

## **The big question: why do change initiatives in education often fail to yield desired results?**

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### **Abstract**

*Although a wealth of fascinating literature on change management abounds in education, there is credible evidence to suggest that a lot of initiatives introduced with the view to bringing about improvement in pupils' learning outcomes often fail to yield intended results. By reviewing literature from disparate research sources, this article unearths the causal factors of this change conundrum while exemplifying implicitly the kinds of strategic work that needs to be done order to bring about the desired outcomes of change. The inherent criticisms of the problem-solving approach to change management adopted by the article are also discussed. The article contends that the approach to change management it adopts is illuminating for the following two reasons. First, the approach propels 'effective leadership' as a crucial ingredient for a successful change strategy. Second, it advises against adopting the straight-jacket of external accountability that favours the imposition of change from the 'outside'.*

**Keywords:** change; policy and practice; change management; change implementation; strategic change; effective leadership

### **Introduction**

One of the major rationales for introducing planned change in education concerns the idea of bringing about improvement in pupils' learning outcomes. Yet, our understanding of the reasons why attempts to implement change often fail to yield intended results seems to be conspicuously underdeveloped. This lacuna is not due to lack of interest of change management experts and/or theorists. In fact, the literature on change management is littered with pieces of research evidence on the effective ways of managing change. However, few systematic attempts are made to unravel the actual causes of this change implementation milieu. As Everard, Morris & Wilson. (2004: 237) aptly note, 'the nature of change is not well explained in many management books, nor in many management courses'.

Through a critical review of literature from disparate research sources, this article seeks to contribute to a systematic understanding of this change implementation conundrum. Toward this end, the article begins first by illustrating briefly two vignettes of 'failed' change initiatives culled from the context of the Scottish

educational system. Thereafter, the reasons for the failure of change implementation initiatives to yield results are explored from the literature, thereby exemplifying implicitly the kinds of operational and strategic work that needs to be done in order to bring about desired outcomes of change. This is followed by a brief statement of the inherent criticisms levelled against the problem-solving approach to change management adopted in the review of the literature for this article. Then, a brief discussion of the contribution of this approach to theory and practice, particularly in education, is presented before the conclusion.

It is important to stress that although the focus of the vignettes in this paper are on the Scottish educational context, the selection is not intended to suggest, for instance, that the failure of change initiatives in education is exclusive to Scotland, or that the issue is much more severe in Scotland than other countries. The research which culminated in the write-up of this article was conducted in Scotland, and so the Scottish educational context is only used here as a lens through which the change management conundrum is brought to the fore and explicated.

### **Vignettes of ‘failed’ change initiatives in education**

Examples of what is described in this article as ‘failed’ change initiatives abound in the education and social policy literature. In this section, two of these initiatives are chosen and illustrated as vignettes from the context of the Scottish educational system for the purpose of substantiating the claim of unsuccessful attempts to manage educational change. The two examples, namely: the Early Intervention Programme (EIP) (Scottish Office, 1998b) and the Integrated Community Schools (ICS) initiative (Scottish Office, 1998a) are among a number of initiatives undertaken by the Scottish Executive (now Scottish Government) in recent times to address the issues of educational inequality, marginalisation and attainment gaps, particularly among children living in poverty. Published evaluations and follow-up reports of the effectiveness of these initiatives provide a number of interesting insights, but very little in the way of evidence of their success as the illustrations below would indicate.

#### ***Early Intervention Programme (EIP)***

The EIP was a policy initiative introduced by the Scottish Government to address the issue of educational inequalities through raising the attainment of the most disadvantaged pupils. The programme was aimed at raising literacy and numeracy attainment in primary 1 and 2 by adapting teaching approaches and increasing the use of home-school link workers (Scottish Office Education and Industrial Development (SOEID), 1998b; Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education (HMIE), 2002). The EIP was designed to be responsive to the needs of particular communities that it served with ‘local participants’ responsible for identifying the main concerns in their areas (Fraser, 1998).

Since it was acknowledged that there was possibly no ‘one size fits all’ definition of what could be regarded as the ‘best’ approach to early intervention, local authorities were allowed relative autonomy over how they chose to implement the programme. In some local authorities, additional staff members were put in place, whilst in others strategies for parental involvement varied and included the development of home-

school links, workshops to develop 'appreciation' of language development and getting parents involved in reading with their children, and the introduction of book lending schemes. But essentially, and due largely to the autonomy granted them, most authorities based their ideas of implementation of the EIP on the successes of an SOEID commissioned 'Pilton Project' in Edinburgh, where strategies to increase reading attainment demonstrated gains for children receiving free school meals (FSM) (Fraser, 1998). It was hoped that these successes could be transferred and replicated under the EIP.

However, an evaluation of the EIP conducted by Fraser, MacDougall, Pirrie and Croxfors (2001) demonstrated that the small-scale successes of the 'Pilton Project' did not transfer easily to the EIP, due mainly to what could be described as 'cultural undertones'. The evaluation explored background features influencing scores of pupils and showed that there was an increase in attainment where pupils had high levels of 'cultural capital', and that there was a negative effect where FSM children were compared with non-FSM children. The overall results, according to Fraser et al. (2001), showed little or no improvement in attainment for children receiving FSM between 1998 and 2000. Rather, and according to Fraser et al. (2001), benefits (in terms of improvement in literacy and numeracy attainment) were experienced for the highest and middle achievers. This, according to Fraser et al. (2001), proved that the EIP did not deliver on its promise of raising attainment of most disadvantaged pupils because benefits were experienced by those children who already had high levels of 'cultural capital'.

### ***Integrated Community Schools initiative (ICS)***

Also known as the 'New Community Schools (NCS) initiative, the ICS was aimed at integrating children's services on a single campus to meet the needs of disadvantaged children as well as promoting home-school partnerships (Scottish Office, 1998a; Sammons et al, 2000). In 1998, a prospectus for the ICS initiative was published by the Scottish Office outlining the main features and aims of the ICS. Of paramount importance, particularly for the purpose of this article, is the foreword to this prospectus written by the then Secretary of State, Donald Dewar. In this foreword, he highlighted how life chances and disaffection with schooling for disadvantaged children were determined at an early stage and how barriers to learning were created and children's needs were not addressed in a coordinated way. It was therefore hoped (according to the Scottish Office and the prospectus) that the creation of inter-professional staff teams under the ICS initiative would enable children's services to collaborate to meet the needs of disadvantaged pupils. It was also hoped that under the ICS initiative, schools and inter-professional staff teams would work in close collaboration with parents and families to 'raise the expectations of their children and to increase their participation in the education whilst building links with communities' (Scottish Office, 1998a: 3).

A follow-up evaluative report produced by Sammons et al. (2003) provides interesting insights into the implementation of the ICS initiative. It was observed in the report, for example, that where models of collaborative working were embraced by partners, they demonstrated willingness to work together. However, in general, the evaluation demonstrated that the pilot of the ICS initiative was unsuccessful in

achieving its aims. This, according to Sammons et al. (2003), was because many home-school workers felt they occupied 'uneasy' and 'ambivalent' positions in the home-school relationship and therefore found it difficult to maintain the necessary trust to enable them function effectively. They added that a lack of consistency between the views of different partners (demonstrating a lack of shared norms) and competing priorities (indicating different embodied cultural capital) weakened the implementation process. Most importantly, Sammons et al. (2003) reported that there was no solid evidence that the attainment gap between 'disadvantaged' and 'advantaged' pupils had been narrowed, claiming further that rivalries between staff and difficulties in promoting family engagements hindered progress.

Thus, the two vignettes illustrated above give credence to the view that most change initiatives in education may not after all be achieving their intended aims, but rather perpetuating the cycle of educational disadvantage. In view of this, the question that begs asking is how or in what ways have the literature contributed to unravelling this implementation milieu? I turn to literature on change management to address this question in the following section.

### **Why implementation plans often fail: general insights from the literature**

A review of current policy and practice in education suggests, in rather stark terms, the failure of many well intentioned change initiatives to impact positively on educational processes and the quality of students/pupils' learning outcomes. Granted that tremendous investments in terms of time, energy and resources are made into many of these change initiatives, the pertinent question to ask is: What makes educational change so difficult to initiate and sustain? In other words, why is it the case that policy solutions prescribed by change agents often tend not to yield intended results? The reasons for this are complex and differ on a case by case basis. However, there are some general principles in the literature which serve as useful pointers to the causal factors of this change management conundrum. In this section, I draw on a review of literature from education, policy sociology, politics and business to unearth some of the causes of this change management milieu, while illustrating implicitly the kind of strategic works that need to be done in order to make change 'happen'.

It is important to note that the insights generated from the review of literature and illustrated in this section are not based solely on the exemplifying the implementation challenges of the EIP and ICS initiatives alone and/or directly. Although the aim of this article is not to produce 'a grand theory' of change management, the intention here is to speak generally to the issues of failure of change initiatives which the literature on change management appears to be littered with. In this sense, the EIP and ICS initiatives are used merely as vignettes to highlight the existence and magnitude of the change management conundrum, particularly in education.

One of the major reasons cited in the literature to explain why attempts to initiate change often fail relates to what Harris (2009) refers to as 'policy borrowing', which concerns the origin and nature of the change being introduced. Change agents and reformers most often tend to replicate change initiatives that seem to be working elsewhere in anticipation that if assimilated, similar, if not better, success would

follow. Little or no account is taken of the specific cultural context in which the successful initiative is taken from, and there is the default assumption that effective policies and change initiatives can traverse cultural boundaries with relative ease. Unfortunately, and as the illustration of the EIP initiative literally shows, the opposite tends to be the case in most instances. The cultural contexts within which change initiatives operate are crucial to attaining desired outcomes of change. As Harris (2009: 64) succinctly puts it, 'policy borrowing may seem a logical and practical thing to do, but the 'cultural fit' is equally and crucially important if change initiatives aimed at bringing about improvement in pupils' learning outcomes are to have any chance of working within the context they are introduced'.

Related closely to the above issue is what the literature identifies as the apparent dissonance between the assumptions and perceptions of change agents and the people on whom change initiatives impact. Most often, change agents, in their bid to initiate change, make assumptions which differ significantly from what pertains in the world of the beneficiaries of change, hence their failure to address themselves to the world of those on whom such initiatives impact. As Everard, Morris & Wilson (2004: 240) for example, note, bringing about change is not just a question of defining an end and letting others get on with it. 'It is a process of interaction, dialogue, feedback, modifying objectives, recycling plans, coping with mixed feelings and values, pragmatism, micropolitics, frustration, and muddle'. Talking further about the short-sightedness of some agents of change, they write:

The first reason why those who initiate change often fail to secure successful conclusion to their dreams is that they tend to be too rational. They develop in their minds a clear, coherent vision of where they want to be at, and they assume that all they have to do is to spell out the logic to the world in words of one syllable, and everyone will be immediately motivated to follow the lead. The more vivid their mental picture of the goal, and the more conviction they have that it is the right goal, the more likely they are to stir opposition, and the less successful they are likely to be in managing a process of change... (Everard, Morris & Wilson., 2004: 239–240)

The arguments put forward inherently propel 'effective leadership' as one of the crucial ingredients of successful change implementation strategy. They emphasize, although covertly, that for change initiatives to be implemented successfully, leaders with vision, change implementation acumen and sensitivities about the norms, belief systems and values of the ordinary people on whom the planned change is likely to impact are required to lead the process.

This issue of leadership vis-à-vis the simplistic approach to change implementation is reiterated further by Fullan (2001: 96) who, rather than facing the leadership issue directly, problematises the processes of implementation. He argues that one of the biggest challenges of change initiation is the commitment of reformers to see a desired change implemented, irrespective of the fact that commitment to what should be changed often varies inversely with knowledge about how to work through a process of change. For him, strong commitment to a particular change may be a barrier to setting up an effective process of change. The lack of knowledge about

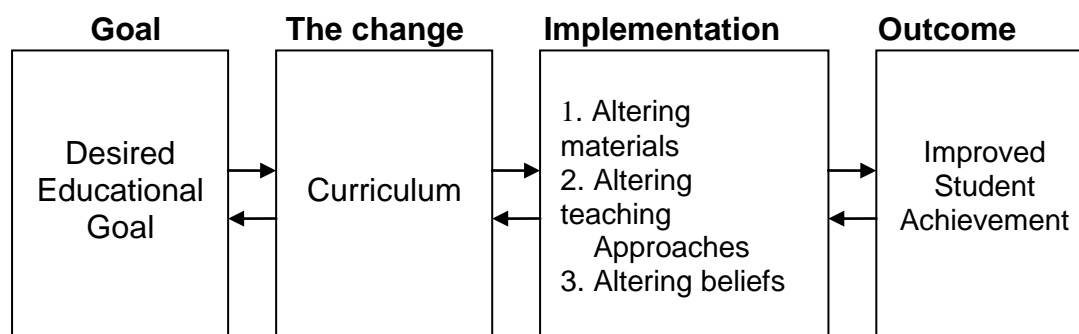
how to work through the process of change, to him, explains the tendency of change agents to have a faulty assumption of change or to oversimplify the approach, especially when they are confronted with the initial problems of implementation. He explains that understanding the meaning of implementation and its associated problems is not as straightforward and rational as it seems at first glance. He defines implementation as a 'variable' and/or 'changing practice' and goes further to explain that it is the process of altering existing practice in order to achieve more effectively certain desired outcomes. Giving more insight into what implementation actually entails, he, in another context, writes:

Implementation is multi-dimensional. To take a curriculum guideline or document as an illustration, we can immediately discern that at least the following three kinds of changes are at stake—possible use of new or revised materials: possible use of new approaches (e.g. teaching strategies), and the possible incorporation of new or revised beliefs (e.g. philosophical assumptions and beliefs) underlying the particular approach. (Fullan, 1988: 196)

Fullan's quote above suggests that the three dimensions regarding curriculum guidelines can be presented in a hierarchical order of complexity when it comes to the task of implementation. The materials are the most visible and tangible to produce and use literally. As such, they could be seen to be at the base of the hierarchical structure. Alteration in teaching approach or style present greater difficulty when significant new skills must be acquired or additional time to plan must be found. This therefore could be seen as being at the middle level of the hierarchy. Changes in beliefs are yet more difficult to bring about as they challenge the core values held by people regarding the fundamental purpose of education. As such, they are often not explicit or recognised, but rather buried at the level of unconscious assumptions and therefore lie at the apex of the hierarchy.

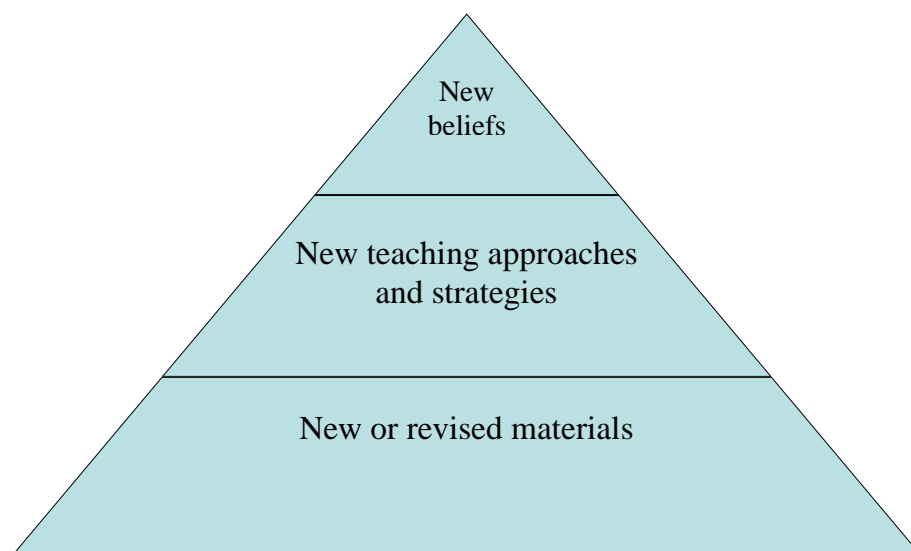
These illustrations about the issue of leadership vis-à-vis working through the processes of change present the multi-dimensional nature of implementation which many change agents underestimate, misunderstand and/or misapply. This explains why change agents most often fail to implement and manage educational change initiatives successfully. These ideas expressed above are encapsulated succinctly in the following two figures which portray the logic and the hierarchical order of complexity of implementation respectively.

**Figure 1: An illustration of the logic of implementation:**



(Adapted from Glatter et al, 1988: 198)

**Figure 2: An illustration of the hierarchical order of complexity of implementation.**



Another reason explicated in the literature to explain why change initiatives don't reap 'huge' rewards concerns resistance to imposition of change from the 'outside'. One of the crucial issues identified in the review of the literature as far as resistances to change is concerned has to do with the fear and uncertainty of what the change in question entails and what the future holds especially for those on whom the change impacts directly (Wallace and McMahon, 1994; Morrison, 1998). As Everard, Morris & Wilson. (2004: 239) aptly put it, change, no matter what form it takes, leads to temporary incompetence. As such, individuals and groups who are not sure about the outcome of the change process because they have not been properly educated, communicated to and helped to conceptualise the process would do everything in their might to resist it. Huczynski and Buchanan (2001), for example, cite Bedian's four reasons, namely: parochial self-interest of individuals or groups in the organisation; misunderstanding and lack of trust of the change process; contradictory assessment of change; and low tolerance for change: to exemplify why change in organisations are strongly resisted. They go on to project that as long as

these conditions exist in organisations, change outcomes will remain partially met (Huczynski and Buchanan, 2001: 599–560).

Also, the literature review links directly the failure of change agents to actively involve persons on whom change impacts or beneficiaries of change in setting aims and goals of change initiatives to resistance to change. Perhaps, as a result of their short sightedness to see a particular initiative through, change agents often fail to identify and communicate with people who are directly concerned with change initiatives, and this brings about resistance to change (Morrison, 1998; Wallace and Pocklington, 2002; Everard, Morris & Wilson., 2004). This issue of resistance to change, in a way, resonates with the evaluative report on the implementation of the ICS initiative (Sammons et al., 2003), where it was reported that lack of consistency between the views of different partners (demonstrating lack of shared norms) and competing priorities and rivalries between staff (indicating different embodied cultural capital) weakened the implementation process. The point is, had both the partners and staff been properly educated, communicated to and involved actively in the process of change, perhaps significant results would have been attained. As Everard, Morris & Wilson (2004) rightly sum it up, 'one of the fundamental mistakes [in the process of initiating change] is to forget that people are best motivated to work towards goals that they have been involved in setting and to which they feel committed'. Echoing the importance of education and communication as a necessary pre-condition for a successful change initiative, they add:

Heads and senior staffs who want to implement change therefore have a sizeable educational task on their hands: they have to help everyone concerned to discover and conceptualise the true nature of change and how it impinges upon all...This attempt to help people to conceptualise change is like tilling the ground before planting the seed; or to use another metaphor, it is like tuning the receiver to the carrier wave before the message of change is transmitted. (Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004: 239)

The lukewarm attitude of change agents towards meeting training and development needs of actual implementers of change is another crucial issue the literature identifies as affecting the successful implementation of change. Staff training and development, the backbone and lifeline to every successful organisation, either does not exist in the linguistic repertoire of change agents or is simply neglected. This explains why very many attempts are made particularly in the educational sector to bring about change but only few of these attempts tend to yield positive results. Armstrong (1999) for example identified this 'human factor' in the attainment of organisational goals by defining 'training' as, the 'systematic modification of human behaviour through learning which occurs as a result of education, instruction, development and planned experience'. Touching on what could be described as the rationale for staff development, he writes:

The fundamental aim of training is to help the organisation to achieve its purpose by adding value to its key resources- the people it employs. Training means investing in people to enable them to



perform better and to empower them to make the best use of their natural abilities. (Armstrong, 1999: 507)

These words are also consistent with the evaluative reports on both the EIP and ICS initiatives where many staff members who were to implement these initiatives were reported to have experienced difficulties in establishing and maintaining good school-home relationships. The words reiterate the point that the practice of adding value to human resource during the process of change is crucially important if change is to be properly effected and sustained.

Limited timescales for change initiation is also identified in the literature as one of the inhibitors of successful implementation of change. As is the case in civilised democracies, governments are time bound, unlike schools, and therefore want immediate results. Likewise, politicians need to feel the impacts of their policies sooner rather than later. This often means that unrealistic goals or timescales are set which in turn results in what Harris (2009: 64) describes as 'superficial' or 'cosmetic' measures to be taken to bring about change. A good example to elaborate this point concerns the Scottish Government sponsored 'Closing the Opportunity Gap initiative which was designed and geared towards reducing the number of sixteen-nineteen year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET), and raising exam performance by 5% for the lowest attaining 22% of S4 pupils between two years (i.e. 2006 to 2008) (Scottish Executive, 2007). As Harris (2009) points out, not only are limited timescales for change implementation problematic, but schools in most cases are bound to face difficulties since they are not given adequate time and resources to turn themselves around to meet the needs and aspirations of the communities in which they are situated.

The issue of unrealistic timescales is further exacerbated by what Fullan (2001: 85-87) calls the lack of 'processual' relationship between educational institutions on the one hand, and government departments and agencies on the other. Government agencies over the years have been preoccupied with change initiation, and have until recently underestimated the problems associated implementation. This, according Fullan (2001) has placed the two sides in entirely different worlds, to the extent that each side is ignorant of the 'subjective' world of the other. For him, the relationship that exists between these bodies could best be described as 'episodic events' rather than 'processes' (i.e. submission of requests for money, intermittent progress reports on what is being done, external evaluations etc). This, for him, explains why there is much misunderstanding and disillusionment during the process of initiating change.

An equally critical issue cited in the literature as being responsible for the inability of policy solutions to bring the expected gains in performance is the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation. Effective monitoring and evaluation of the process of change is most often misunderstood and misapplied by those responsible for bringing about change. One practical reason alluded to by change management theorists is that the change agents often tend to be over-zealous in achieving policy results rather than paying attention to the means to that end. Quoting Beckhard and Harris, Everard, Morris & Wilson (2004) make this point forcefully:

One of the biggest traps... is the failure of organizational leaders to resist the temptation to rush through the planning process to get to the 'action stage'...When the manager lacks an appreciation for and understanding of the complexity of the intervention process, it is predictable that the emphasis will be on 'action' or results. (Beckhard and Harris, cited by Everard, Morris & Wilson, 2004: 236–237)

Buttressing the importance of monitoring and evaluating the process of change, Newton and Tarrant (1992: 180) draw a fine line between the two processes. They describe the former, as the process of 'keeping an eye on a situation as it develops or changes over time'. They add that monitoring within the context of change initiation is the act of 'checking and ensuring that things are going as planned'. Fullan (1992: 123–124) adds to these useful points. He suggests that monitoring serves two functions. First, he argues that by making information on innovative practices available, monitoring provides access to good ideas. Second, he contends that it exposes new ideas to scrutiny, helping to weed out mistakes and further develop promising practices. Regarding the latter, Newton and Tarrant (1992), define it as a process of systematically gathering information for the purpose of determining the extent to which the objectives are realised. Summarizing their argument about the importance of evaluation, they contend that evaluating change helps to involve the whole organisation in planning, allowing a range of contributions and a less personally dependent debate (Newton and Tarrant, 1992: 75).

Thus, a close examination of the issues that the literature review in this section throws up leads to the conclusion that they form a system of variables, interacting and/or operating in a dynamic fashion and as a process over time. If any one, two, or three factors are working against change initiation the process of implementation is most likely to be ineffective as the vignettes illustrated earlier have shown.

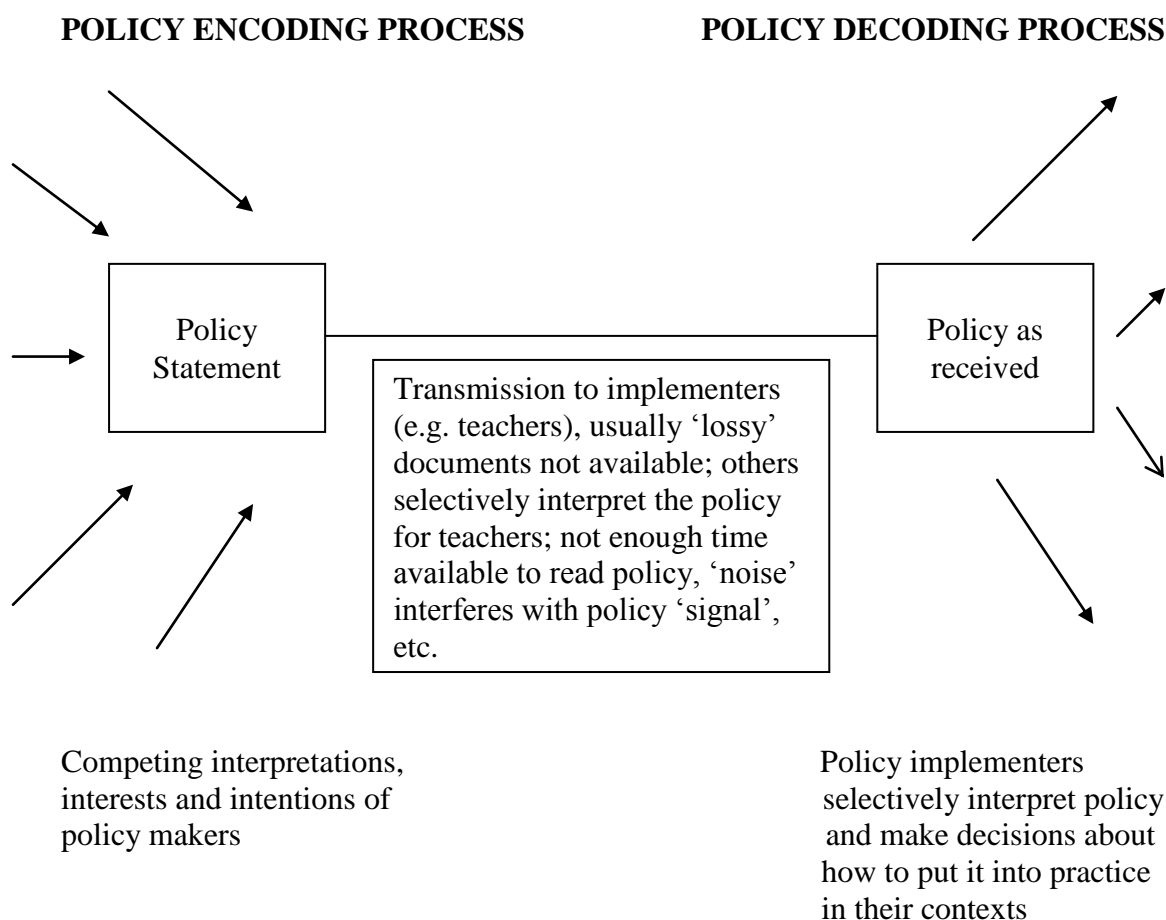
### **Criticisms of the rationalist approach to change management**

Like any other approach to managing or leading change, a number of criticisms are levelled against the problem-solving approach to change management adopted by this article. One of the criticisms concerns what in the literature is perceived to be the reinforcement of the prevailing rationalist view by which change is conceptualised exclusively as a problem solving tool as opposed to a complex process involving contestations, negotiations and struggle. Proponents of the process conception of policy[change] (for example Bowe, Ball and Gold, 1992; Ball, 1994; Trowler, 1998; Shulock, 1999; Ozga, 2000), argue that the problem-solving approach to the change presumes that experts trained in proper analytical techniques can apply their expertise to the political marketplace, can discover and measure the impact of policy on citizen interests, can project policy consequences with some accuracy, and can affect the decisions of identifiable clients, who will use policy[change] and its analyses to solve problems. According to this school of thought, the problem-solving approach to change processes is an optimistic view that reflects a positivist view of the social sciences that forms the core of its interdisciplinary approach. It is driven as well by the 'stages' view of policy-making in which one of the final stages is a timely recommendation to a client or a timely intervention to solve pressing problems.

This view, according to the proponents of the process model of change, limits our understanding unduly. This, for the critics, is because the 'client orientation' invigorated in the rationalist approach to change management 'endorses the prevailing view of policy-making [in this context, change management] as relatively orderly in which implementation is seen as advice to clients and its usefulness is assessed in terms of contributions to eventual actions by policymakers, rather than as a contribution to the broader political discourse' (Shulock, 1999).

Following from this, the approach is also criticised for missing out on the socio-cultural and political dynamism of the processes of change. For the critics, mostly postmodernists, the socio-cultural and political dynamism of change processes is visible at two stages: the 'encoding' (which they refer to as 'policy as text') and 'decoding' (which is also referred to as 'policy as discourse') stages (Ball, 1994; Trowler, 1998; Walford, 2000). Policy as 'text', for these critics, denotes the initial stage of formal policy-making where the ideas, values and aspirations of both the key actors involved in the policy process, and the people and/or interests they represent are elicited and enlisted via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations. Policy as 'discourse', on the other hand, is marked by the disputed and complex ways by which the policy messages and outcomes are interpreted by actors and implementers in the contexts of their own culture, ideology, history, resources and expertise. For the critics, therefore, to conceptualise change in quite a straightforward terms as a problem-solving tool is to neglect the power relations of actors at both the micro and macro levels. Ball (1994) for example, advises against ruling out of certain forms and conception of social action, as the problem-solving approach to change management seemed to have done, on the grounds that they are simply awkward, theoretically challenging or difficult. The issue, for him, is the need and urgency of 'relating together analytically the ad hoc-ery of the macro and micro levels. That is, accounting for agency in a constrained world, and showing how agency and structure are implicit in each other. The dynamism and complexity of the processes of change is captured below in figure 3, which shows how policy [change] intentions are enlisted/encoded and decoded by actors via subtle ways.

**Figure 3: An illustration of policy encoding and decoding processes.**



(Adapted from Trowler, 1998: 49).

Similarly, the problem-solving approach adopted by this paper is also criticised severely for what ‘textual dissenters’ refer to as its overly ‘reductionist’ and/or ‘over-deterministic’ approach to change implementation. The change management principles and practices illustrated in this article, according to the critics, ‘tend to ignore the wider structural and political dimensions of education management problems’ (Thrupp and Willmott, 2003: 63) by oversimplifying and reducing change initiation and institutionalisation processes to operational plans and routines which should be followed in order to achieve the desired outcomes of change. As Trowler and Knight (2002: 144) for instance, succinctly put it, “the technical-rational approach to policymaking invigorated in the change management perspective assumes that if sufficient energy can be elicited from those involved by enthusiastic leaders with clear vision of change then large scale transformations can be accomplished relatively quickly and economically”. For the critics, the principles further presuppose that once these change management routines illuminated are well conceptualized, put in place and efficiently and effectively pursued, change is bound to succeed.

## **Relevance of the rationalist approach to theory and practice**

In spite of the criticisms above, the problem-solving approach to change management adopted in the review of literature for this article is relevant to theory and practice in a number of ways. The approach is helpful in illustrating some of the causes of what this paper describes as the change management conundrum. It does, for example, speak to the literature and exemplify, although implicitly, the kind of practical, operational and strategic plans or works (such as: educating and actively involving people on whom change impact; meeting the training and developmental needs of implementers; reducing resistance to change; building collegiate culture; and effective monitoring and evaluation of change processes) that need to be done in order to bring about the desired outcomes of change. The approach is further illuminating in respect of two implicit contributions it appears to make regarding initiating and sustaining change in education. These contributions are captured below:

### ***Effective leadership as an ingredient of a successful change strategy***

The approach adopted by this article has identified and propelled 'effective leadership' as one of the crucial ingredients or pre-conditions of a successful change strategy. The article argues, although covertly, that whether change springs forth from within or outside the educational system, the right leadership styles and skills must be adopted and strategic decisions taken, if the change initiated is to succeed. To state this rather succinctly, the exemplifications contained in this article appear to reiterate the view that as far as successful initiation and management of change is concerned, 'effective leadership' is more of an act or skill of firing a guided arrow or missile at a moving target in unpredictable and/or turbulent circumstances. It (the insight this paper generates) appears to take this point further by suggesting that in circumstances such as this, the role of the leader is to ensure that not only is the target fired at derailed but is also over-powered.

### ***Avoidance of imposition of change from the outside***

Also, the problem-solving approach to change management adopted by this article is illuminating in the sense that it advises against adopting the straight-jacket of external accountability that favours the imposition of change from the outside. To put it differently, the evidence emanating from the discussions in this article suggests (albeit implicitly) that external accountability models and their inherent 'top-down' approaches to implementing change do not work because they fail to garner ownership, commitment and clarity about the nature of change being introduced. These external accountability models, as the review in this article suggests, tend to privilege the demand side over the supply side of the solutions to change (Møller, 2009: 39), and in most cases are not sufficiently differentiated to match the diversity of school need and context (Harris, 2009: 66). The approach further appears to make the case, although covertly, that communities, and for that matter, schools that are able to see improvement in pupils' learning outcomes do so through strong moral purpose (for example, through high expectations and sharing vision of change), which are in themselves the products of high internal accountability as opposed to enforced external accountability.

## Summary and Conclusion

In this article, I have used two vignettes to exemplify and give credence to the view that most educational change innovations and programmes initiated with the view to altering positively pupils' learning opportunities and outcomes most often tend not to achieve their intended results. I have also reviewed literature from disparate sources to identify and explain some of the general causal factors of this 'change management conundrum'. Through the exploration of the causal factors of the change management milieu, the article has identified, implicitly, the kinds of operational and strategic work that need to be done in order to successfully effect change. Thereafter, the criticisms levelled against the rationalist or problem-solving approach to change management adopted by the article have been illuminated briefly before an illustration of the relevance of this approach to theory and practice.

It is argued that the problem-solving approach to change management adopted in the review of literature for this article is relevant to theory and practice particularly for two reasons. First, the approach has identified and promulgated 'effective leadership' as one of the crucial ingredients or pre-conditions of a successful change strategy. Second, it advises implicitly against adopting the straight-jacket of external accountability that favours the imposition of change from the outside.

So whilst the EIP and ICS initiatives are used as vignettes in this article, the focus really is not the Scottish educational system. Rather, the article uses the vignettes to give credence to the existence of the change management conundrum, and to explore and offer, through a systematic review of relevant literature, the causal factors of this milieu. In this regard, the essential prescription the article appears to give is that in pursuit of change, 'quick fix' approaches to improvement must at all cost be avoided as such improvements do not last but tend to hurt the very systems they seek to help in the longer term.

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