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Better Inspection, Better Learning
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Future-ready evaluation

System Leadership and Innovation

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Context

Education environment

- Volatile
- Uncertain
- Complex
- Ambiguous

Changes

- Political changes
- Artificial intelligence
- Demographic shifts
- New labour market demands
- Sustainability challenges
- Expectations around equity
- Skills required for the future

Inspectorates

- Similarities
- Differences

Key questions

How can Inspectorates ensure that their evaluation processes remain relevant, responsive and trusted in an increasingly complex educational landscape?

How can they promote innovation in the educational system and in schools?

Are our evaluation systems designed merely to judge the past, or are they designed to help shape the future?

Overview

- Purposes of inspection
- Models of change
- Inspection mechanisms for change
- Going forward
  - System leadership
  - Rethinking accountability
  - Participation as a foundation
  - Designing frameworks
  - Leveraging digitisation and AI
  - Potential for innovation
  - Future competences

Purposes of inspection

- Providing public assurance and accountability
- Sharing effective or innovative practice around the system
- Informing the development of national policy

(Maxwell, 2017)

- Control
- Improvement
- Liaison

(Ehren, 2016)

Theories of change (Maxwell, 2017)



MARKET COMPETITION THEORY



COLLECTIVE CAPACITY BUILDING THEORY

Impact of theories of change (Maxwell, 2017)

- Market competition theory
  - System improvement
  - Inspection
  - Self-evaluation
- Collective capacity building theory
  - System improvement
  - Inspection
  - Self-evaluation

Market competition theory- Improvement

Education is primarily seen as a service for consumers

Continuous improvement is driven by

- Clear definition of outcomes for schools
- Reliable ways of measuring the delivery of outcomes
- Putting the results into the public domain
- Encouraging a ‘market’ of highly autonomous schools
- Giving parents and pupils a free choice of schools

Market competition theory: Inspection

Role of inspection is mainly for public assurance & accountability

- A high premium on cyclical inspection of schools
- Inspection outcomes drive parental choice
- High stakes lead to tense climate during inspection
- Standardised inspection processes protect inspectors' judgement against challenge
- Schools focus on anticipating what inspectors want
- Inspectorates develop processes to detect 'gaming'

Inspectorates place a high priority on demonstrating their independence

Market competition theory: Self-evaluation

- Self-evaluation is encouraged but may evolve in certain ways
  - There may be a standard format for self-evaluation reporting aligned to inspection frameworks
  - Inspectors cross check schools' judgement on specific indicators
  - Schools may present an unrealistically positive picture in their reports
  - Inspectors treat the reports that they receive with a high degree of caution

Unintended consequences

- Market model on education
  - Narrowing of the curriculum
  - Polarisation of performance across schools
  - Avoidance of pupils perceived as less able
- Accountability focus in inspection
  - Risk aversion
  - Performativity
  - Gaming
  - Reduced innovation
  - Negative psychological effects

Collective capacity building theory: Improvement

- Education as a common societal good
- Aligning the system around a broad view of the purposes of education
- Strong stakeholder consensus
- A strong commitment to investment in the professional capital of teachers and school leaders
- Performance data mainly for self-evaluation and system improvement

Collective capacity building theory- Improvement



There is greater readiness to invest trust in schools and professionals



Schools have flexibility to interpret national guidance and to develop innovative approaches



Multiple forms of evaluation generate evidence about practice innovations and new learning about how to improve the system that is fed back to schools and spread throughout the system

Collective capacity building theory: Inspection

- There is a strong focus on inspection for accountability, sharing practice and informing policy
- The public assurance and accountability function places more trust in schools
- The design and conduct of inspections facilitates sharing of effective practice and building of professional capacity in schools
- A closer link with central policy development may result in a strong programme of national thematic inspection activity

Inspection as capacity building

- Doing inspection ‘with’ schools rather than ‘to them
- More time for professional dialogue during inspection, including the sharing of practice seen elsewhere
- Involving leaders from other schools as peer inspectors on inspection teams
- Moving from detailed grades to a customised narrative about the school and its improvement journey

Collective capacity building: Self-evaluation

- More targeted activity relating to a few themes
- Building competences in self-improvement
- Initiatives to help teachers develop the skills of systematic professional enquiry
- Collaboration between schools to support each other
- Creating a ‘rich data’ environment
- Data as a tool for self-evaluation and improvement
- Less focus on standardisation and use of data for public reporting and comparison

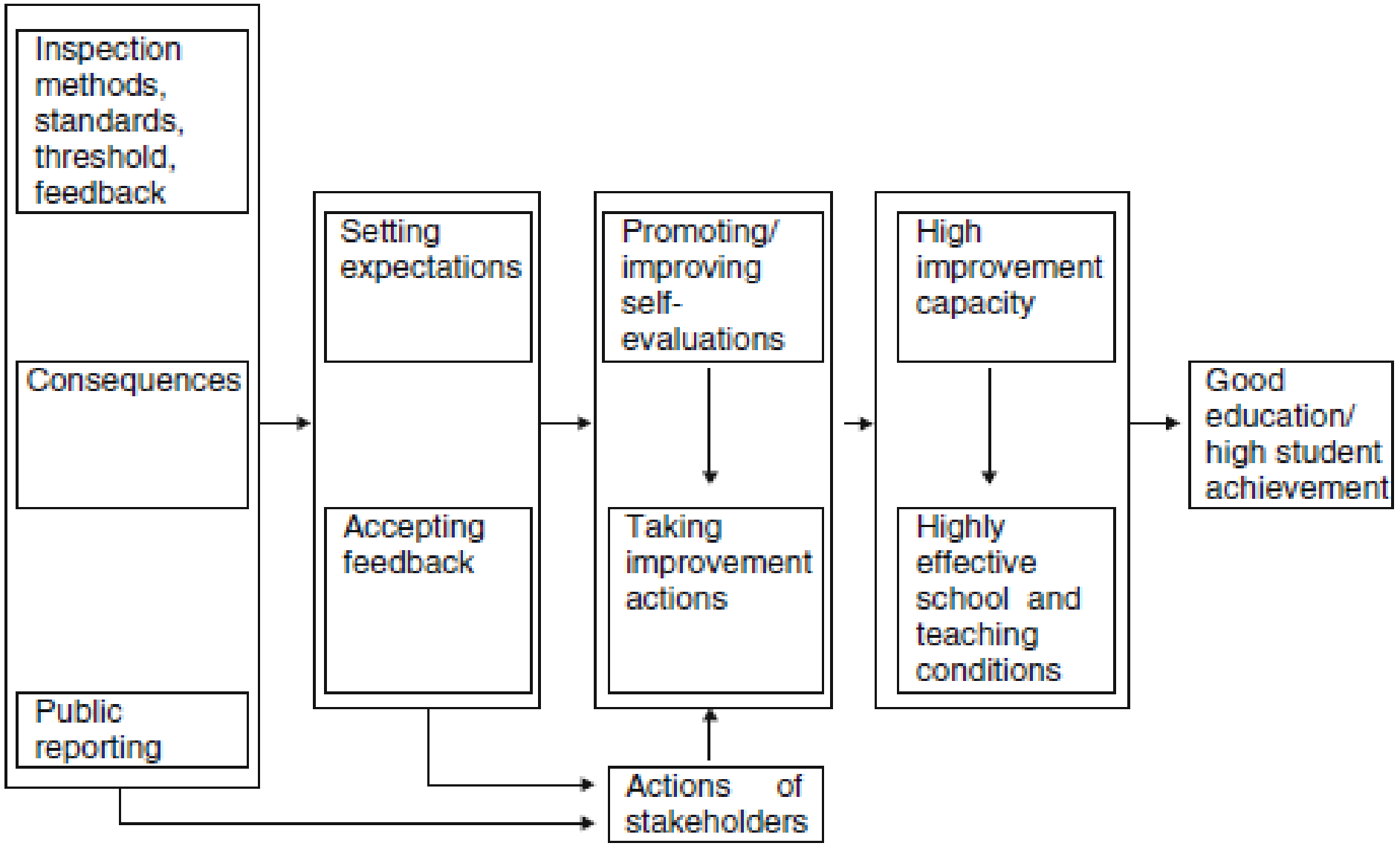
Unintended consequences

- Sustained consensus with stakeholders leads to excessive risk aversion and a lack of variety and innovation

Inspection causal mechanisms for improvement

- Acceptance and use of inspection feedback
- Setting of expectations through standards
- Stakeholder pressure (Voice, choice and exit)
- Capacity-building of schools

(Ehren et al, 2013; Ehren, 2016)



A theory of action about the impact of school inspections (Ehren, 2016)

Going forward

System leadership

- Unique role of Inspectorates in education system
- Knowledge brokering role
- Generators of system intelligence and institutional learning
  - Provide evidence to policymakers
  - Support the implementation of reforms
  - Identify successful practices
  - Facilitate learning across the system

System leadership actions

- Exert influence through expert professional advice
- Helping systems understand emerging challenges and opportunities
- Ensuring that highly effective and innovative practice is mobilised and shared
- Creating feedback loops where schools learn from evaluation data to build capacity
- Evaluating how effectively schools learn from their own internal data
- Moving away from standard, single-school inspections toward a "polycentric" (multi-centre) approach
- Increasing the use of thematic evaluations

System leadership actions

- Increasing the use of thematic evaluations
  - Inform national policy and support system-wide improvement
  - Respond to system need for information on areas of immediate and strategic importance
  - Serve as an early warning mechanism of emergent issues

Rethinking accountability

- ‘Intelligent accountability’ not only preserves and enhances trust, it also needs to start from a position of trust where educators have a positive expectation of the benevolence and integrity of the exercise and of the competences of those holding them to account

(Ehren, Pattersen and Baxter, 2019)

Drivers of trust

- Reliability
- Responsiveness
- Integrity
- Fairness
- Openness

Intelligent accountability in practice

- Using evidence to stimulate reflection, not just judging performance
- Having open professional conversations with teachers and school leaders about their practice
- Balancing challenge with support in feedback
- Including a focus in inspection on learning and improvement capacity
- Encouraging/supporting schools to become self-evaluating organisations

Intelligent accountability in practice

- Moving from cyclical cycles of inspection to a proportional inspection approach
  - Adjusting the footprint of external evaluation based on a schools internal self-evaluation capacity
  - Adopting a risk-based approach to inspections
  - Inspecting a nationally representative sample of schools each year

Participation as a foundation

- Inspection must be participative by design
  - Strengthens the quality of evidence
  - Builds trust and legitimacy
  - Is critical for innovation
  - Promotes equity

Embedding participation

- Involving all stakeholders in gathering evidence
- Embedding learner voice
- Co-designing inspection frameworks with stakeholders
- Inclusion of school leaders or teachers from other schools on inspection teams
- Using collaborative self-evaluation before inspections
- Creating structured dialogue throughout the inspection process
- Closing the feedback loop and demonstrating impact

Designing inspection frameworks

- Frameworks set out expectations about quality
- They help ensure that priorities become embedded within educational practice
- They must be research based and responsive
- To remain relevant, they must
  - focus not just on present performance but capacity to improve and adapt
  - keep pace with social, technological and educational change
  - reflect the skills of the future

Designing inspection frameworks

- Learner wellbeing
- Learner participation
- Innovative practice
- Digital competence
- Inclusion
- Sustainability
- Readiness for future learning
- Capacity to adapt, improve and innovate

Leveraging digitisation and AI

- Opportunities
  - Inspection planning
  - Evidence synthesis
  - Data analysis
  - Identification of trends
  - Thematic analysis
  - Reporting
- Risks
  - Algorithmic bias
  - Inappropriate use
  - Lack of understanding
  - Privacy
  - Over-reliance on quantitative data
  - Loss of professional judgement



Leveraging digitisation and AI

- Use technology to enhance evaluation while preserving professional judgement and contextual understanding and fairness that remain central to effective inspection.

Potential for innovation

Definitions

“I define innovation as executing new ideas to create value.”

(Tim Kastelle, University of Queensland)

“Innovation is change that creates a new dimension of performance.”

(Peter Drucker, management theorist)

“Innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas within an organization.”

(Professor Teresa Amabile, Harvard)

Potential for innovation

Principles

- Be open to new ideas and ways of working
- Bridge the gap between the ideas and implementation
- Be clear about the value that the implementation will bring and how the value may be measured

Potential areas for innovation

- How we inspect
- How we report
- How we affirm and disseminate innovative practice in schools and classrooms

Future competences

- Existing strengths
  - Pedagogical expertise
  - Evaluation expertise
  - Analytical skills
  - Professional judgement
  - Data literacy
  - Communication skills

- Future skills?
  - AI and digital literacy
  - Evidence brokerage
  - Strategic foresight
  - Adaptive leadership
  - Improvement orientation



Conclusion

- No one-size fits all
- Context is key
- Accountability & improvement
- Trust is important
- Willingness to adapt
- Openness to ideas and possibility of implementation
- Leveraging our unique role and insights



Questions