirations for the good of the team and its purposes. They focus on the team's goals, participate openly and honestly in team dialogue, share leadership, and address conflict in ways that focus on ideas not personalities.

- 4 *Reculturing* addresses the cultural aspects of an organisation. Culture has many meanings, some complex, but I prefer the simple. Culture is "the way we do things around here"⁴⁸ or Gareth Morgan's, "How organisations work when no-one is looking."⁴⁹ Culture is a "way of life."⁵⁰ It defines reality for those who work in a social organisation; it also provides support, identity and "forms a framework for occupational learning."⁵¹ Within schools cultural norms are those rules not written down in any staff or student handbook, but rather they are the mutually understood standards for daily living. You usually learn the rules by inadvertently breaking them.

Elsewhere my colleague Louise Stoll and I have identified ten cultural norms for improving schools that have the capacity to deal with change. We have added an explanatory catchphrase that elaborates the meaning of each norm.

- Shared goals – 'we know where we're going'
- Responsibility for success – 'we can succeed'
- Collegiality – 'we're working on this together'
- Continuous improvement – 'we can get better'
- Lifelong learning – 'learning is for everyone'
- Risk taking – 'we learn by trying something new'
- Support – 'there's always someone there to help'

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- Mutual respect – ‘everyone has something to offer’
- Openness – ‘we can discuss our differences’
- Celebration and humour – ‘we feel good about ourselves’⁵²

Learning communities continually revisit and challenge the cultural norms of the school in such a way as to make the invisible visible, and the unspoken spoken, to bring the school’s ‘communities of practice’⁵³ into line with the cultural norms of a learning community.

- 5 *Creativity and spontaneity* based on trust and strong interpersonal relationships provide the energy for learning communities. Openness to experience and learning drives these communities to imagine the unimaginable and try the impossible. Gary Hamel explains that in the business world “companies fail to create the future not because they fail to predict it, but because they fail to imagine it. It is creativity and curiosity that they lack, not perspicuity.”⁵⁴ In the modern world, experimentation is the key to progress. Tom Peters, an American business writer, advises organisations to “fail, forward, fast.” He explains, “If nothing goes awry, then nothing new can emerge. That is an iron law of nature.”⁵⁵ Learning communities do not fear failure. In fact they embrace it as a learning experience, and a building block for future greatness.
- 6 *Making connections* is the ability to see ‘the big picture’. It is also described as ‘systems thinking’ or ‘joined up thinking’. It’s about looking at the forest, not just the trees. It is about seeing inter-connections and interrelationships within an organisation. It is essential to understand how the school as a whole and its parts relate to each other, and how it connects to its community, district and beyond. A useful metaphor is to think of a school or a school system as similar to the child’s activity of connecting the dots. Young children are often asked to connect dot 1 to dot 2 to dot 3 and so on, and by the end of this activity they have sketched the outline of a picture which they are usually asked to colour in. Schools and systems are made up of a myriad of dots, and the ability to connect them to create large understandable pictures contributes significantly to their success as learning

communities. How we connect one teacher to another, or one department to another, or the school to the community, or the math curriculum to the science curriculum, or how we create a school-wide strategy for student problem solving are just a few of the countless networked connections that learning communities must make.

Conclusion

Many years ago a riotous song called *Jake the Peg* by the Australian entertainer, Rolf Harris, became internationally popular. 'Jake' was a three-legged man who found difficulty knowing which leg to use at any given moment and inevitably fell on his face. Leaders in the first decade of the twenty first century are like 'Jake the Peg', the three-legged man. They have one leg in Traditional Public Administration since most still work in hierachial bureaucracies, one leg in New Public Management as they struggle with state curricula, standardised tests, and site-based management, and a third leg in Learning Communities as they work to refocus their schools and communities on students' learning. The challenge for a leader in education is to learn how to balance on all three legs while simultaneously leading their school to become a learning community.

Technocratic leaders are insufficiently flexible and dextrous to meet this challenge. In an environment that values predictability, control and compliance, technocrats have their place, but that place isn't to be in charge of building organisational capacity or promoting the kinds of educational change that will be necessary to prepare our students for a knowledge society. The challenge of 'the three-legged man' is beyond the capabilities of any one person, regardless of how heroic, charismatic or brilliant he or she may be. Rather than looking at school leaders as individuals, we need to look at school leadership as a pervasive force across schools and school districts, and how dedicated 'mortals' can blend together to shape this school and district leadership in ways that ensure challenging and creative learning experiences for all students. It is in this direction that the remainder of the book is heading.

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Notes

- 1 Pitcher, P. (1997). *Artists, Craftsmen and Technocrats*. Toronto: John Wiley.
- 2 I base this discussion on Bill Mulford's comprehensive (2003) study of public policy and its effect on leadership, 'School leaders: Changing roles and impact on teacher and school effectiveness: A paper commissioned by the Education and Training Policy Division', in Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), pp. 1–65.
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20 *Leadership for Mortals*

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