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A Public Value Approach to Analyzing and Intervening in National Educational Systems

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I. Introduction

Any analysis of a "National Educational System" reveals a highly complex social production system that is neither a hierarchical organization, nor a market, nor simply a misaligned system of principals and agents. It is, instead, a complex array of social actors bound together through various social structures and processes on one hand, and important functional relationships on the other. Together, these actors:

1) *shape* the national educational system (giving it a particular structure of interdependent actors that mobilize and direct assets to the production of educational services provided to school aged children to achieve individually and collectively valued results);

2) *experience, witness, and evaluate* the performance of the system (by agents across different sectors at many different levels focused on different dimensions of performance with varying degrees of economic, social, or political power to register their views and influence the performance of educational suppliers);

3) *mobilize resources* used in the system that produces educational services delivered to particular populations); and

4) *deploy those* resources towards particular directive policies and operational programs that produce (or fail to produce) empirically observable educational outcomes at individual and aggregate levels.

In approaching the challenge of moving that system towards sustained productivity gains (defined in terms of national educational goals), national governments naturally fall prey to the assumption that they are the important drivers, resource providers, and directors of change – that, in the principal/agent framework they are the *principals* of the system. They are in the best positions to define the values to be produced, and to create urgency for action among those who produce and use the educational services. They are also in the best position to draw and direct resources from multiple sources including tax dollars, charitable contributions, the professional aspirations of teachers, and the ambitions of parents and students. And they are in the best position to direct and manage the use of resources in the system to ensure efficiency and effectiveness in current operations, and to stimulate, evaluate, and diffuse innovations that can improve system performance – not only generally across the system, but also with respect to particular populations or particular dimensions of value that seem particularly urgent to pursue. This adds up to a vision of the national government as an authoritative, influential, and powerful principal able to define purposes, raise resources, allocate them to existing methods known to be effective, and create new methods when old are failing to do the job.

But, as we have seen empirically, this idea overestimates the capacities of most central governments in developing countries (or, for that matter, even in so-called developed countries as well!) (Pritchett 2013, Pritchett 2015, Moore and Spivack 2022). The world at large has learned that it is hard to centrally manage complex economies to produce economic prosperity and social equity. It is not obvious that the search for educational improvement is any less difficult.

We *oversell* the virtues of centralization in managing this process and *undersell* the virtues of a broad effort to mobilize a search for improved educational performance for many different purposes in many different contexts. We think we have to choose between a *collective* or *individual* arbiter of value rather than rely on a motley, pluralist collection of actors who find and pursue value in different aspects of national and local educational efforts and their impact on individuals and the wider society.

Of course, it is not wrong to imagine that the national government can become an important catalyst, motivator, and director of the system that will enhance its productivity – broadly understood. Indeed, it is hard to imagine what other actor would have the motivation, the authority, the effective influence and power to undertake such a task.

The important question, however, is *how exactly it should practically do so*? How can the central government develop a "strategic capacity" that can keep the widely distributed system as a whole moving towards improved performance with respect to both educational goals, and the wider economic, social, and political purposes that a polity hopes to advance through the provision of educational services.

Clearly, that effort cannot be simply dictated. It cannot rest entirely on establishing a hierarchical structure. It has to consist of the influence, continuity, and flexibility of some kind of *functional executive capacity* that draws energy, purpose and capacity from the existing motivations, resources, and capacities of the large number of widely distributed actors who now *do* or *could* be recruited to play active roles in shaping the short and long run performance of the national educational system. (Anshell and Gash 2007, Moore, 2009; Moore and Veth, 2022)

But how could such a functional capacity be created? Who would constitute or populate this collection of actors? What institutional platform would it stand on? Through what processes could it influence the actors that are strategically important in determining educational system performance to embrace and execute their important roles who are not included within the group that seeks to exercise leadership over the development of the national educational system? Answering that question for a broad class of national governments seeking to promoted sustained educational productivity relative to their goals is the task we will tackle in this essay (Moore and Spivack 2022).

II. The Public Value Approach – Supporting and Challenging a National Network of Strategic Actors to Create Public Value Through the Provision of Educational Services

Public Value and the Strategic Triangle

The analytic approach we will take relies on a framework that has been developed and used at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government for many years – one that uses the concept of public value, and the framework we call the strategic triangle to:

1) describe, evaluate, and diagnose existing social production systems failing to produce some collectively desired outcomes
2) imagine and test (logically and empirically) proposed interventions that could: a) not only be plausibly effective in improving existing performance and conditions, but b) could also be successfully authorized and implemented in that particular, concrete setting; c) by some particular "strategic actor"; d) operating from some particular position in that setting; and
3) identify the concrete actions that a particular "strategic actor" would have to take -- starting immediately and stretching forward over the years -- to build their own capacities to catalyze and influence the actions of all the other actors whose interests, values, knowledge, resources, and capacities have to be engaged and re-directed to produce the desired change.

Fitted to the Existing Setting

This approach is *strategic* in the sense that it is broad, purposeful, and important to the lives of those in the setting within which the effort is being undertaken; but also in the sense that the effort is *fitted to that existing environment*. It takes for granted the *future has to be constructed from the past* – that all the resources that are necessary to make progress have to be present to some degree in the past and present capacities of the system. Therefore, the

effort always begins with a detailed evaluation of the existing *status quo*, and a detailed diagnosis of the economic, social, and political interests and values that are mobilizing, directing and sustaining that *status quo* as the *best* or *only* condition in which to live and work.

Conflicting Interests and Values at Stake and Empirical Uncertainty

It also takes for granted the idea that the strategic effort will be mounted in an environment in which there are significant conflicts over the interests and values that are to be advanced through the imagined and proposed changes, and significant uncertainty about whether the proposed changes will actually work. It follows, then, that the effort will require learning and adaptation along the way rather than a direct march to an improved steady state.

The learning has to be about more the most efficient and effective means for advancing educational goals. It also has to be about naming, observing, and measuring performance against the particular dimensions of value that are to be advanced and reflected in the efforts of the particular educational "production processes" that are being relied upon to produce the desired results. The learning also has to be about the important political structures and processes that have to challenged and adapted to make room for and sustain the political support required to make the suggested changes, even when those changes are risky, and involve losses to some actors in the system. And the learning has to be focused not only on how to meaningfully evaluate the performance of the system at macro and micro levels, with respect to different purposes and different populations being served, but also on developing and testing innovations that can improve the performance of the system.

Imagining an Intervention that Could be Plausibly Effective, Authorizable and Doable

It takes as a challenge the task of envisioning an intervention that could, if adopted and implemented, successfully alter both the political and operational conditions that are simultaneously constraining and enabling improved performance by the existing national educational system. Such an intervention would likely include many different specific initiatives – in effect, a sequenced portfolio of distinct initiatives, launched by different actors from different positions advancing different purposes with different populations – rather than a single intervention launched from a single spot. (Moore and Spivack, 2020). The particular interventions would always be contingent in conception, and uneven in their execution and in adaptation. The uneven progress and the adaptation of the plan would reflect the learning that occurs as political and operational experience, combined with evaluation and discussion, accumulates in real time.

Developing a Strategic Actor that Can Think and Act Together to Lead the Change

Finally, it assumes that it is possible to develop an important "strategic actor" that will emerge, change over time, and become successful in influencing the structure, conduct and performance of the national educational system.

Such an actor can begin with an individual in a powerful, authorized position. But if it is to succeed, that "strategic actor" has to grow into a larger, more widely distributed, loosely connected group composed of many quasi-independent actors distributed across the system. Over time, that strategic actor will have to develop the collective capacity to think and act more or less in concert, and in doing so, exert their combined influence, knowledge, and resources to transform the political context and operational performance of all the other important actors in the national education system.

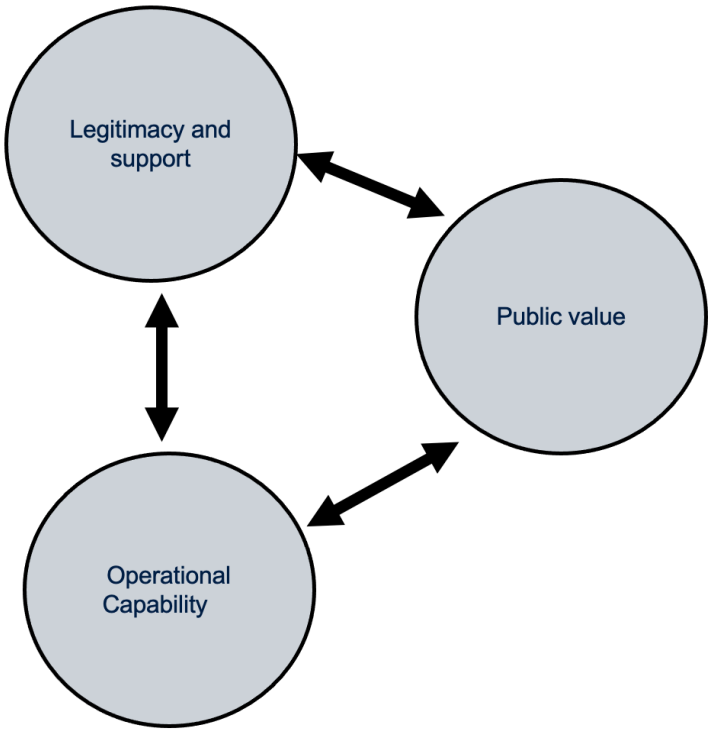
Note that the "strategic actor" is defined less by a particular *structural position* and more by an effective *functional strategic capacity* to monitor the current state and performance of the sprawling national educational system, and to spot, invest in, and encourage opportunities to improve performance as they emerge from other actors in the system who see opportunities to make changes in the system that they value and believe will work.

Below, we present the core ideas associated with this approach. We then apply this framework to the particular case of individuals in a National Government charting a path forward from the National Educational System's current level of commitment, capacity, and performance to improved educational and social performance, guided by a responsive, influential, and catalytic strategic capacity distributed across the important social actors in the system. In the end, this will look more like a searching social and political movement than a hierarchically organized production process.

The Strategic Triangle as a Guide for Evaluating and Diagnosing the Status Quo

Figure 1 presents a very simple, highly abstract framework for thinking about the challenge of mobilizing a significant change in an existing social production system.

Figure 1: A guide to strategic action: The Strategic Triangle



Source: Moore 1995

The framework was originally developed to guide the strategic calculations of public managers charged with the responsibility for managing public agencies in the complex, dynamic *political authorizing* and *operational task* environments in which they operated (Moore, 1995).

The basic idea was that those managers were responsible for envisioning and creating "public value" using the tax dollars and regulatory authority granted to them by a "political authorizing environment" (Moore, 2013; Moore, 2014). That political authorizing environment provided not only the *legitimacy and support* the public agency needed to survive and produce improved economic, social, and political conditions in the society, but also assumed the responsibility for *naming, observing, and measuring the important dimensions of public value* along which they expected (demanded!) the public agency produce observable improvements. These managers were also responsible for developing the special operational capacities used by their organizations to produce the desired results – ensuring that the resources granted to

them were efficiently and effectively deployed to produce collective desired results in both the short and long run.

Strategic Success

Strategic success was achieved by imagining and developing a path towards improved performance that successfully aligned:

1) the particular dimensions of public value the managers sought to advance for the society;

2) the sources of legal authorization, financial support, and political energy that could be tapped not only to sustain its operations, but also to demand improved performance, and carry the risks associated with innovation and change; and

3) the development of operational capacities that would allow it to produce the desired results with the resources provided to it for the collectively desired purposes.

Many public agency managers found it hard to keep the three points of this strategic triangle aligned along a developmental path that could maximize the public value they judged to be not only publicly valuable, but also authorizable and implementable. The reason was that the economic, social, and political environment in which they were operating was often far being aligned along that path.

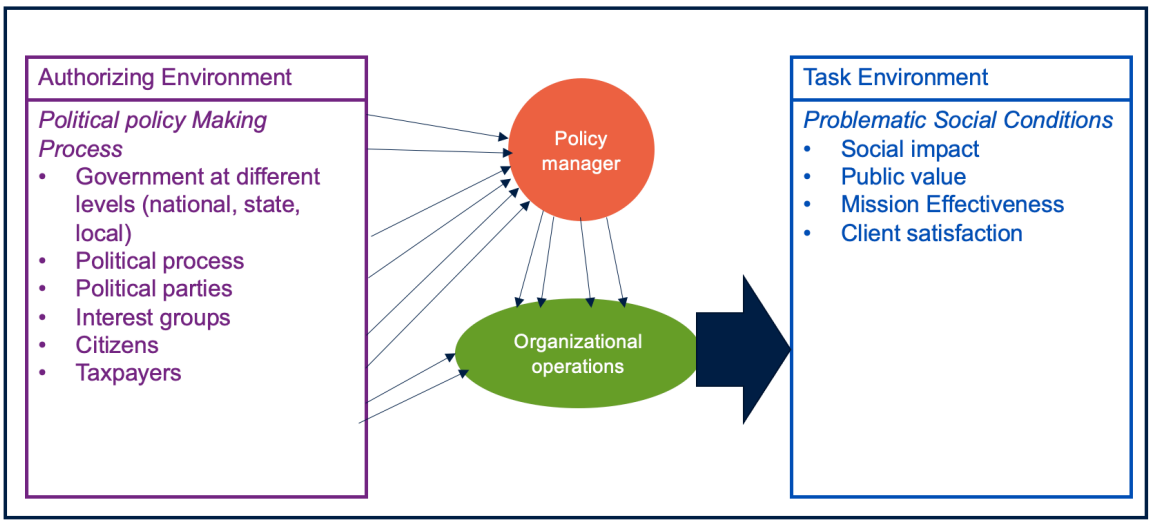
Key Pieces of the Environment/Setting in Which One is Working

As a practical matter, two pieces of their environment were strategically important:

1) the "political authorizing environment" that consisted of the elected representatives of the people who collectively assigned them particular purposes the managers were supposed to achieve, and provided the resources – tax dollars and regulatory authority they would need to accomplish their mandated objectives; and

2) the "operational task environment" that consisted of the material conditions in the world they were charged with the task of improving through the efficient, effective, fair deployment of the assets entrusted to them.

Figure 2: The Strategic Triangle in an Environmental Context That Includes the "Political Authorizing Environment" and the "Operational Task Environment"

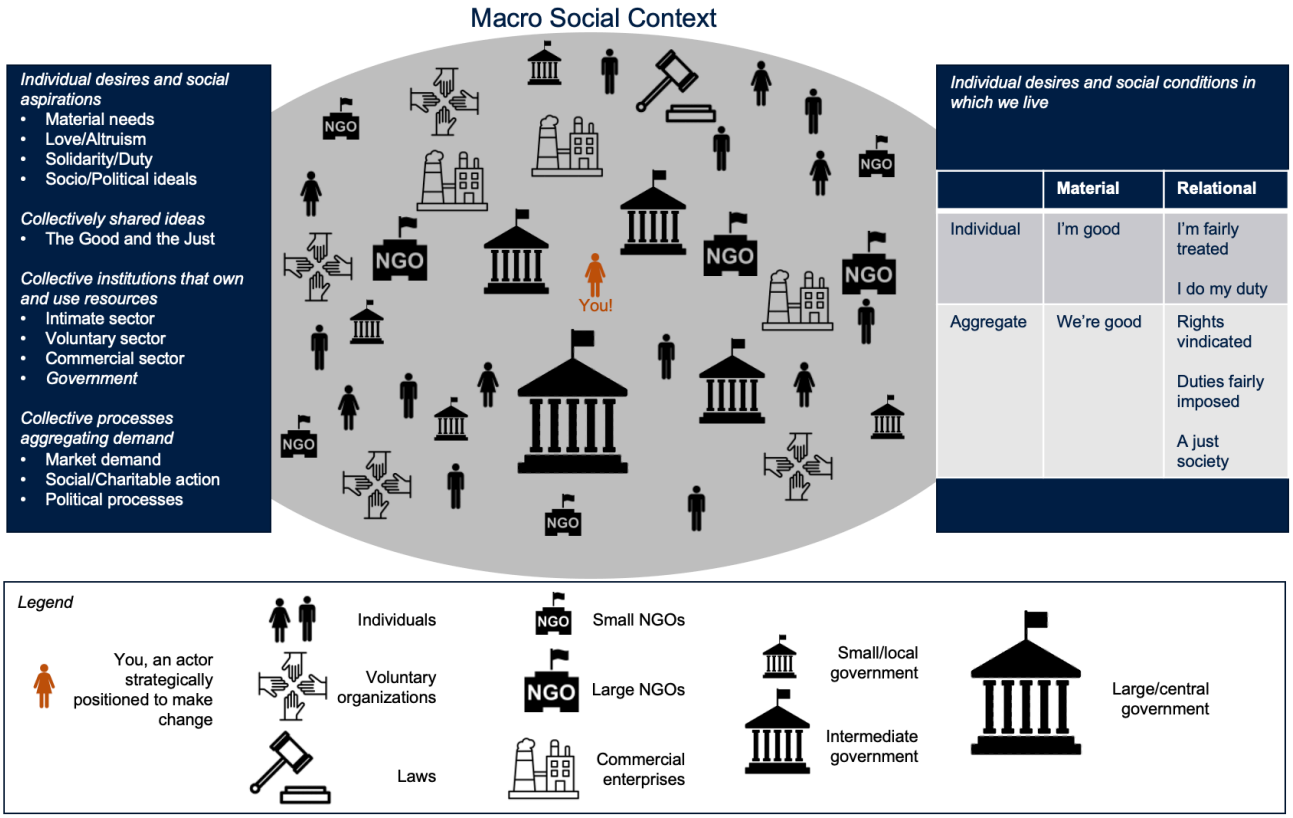


It might have been relatively easy to keep the points of the strategic triangle aligned *if* these pieces of the environment had remained stable and relatively simple in terms of what was valued and expected and what could be produced. Then, the organization could simply settle into a comfortable niche, and keep producing the same results through the same purposes over time.

The difficulty, however, was that the environments in which the public agencies operated were neither simple nor constant. The "political authorizing environment" was *complex* in the sense that there were both many different actors in that environment, and they often had their eye on very different dimensions of public value to be produced by public managers. It was *dynamic* in the sense that the values that the authorizers sought to produce through the work of the public managers changed over time with some dimensions of public value being emphasized more than others, or with some new dimensions of value, or new tasks being added to the work of the organization.

The "operational task environment" was similarly complex and similarly dynamic. It was complex because the operational challenges the organization confronted in its efforts to create public value were often highly varied and required customized measures to be successful. It was dynamic because economic, social, and political conditions in the society that had once seemed under control began to deteriorate, or new conditions that had not been seen before arose.

Figure 3: The social context (so big and confusing!)



The inevitable result of operating in a complex and dynamic environment was that public organizations were constantly buffeted by apparently conflicting demands for change to which they could not effectively respond. The natural response was to search for a quiet niche in the storm of demands in which the most important pressures on the organization could be held at bay. This often took the form of an organizational *status quo* in which the organization hid behind the shield of its professed mission and aspirational goals *despite the fact that it was largely failing to achieve those goals*, and that its *mission (or at least the particular way in which it enacted and performed its mission) had become less relevant and valuable to the society for whom it was trying to create public value*.

It is sometimes said that there is no such thing as a dysfunctional system. If a system currently exists in some particular shape, form and performance it is precisely because it is serving the interests and advancing the values of those who are participating in it, benefitting from it, and accepting it as a tolerable enterprise in their midst. And it is true that many public organizations seem to be able to establish an acceptable *status quo* in which it *seems* as though all the points of the triangle are well aligned. A commonly understood mission has been established, resources flow reliably from the public sources to be used by the organization, the resources are deployed according to a voluminous policy and procedures manual that tells the organization what it should to do with the available resources, and the audits and reviews of the organization's operations find little to complain about – until there is some kind of scandal, often signaling an important change in the status quo.

Using the Strategic Triangle for Environmental Diagnosis, Evaluation and Improvement

But using the strategic triangle in a rigorous examination of the existing *status quo* brings to light is the likelihood that there is very large *gap* between what the organization *is currently producing*, and the value it *could be producing* if it paid more discriminating attention to the complex and dynamic political and task environment in which was operating and responded more strategically to that environment.

This is perhaps the first and most important use of the strategic triangle: to diagnose the existing *status quo* by:

1) evaluating the performance of the existing organization with respect to publicly proclaimed purposes;
2) identifying the sources of public authority and financial assistance, and the "strings" that are attached to the use of these resources by those who control them; and
3) observing the particular operational processes and procedures the system is relying on to produce the desired results and noting where those methods seem to be falling short.

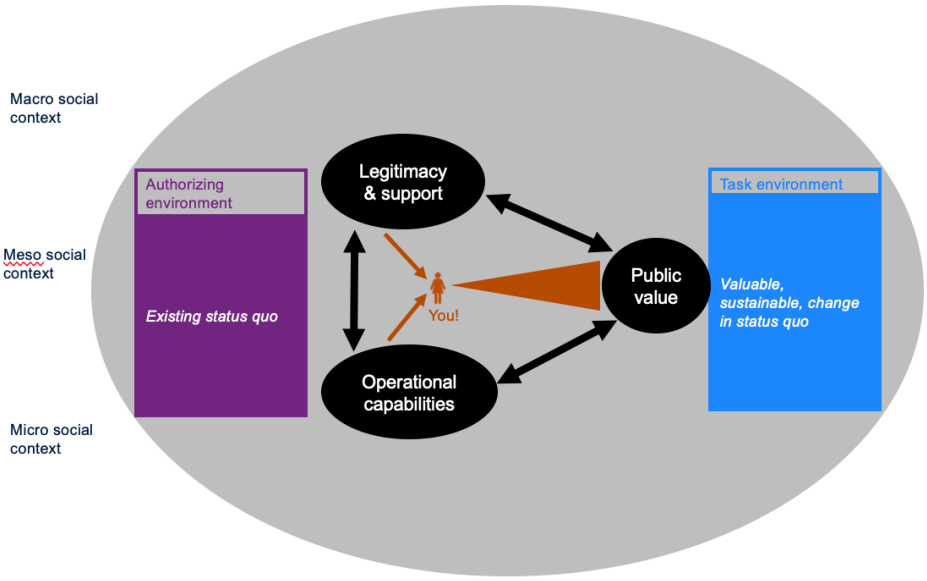
Such a comprehensive, detailed examination of the existing system provides an empirical baseline against which contemporary efforts to build support and operational capacity for improved performance can be measured.

Envisioning a Strategy for Intervention: The Public Value Proposition

That empirical diagnosis is important because it sets the stage for some particular actor in the system to begin thinking about how it can use the assets and power of its *position* in the *existing context* to design and execute an *intervention* that will improve the performance of the system over time. The proposed intervention can be described as a *public value proposition* – a more or less detailed strategic plan that envisions a path towards improved performance that includes demonstrated performance on important dimensions of public value, advanced through innovations in existing operations, and supported by new political conditions that will demand

and support the improved performance and accept the risks of both high expectations, and the innovative efforts required to meet those high expectations.

Figure 4: The Proposed Strategic Intervention -- a Contingent Public Value Proposition



Inevitably, the development, authorization and implementation of the strategic plan will be a dynamic, iterative process. It often begins as a disjointed conception. Some parts of the plan will be sketched at high levels of abstraction and describe future aspirations without specifying the means necessary to achieve them. Other parts will be much more concrete and focused with clear implications for what actions need to be taken right now (Moore, 2013, Chapter 2).

Similarly, some parts of the plan will focus on the ultimate goals and more particular objectives which, once achieved, would recognize and account for the improved concrete performance of the system. Others will focus on the efforts to improve that operations of the system in the short run through improved administration, and over the long run through the development, testing, and diffusion of improved operational methods (Moore, 2013, Chapter 7).

Still others will focus on the political work that has to be done to sustain a flow of resources to the existing system, to challenge its performance, and to tolerate the risks created by experiments with innovative administrative and operational methods for managing system operations (Moore, 2013, Chapters 1, 2, and appendix).

Over time, however, the plan will evolve as those engaged in the planning learn more about the political and operational environment in which they are working. Generally speaking, the plan will become both more detailed and concrete, and more comprehensive as the original sketchy parts of the plan are “inked in”, then adjusted, and sometimes even widened as the efforts to define public value, to mobilize political support for producing it, and to find the means for producing it lead to a greater, more comprehensive, and more detailed understanding of what might be both desirable and possible at a general, abstract level, as well as a specific, concrete level.

A critically important question, of course, is exactly who is the “strategic actor” who is doing all this thinking planning and acting? So far, we have not focused too much detailed attention on the key to this strategic effort: namely, *the identity, social location, formal authority, and effective influence of some particular actor who takes on the responsibility for orchestrating*

and driving what will inevitably be a collective process of thinking, acting, evaluating, and adapting (essentially, the actor who is represented as the orange figure in Figure 4).

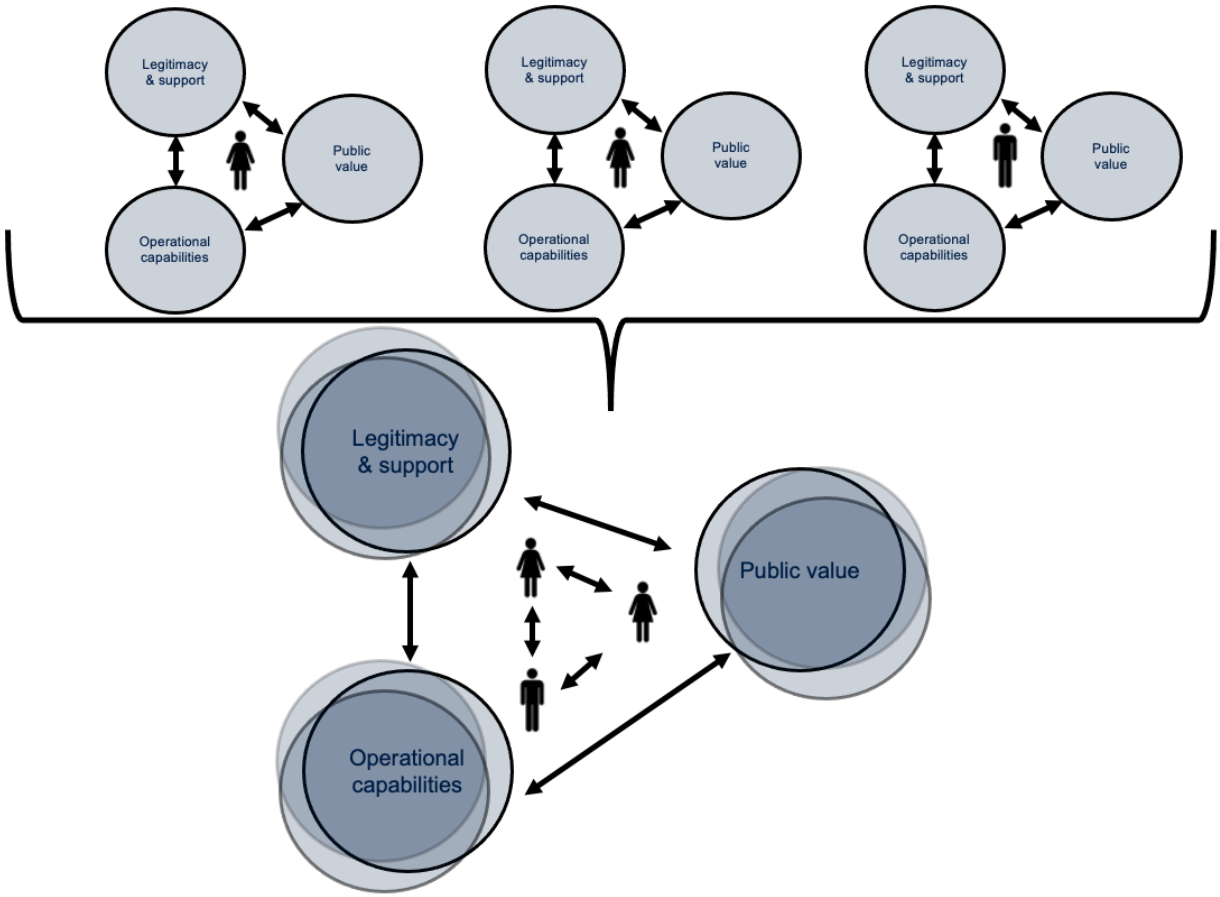
We have been able to avoid this critical issue because we have been thinking of using the strategic triangle in the context of a single organization. In that context, it is natural to assume that the important strategic actor is the particular individual who has been authorized to lead the organization and holds a particular institutional position. We describe these individuals as organizational leaders, executives or managers. They have been given both the right and the responsibility to take on the role as the key strategic actor: diagnosing the existing environment, searching for some path out from the existing status quo that could increase the value of the organization he or she leads, and mobilizing and directs new and old resources and methods to those new and more valuable ends.

In the case we are considering in this paper – the case of a National Education System being guided by a National Government -- the question of who is the "strategic actor" becomes considerably more complicated. So does the question of which actors in a given society represent important functional parts of the National Education System, and therefore have to be integrated into any successful effort to change the operations of the system through some kind of informal structure and functional co-ordination.

In fact, the reason that the issue of who can act as the strategic leader or manager of educational system reform becomes so complicated is that the strategic leader *will have to include many different powerful individuals, who can be brought together in a firm enough commitment to exercise their considerably combined influence and power to move so complex, decentralized, and distributed production system.* That actor will have to be created, and in all likelihood, continuously adapted as the reform movement evolves over time. (Moore and Veth, 2022).

Figure 5 below shows the complexity that is added to the effective leadership and management of a National Educational System when several different, structurally independent, social actors have to be combined in some kind of collaborative effort to achieve a purpose that cuts across their independent jurisdictions and operations.

Figure 5: The Strategic Actor – A Functional Executive Capacity to Lead a Complex Collaboration



Source: Adapted from Moore, Jong, Moore, and Veth "Public Value Tool Kit Graphics".

We will discuss below the question of how a functional "strategic actor" can be developed that can influence the short and long run performance of a National Education System. The important point to remember at this point is that in order to work, there has to be some strategic actor that *has sufficient authority, influence, power, and continuity to lead a complex political authorizing environment, and a complex operational and task environment through to improved performance of the system*. Given the decentralized *structures* of government and society, and the even more broadly distributed *functional capacities* that exist in society and act to define the values to be produced by and reflected in the national educational system, to provide resources to sustain its operations, and to use those resources in particular activities that seek to advance educational goals, that strategic actor is unlikely to be successfully corralled within a single formal structure.

III. Applying the Strategic Triangle to the Challenge Faced by National Governments That Seek to Improve Educational Performance

The Decentralized Structure *and Widely Distributed/Overlapping* Functions *of a National Educational System*

The challenge of using this strategic framework in the highly decentralized structure, and highly interdependent functioning of a National Education System is to imagine how the many actors in the system might be engaged successfully in a sustained process of supporting, operating, experimenting, evaluating, and learning what actually will work to achieve the broad social goals that are linked to improved educational performance.

In principle, the solution might lie in the establishment of a national "principal" with broad and exacting executive powers over all those "agents" who hold positions that affect national educational outcomes – in effect, an educational czar. But the system of interdependent actors that the national principal would seek to influence would not necessarily see themselves as *agents*. They are more likely to see themselves as *independent actors who are simultaneously principals and agents, and demanders and suppliers of educational services.*

The strategic approach suggested here is designed to take into account the empirical reality that the educational production system consists *structurally* of many different social actors who *function interdependently* to evaluate the performance of the system, provide resources to it, and carry out activities that determine its ultimate impact on conditions in the existing society.

A structural analysis of the national educational system through the lens of the strategic triangle leads on to identify the following important actors:

- *Individuals* who use the services provided by the national educational system – on either voluntarily or compulsory basis (e.g., school aged children and their parents)
- *Individuals* who are asked to contribute financially to the provision of the services (e.g., to some degree and in some instances those who use the services, but also and more significantly, taxpayers who may or may not be the parents of school aged children)
- *Individuals* who are citizens of the society and are asked to consent to the use of state authority to use its sovereign authority to tax and spend to provide financial support to educational service providers, and its regulatory authority both to require children to attend school, and to regulate what can or must be taught by educational supplier
- *Government* representatives (in different branches and at different levels of government) who decide on behalf of the individuals described above whether and how to use public assets to provide educational services designed to reflect and advance different dimensions of public value in the financing, production, and regulation of educational services, and call those who provide the services to account for their performance including:
    - Public sector bureaucrats and managers who make policy, regulatory, and budget allocation decisions.
    - Public school administrators who direct and control the use of resources, and the hiring and firing of teachers who work for them in publicly financed and managed school
    - Teachers who assume the responsibility for developing and deploying professional skills to teach school aged children
- Collective actors of various types who engage with the system
    - *Parents, families, and communities* that provide basic or supplemental educational services to children on a voluntary basis
    - *Philanthropists* who provide financing to increase the quantity and quality of educational services to those in need, and support the development and testing of innovations in educational service provision designed to produce increased educational productivity

- *Private/Independent Educational Providers (both non-profit and commercial)* that provide educational services supported by different combinations of user fees, and voluntary donations of money or time)
- Representatives of *voluntary associations or commercial enterprises* (operating at different levels of the society at different scales) who seek to influence government policy with respect to its support and guidance to the national educational system
  - PTA's, civic associations
  - Teachers' unions
  - Potential employers
  - Suppliers of educational materials, supplies and technology
- Unelected representatives of the public who claim to speak for the public through varied *social and public media.*

This *structural* complexity is bad enough. But what is worse is the *functional* complexity of the system. The structurally defined actors do not line up neatly along functional lines with some supplying resources, some engaged in production, and some acting as social arbiters of the value of system performance at individual and collective levels. The reality is the actors in different structural positions *perform functions that are both varied and overlapping*. The functions include:

- providing resources to the system to maintain its operations;
- deciding how to deploy the resources they control to produce concrete changes in individual and aggregate social conditions and ensuring that those resources are used in the right ways.

Table 1 presents a matrix that lists (in rows) the structural actors who play important functional roles in authorizing, paying for, producing, and being affected by educational services provided by a publicly supported and regulated national educational system. It then identifies (in columns) the important functions we associate with the demand side or the supply side of a market system. What one can observe is that these actors are all bumping up against one another in ways that may or may not be usefully aligned.

Table 1: A Matrix of Functional Roles Played by Social Actors in: Authorizing, Financing, Producing, and Benefitting From a National Educational Systems

Actors in the National Educational System	"Demand Side": Value, Pay and Benefit from Educational Service Productions				"Supply Side": Invent, Produce, Adapt, Participate in Educational Service Production Processes	
	Arbiter Value	Pay For/ Authorize Use of Authority	Benefit From		Use Resources and Knowledge to Produce	Contribute Voluntarily to Production Processes
			Directly	Indirectly		
Individuals						
School aged children and their parents	X	X	X		X	X
Taxpayers and (in some cases) parents and students	X	X		X		
Citizens	X	X		X		
Government officials or representatives						
Public sector bureaucrats and managers	X	X		X	X	X
Public school administrators	X	X	X		X	X
Teachers	X	X	X		X	X
Collective Actors						
Parents, families, and communities who pay for or volunteer to provide supplemental education	X	X	X		X	X
Philanthropists	X	X		X		X

Developing a National Actor That Can Play a Strategic Role in Improving System Performance

Obviously, this is a complex system that might be hard to move in any concerted, narrowly defined direction, even with a strong hierarchy. Such efforts will always be undermined in part by cultural and political divides, and the presence of *de facto* and *de jure* discretion in decisions that determine the detailed character of system operations.

But the goal would also be hard to achieve through a competitive market system in which individuals with money to spend would determine what would be produced, for what purposes, and in what ways since that effort would leave some important collective goods, positive and negative externalities, and equity goals that are important in judging the overall public value of the education system unacknowledged and unachieved.

As noted above, what is needed is some central *functional* capacity – *not necessarily at the top of an apparent hierarchical system* -- that can actually exercise the necessary influence over the many decentralized actors in the system to establish and sustain:

- some sense of purpose – embodied not only in abstractly defined aspirations, but also in concrete measures that can show whether the system's performance (along many different dimensions of public value) is improving or not
- some capacity to mobilize broad social and political commitment (or at least grudging support and tolerance) among public, voluntary sector, and commercial educational service providers to improve national educational performance
- some capacity to ensure that public resources are being used efficiently and effectively in educational production in the short run, and that rapid progress is being made in developing improved methods of achieving educational outcomes in the classrooms, across the schools in a given district, and across the society as a whole.

This is a *governance system, led by a collective strategic actor*– not just a *centralized government*, not just *principals and agents*, and not just *demanders and suppliers*. Those who take responsibility for improving this system at scale will have to construct a governance system that will animate, guide, spend resources, place bets, evaluate, and learn over time.

Inevitably, they will have to do that from the position of the National Government, and it will naturally draw on the authority and resources of central government. But the formal authority of the National Government and its control over public funds and regulatory authority has to be buttressed with some kind of collaborative governance capacity. This capacity should be able to create and sustain a sense of purpose that is widely accepted and shared, build a measurement system that can keep track of progress both to learn what works and to sustain focus and hope, and mobilize resources beyond those that are held only by the national government. Finally, it must both be willing to manage a system that reliably takes advantage of current operational knowledge about what works to achieve educational system goals, and also be willing to run risks in experimenting with new methods for general progress towards system goals, or to enhance performance with respect to some populations and purposes not currently responding well to the standard methods.

Putting the Pieces of the Strategic Triangle and the Strategic Actor Together

Figure 6 presents an initial, highly abstract picture of the National Educational System, and the National Government.

Figure 6: Charecterizing a Public Dominated Social Production System: Levels

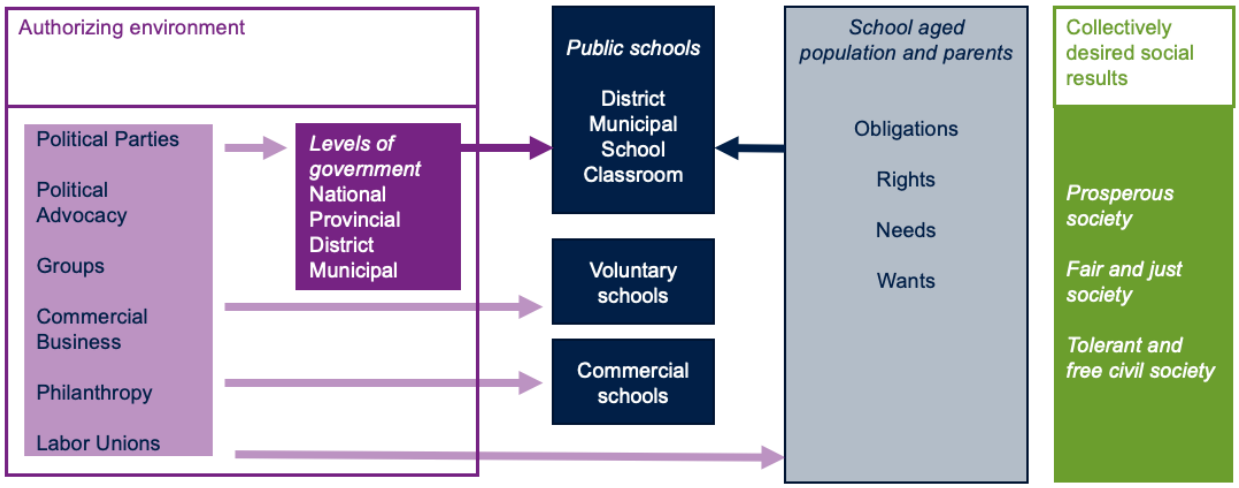
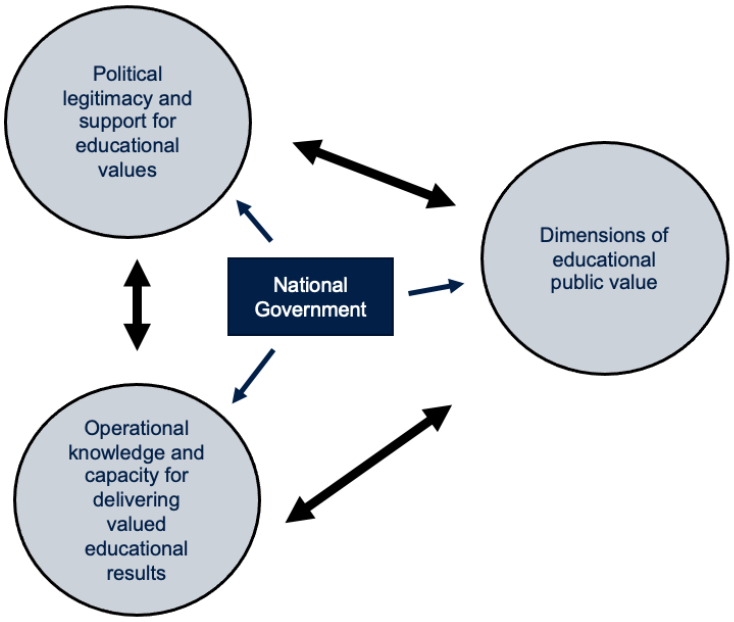


Figure 7 frames the effort to manage this complex system through the lens of the strategic triangle. The National Government is here envisioned as the strategic actor. The national purpose is conceptualized as dimensions of public value that name and capture the valued results and costs incurred through the operations of the National Educational System. The operational capacities of the system are embedded in educational suppliers (schools) operating at different levels in different sectors. The legitimacy and support for the system as a whole is provided by governments at different levels who provide the legal authority, the public financing, and regulate the activities of the National Educational System.

Figure 7: The Strategic Triangle: A Guide to Public Value Creation



In formulating a strategy for improving educational performance that is *valuable, authorizable,* and *doable*, those designing and pursuing the strategy have to deal with the considerable complexity that lies beneath each of the points of the strategic triangle, and the dynamic forces which are at work in altering both the *political authorizing environment* and the *operational task environment* of that system. And, as we have seen, there is considerable complexity, dynamism, uncertainty, and conflict just below the surface of each of these points, to wit:

- What are the important purposes of the educational system? Who gets to name and prioritize? How can our performance be measured? (Public Value)
- What are the best educational methods available for achieving both educational goals and broader economic and social goals? What do we do if our current methods are not working? (Operational Capacity)
- Who is called upon to provide support the educational system? To what extent are those who provide support allowed to define the methods and purposes of the educational system? (Legitimacy and Support)
- What if the important actors of the system are not now aligned with respect to the values that define the purposes of the system, the means to be used in producing those results, and the ways in which the work of financing and operating the system are distributed across social actors? (Development of the Strategic Actor and the Contingent Strategic Plan)

There are three possible responses to these important questions.

First, one can try to beat the philosophical, political, technical, and managerial complexity of the problem through the establishment of a strong, directive authority that knows enough and is powerful enough to man-handle the complex system towards a clearly envisioned high performing future.

Alternatively, one can throw up one's hands in despair at the possibility of being able to guarantee any improved performance at all.

Or a national government can learn how to make the most of the complex, dynamic reality by developing a collective capacity among actors occupying key positions across the system to continuously observe and evaluate the performance of the system, to imagine and pursue promising ideas about how performance could be enhanced, and to engage a larger, wider, and more resourceful group of contributors to the cause.

The strategic approach seeks to salvage the third from the obvious inadequacy of the first two. But to do so, those seeking to improve the system have to change their idea of what it means to develop and implement a strategic plan in such a complex, dynamic, contested, and uncertain context.

At the outset, it is important to keep in mind that the complexity and dynamism one confronts in trying to construct such a plan can help rather than hinder efforts to improve in the face of both political conflict and empirical uncertainty. For example, one important way to deal with conflict is to ensure that the values that are important to those asked to contribute to the performance of the system be recognized and honored in the formulation of not only broad purposes, but also of narrower and more concrete objectives. Each contributor or producer or user in the system might have a particular reason to want to push the operational system in one direction rather than another. And the system as a whole might benefit from having many different educational suppliers or demanders who have the opportunity to try their version out.

Similarly, one important way to deal with uncertainty is to acknowledge it, and let some combination of experience, expertise, and experiments answer the empirical question of how well a proposed initiative can perform against a particular set of objectives for a particular part of the educational system. (Moore, 1995b). In these ways, accepting complexity and dynamism in the system is not only an *inevitable* feature of a path forward, but also a *desirable* feature. It

allows the system to build broad political support, and to learn from the experience of many different initiatives.

The challenge, then, is to get comfortable with the complexity and the frequent changes in existing environmental conditions, to chart our progress through a complex maze rather than a straightforward march down a well-known path, and to create frequent occasions to take stock, reflect, and see what opportunities no longer seem so promising, and which new opportunities have appeared.

It is often said that a strategic plan never survives its first contact with experience. And, given the complexity and uncertainty, that is inevitable, and necessarily true. But what a strategic plan *does do* -- particularly when it is combined with an executive capacity capable and committed to monitoring what is occurring, evaluating what is happening, and making interventions to nudge the system towards better paths forward – is to provide a baseline for reflection, learning and adapting among both the strategic actor in the systems, and those who will be invited or called upon to make a contribution.

Each initiative taken under the guidance of a plan, or with the encouragement of the strategic actor, teaches a specific lesson about what is valuable, authorizable, and doable, and allows the effort to improve performance to continue to learn and advance. That process of learning and advancing is important in developing both the *political will* to act (what is important, why it is important), as well as the *operational way* to act (what particular kinds of resources combined and deployed in what particular ways could produce the results we now understand are important.)

So, the strategic triangle lays out for us a method for formulating an initial plan, filling it with more detail as we think and learn more, but also abandoning some parts of the plan if they are not panning out, and adding new pieces as they seem to be needed, supported, and useful. The constant observation, evaluation, reflection, learning, and adaptation of the overall plan is the work of the strategic actor in this system. The strategic actor cannot be a single actor; it will inevitably have to include a collection of different social actors, each standing on a particular social or institutional position in the system, that has learned to think and act together.

Ideally, that strategic actor would be one that could keep using the strategic triangle to recognize important dimensions of value that are at stake and need to be acknowledged, named, measured, and valued; to spot shortfalls in performance and innovative ideas that can close this gap; to identify and actively engage social actors who are either sitting on the sideline and not engaged, or who are actively opposing for reasons that have not yet been fully understood. It is a constant juggling act carried out by a troupe in which the constant task is to stay in touch with strategically important actors, untangle their traffic jams, fill in gaps in knowledge, line up their capacities, and keep learning about what is valuable and how it might best be produced by a large, very complex, highly interdependent system.

Balancing Political, Operational and Performance Monitoring Functions

One potentially important contribution of relying on the strategic triangle in diagnosing, evaluating, and changing the existing National Educational Systems is that it emphasizes the importance of both integrating and balancing three key functions in developing, executing, evaluating, and continuously revising the nation's strategy for improving educational performance, and the attendant economic, social, and political benefits that can result.

The first key function is the important *political* role of framing the purposes of the national educational system in a way that can command broad support across the nation – purposes that give all citizens an opportunity to get excited about the possibilities of education system improvement, and to take satisfaction in the progress that is made towards achieving those goal.

The second is for the national government to play a key *operational* role in ensuring the integrity, accountability, efficiency, effectiveness, and fairness of the existing system, and to

create room for and actively stimulate a broad array of innovations and adaptations in system operations that can carry the performance of the system along a path of steady improvement that can "moved the needles" that empirically register the performance of the system with respect to collectively defined goals at both individual and social levels.

The third is for the national government to play a key role not only in framing the broad purposes and aspirations that can command the commitment of the society as a whole, and those who operate the system, but also in developing the means for *empirically observing whether the system as a whole is on a path for improvement.* This would include not only measurements of educational outcomes observed at individual and social levels, and the degree to which these educational outcomes were being parlayed into improvements in economic, social, and political conditions in the society, but also the degree to which productivity enhancing educational innovations were being successfully initiated and evaluated.

To a degree, each of these functions can be seen as a separate and distinct challenge for the national government. And it is true that it is possible to plan for and monitor the progress in moving the system in each of these three domains:

- in the degree of political support for moving the system forward,
- in the rate at which operational performance is improving, and
- in the comprehensiveness and accuracy with which the performance of the system can be observed (Moore, 2013).

But the whole point of the "strategic triangle" as an analytic framework is that it shows the important interconnections among these functions, and therefore among the particular tasks that must be undertaken to realize the ambitions that are contained in a broad effort to use whatever will and capacity for improving educational performance exists, or can be created in the existing economic, social, and political context.

For example, one can see the task of *mobilizing legitimacy and support* as largely a *political* task. And so it is. It is accomplished using the political tools of collective mobilization.

But one can also see that success in mobilizing legitimacy is importantly tied to the challenge of *framing purposes* in ways that not only can capture the interest and commitment of those asked to support, witness and participate in the nation's educational system, but also can be used to observe and evaluate empirical changes in system performance and operations. The established purposes have to be consistent with the *philosophical values* of the country as they now exist, or as the citizenry would like them to be in the future. *Technical difficulties* associated with observing, counting, and measuring important changes in performance, support, and operations collectively judged to represent some kind of "progress" have to be overcome. And *administrative structures and managerial methods* will need to be adapted to ensure appropriate degrees and kinds of accountability that will simultaneously guard against corruption, assure efficiency, effectiveness and fairness in the provision of educational services, and create enough flexibility and discretion within the operating system to allow those with both large and small ideas about how to improve performance to have the opportunity to test them.

In contrast, the second functional requirement – *improving educational* performance -- can be seen as largely an operational task. And so it is. It is concerned primarily with the development and use of substantive, technical knowledge about how best to deploy public assets including tax dollars, regulatory authority, and the public spirit that can be mobilized through the kinds of political efforts described above: a shared, whole-hearted, quasi-volunteer effort (even among those paid or coerced to produce particular results) to produce not only the best *educational* results, but also the educational results that are most important in achieving the *economic, social, and political goals of individual citizens and the society as a whole.* But this requires a successful political effort to build a broad and deep commitment to achieving both the broad, long terms goals of the system, and the narrower, immediate and urgent tasks that will create observable progress.

Similarly, the third function might look initially as though it was primarily a technical task to be handed off to the auditors, the statisticians and the bureaucrats who are expected to keep track of the public resources being used to produce educational and social outcomes, and to demonstrate the impact of the efforts made on the empirically defined dimensions of public value that would reveal improvements in the performance of the system. But it should be clear that while there is a significant technical component to this function, it is intimately tied to the political as the measures of value have to reliably reflect the aspirations of those politically supporting and operationally contributing to the effort, and to the managerial and operational tasks of deploying productive assets made available to them to efficiently, effectively, and fairly achieve the goals of the national educational system.

Once one sees how these different functions overlap, and how each depends on good performance with respect to the others, it becomes very important to ensure that one is not only operating on each point of the strategic triangle, but also *keeping these points closely aligned with one another as one moves forward.* Success at one point in the triangle can enable or frustrate efforts being made in others.

This raises an important question about whether the countries whose performance has been studied within the RISE program have maintained the appropriate emphasis on each part of the strategic triangle. The empirical analysis we have done so far suggests that *if* there has been an error, or a missed opportunity, in balancing these efforts, it has probably been on the political side of the effort.

In many of the countries in which RISE has worked, the process of political mobilization around a set of goals that could command the respect and effort of many large segments of the population has given way to a search for stronger administrative systems that could control the performance of educational suppliers, and to a fairly narrow research and development process that seeks to find relatively small innovations in curriculum, pedagogy, or school management that might justify confident investments in small, incremental steps at improvement.

The key strategic question is what a more balanced, dynamic approach, guided by the concepts of public value and the strategic triangle, might look like. Below, we take up this question at each point of the triangle and conclude with the important question of how a national strategic actor could be created that could develop a useful contingent strategic plan and move it towards successful execution through political and operational methods, guided by a framework that outlines and measures the important dimensions of public value that define the broad purposes, goals, and objectives of the system.

Guiding Action I: Developing a Public Value Account for a National Education System

We begin with the challenge of creating a framework that can capture the important dimensions of public value that are judged to be at stake in the performance of the national educational system. We will call this framework a Public Value Account.

Empirical, Philosophical and Political Aspects of a Public Value Account

The first step is to look at the “public value” the system has in the past, and is now producing, with respect to some key dimensions of “public value.” To no small degree, this an empirical question. We want to know how the national educational system is doing with respect to such dimensions of public value as equal access to schooling, to the performance of schools in developing knowledge, skills, and human potential of the students, and to the impact that schools have on the economy both in the short run as they enable parents to become employed, and over the long run as the national work force becomes better suited to developing economies, and on the society and its political system as those who are now dependent children become resourceful citizens.

Obviously, there are important technical problems in measuring improvements along these dimensions of performance continuously over time, and across many different jurisdictions and populations. And there are important managerial questions about how to develop and use the instruments that can measure these effects in policy and management decision-making (Moore and Spivack, 2022).

But naming the dimensions of public value that are at stake in the development and operation of a national educational system is also importantly a *philosophical* and *political* task. When we want to talk not just about the *facts* of educational service provision and its effects on individuals and larger social aggregates, but instead focus on the *value* (both negative and positive) that we (as both individuals and members of a wider polity) assign to the observed effects, we move from neutral observations of empirical facts (as best we can record them), and enter the worlds of philosophy and politics – *philosophy* because we must now talk about how we value certain conditions rather than simply observe them, and *politics* because individuals and groups in societies will have different ideas about what is valuable to the welfare of society, and what we *owe to* one another and can *expect from* one another as a matter of justice. Those philosophical differences have to be expressed, debated, and integrated in political dialogue if those leading and managing the educational system wish to sustain the political support, urgency, and direction that it will take to move the system as a whole.

The Basics of Public Value Accounting

The basics of Public Value Accounting consist of the following principles. First, it is possible to describe empirically the impact of the National Educational Production System in "positive" (desirable and wanted) or "negative" (undesirable and unwanted) terms. We commonly call the positive effects "benefits" or "advantages," and the negative effects "costs" or "impositions." *Positive* effects include students learning to read, write, and do arithmetic, and to understand and learn how to participate effectively in the economic, social, and political system in which they live. They also include the external beneficial effects of education that accrue to citizens of living in an economy, society, and polity that consists of well-educated citizens. *Negative* effects include the financial and economic costs of providing educational services, and the use of state authority both to require taxpayers to pay for the public services provided, and to require students to attend classes even if they would rather not.

Table 2: Public Value Account: National Education System

Public Value Account: National Education System	
Costs/Losses	Benefits/Gains
Economic costs of operations/investments Public/governmental: voluntary: charitable individual: purchase Use of state authority Taxation Rights to educational services Obligations to be educated	Educational benefits to students Academic achievement Economic benefits Social/Citizenship benefits Prosperous, free, tolerant and just society Economic growth and upward mobility Social cohesion/ cultural understanding Political engagement and participation

Second, the good and bad effects of the National Educational Production System can be observed, and are experienced, by actors in the system at two different levels: at *the individual level* where effects are experienced and accumulated as individual are affected by the system; and at the *aggregate level* where effects accumulate and register not only at the individual level, but also within the society as a whole – affecting the experience of both individual and collective "arbiters" of value in significant ways.

The condition of an individual student, parent, citizen, or taxpayer will obviously be affected by the operations of the National Education Production System. They will notice the effect on themselves as a individuals and evaluate it in terms of whether it is good or bad, and how good or bad the effects are.

When we shift to the aggregate level, accounting for the "value" of the educational system becomes a bit more complex. At the simplest level, a public value accountant could simply add up the observed effects on all the individuals affected by the system – both positive and negative – and call that the net aggregate value of the national educational system. Conceptually, that is the most common approach.

But this approach leaves out two important complications.

The first is whether individuals assign value not just to their individual experiences with the system, but also *to the system as a broader condition of the society in which they live*. There is an important sense in which the aggregate characteristics of the educational system create a public good – an aggregate condition of our daily life like the air we breathe or the general sense of security we experience. Individuals living in a society might look to the overall quality of the educational system as a condition that affects their economic, social, and political prospects in society – something that will both mark their individual status in society and affect their anticipated path through life in their current society.

Moreover, that effect of the educational production system – its existence as an institution shaping many individuals' experiences in the world – would suggest that there would be many individuals *witnessing* the aggregate performance of the educational system who were not directly participating in it! They would observe, evaluate and take satisfaction in or despair of the society that has built the schools and the educational system which is available to other individuals in the society, and influences the overall quality of individual and collective life.

Together these points would suggest that the individuals who participate directly in the education production system might evaluate the performance of the system not only through the direct effects on them, but also through the effects that the existence of the system as an institutional feature of their current and future, individual and collective life has on their current and future sense of well-being.

Table 3 presents the idea that individuals might value the character of the national educational system according to various material benefits and costs that accrue directly to them through their direct interactions with the system, but also more indirectly as the character of the system as a whole is evaluated as a condition that affects them not only as direct participants, but also as those who witness and experience the impact of the system on their current and future lives as individuals, living in a particular society, characterized by a given set of values.

Table 3: Arbiter of Value and Objects of Valuation in Education national educational system

Arbiter of value	**Objects of valuation**			
Individual Arbiters of Value Parents/Children Taxpayers Citizens/Witnesses	*(Homo Economicus)* Own material wellbeing	*(Homo Altruisticus)* Wellbeing of others	*(Homo Civicus)* Moral and legal duties to others	*(Homo Politicus)* Ideas of a good and just society

The second complication takes the challenge of the first and broadens it further. So far, we have been consistent in thinking about *individuals* as the arbiters of value and have suggested that the individuals experience their National Education System not only terms of the services it provides and the burdens it imposes on them as individuals, but in terms of their observations of the impact that the national education system has on others in the society in the short and long run.

A different approach would be to shift from a system of valuation that depended on individuals as the arbiters of value (whether they did so as direct payers and beneficiaries, or as more "public spirited" individuals who only witnessed the system, and judged its impact on the quality of life of others in the society as well as themselves individually), and relied instead on the idea that individual valuations (whether selfish and material or public-spirited in the sense that it focused on the welfare of all others in society) could somehow be combined together to *create a collective arbiter of value* that could evaluate the National Education System by observing the direct and indirect effects of the system on individuals, and on the society as a whole.

We know, of course, that a "unum" does not emerge easily from an existing "pluribus". And despite our best efforts at developing the institutions and processes that would allow us to form a reliable, articulate public from the clamor of individual wants, needs, felt duties, and political aspirations distributed among individual citizens, we still fall well short of anything approaching a "Vulcan mind meld."

But it also remains true that, on a daily, practical basis we make decisions about how to use the collectively owned assets of government as though there was a voice that could speak for the public as a whole – in effect, a collective arbiter of the dimensions of public value to be advanced by and reflected in the choices made by those who represent us, and give voice to our individual desires about what our collective life should both demand from and provide to us as individuals.

Table 4: Individual and collective arbiters of value and objects of valuation

Arbiter of value	**Objects of valuation**			
Individual Arbiters of Value Parents/Children Taxpayers Citizens	*(Homo Economicus)* Own material wellbeing	*(Homo Altruisticus)* Wellbeing of others	*(Homo Civicus)* Moral and legal duties to others	*(Homo Politicus)* Ideas of a good and just society
Public/Collective Arbiters of Value Communities Polities Governments	Economic development	Satisfaction of collective needs	Vindication of individual rights Imposition of public duties	Advancement toward a good and just society

Individuals will evaluate the performance of the system at both individual and aggregate levels, and since public assets are involved in sustaining the system some processes and institutions that can claim to be a "public" as well as an "individual" arbiter of value are necessary. This adds the third complication to the valuation of the National Educational Production System: *the effects at both individual and aggregate levels have to be judged not only as good or bad, and not only at individual and collective levels, but also in terms of three different philosophical systems.*

The first system is described as "utilitarianism." It is based on the common-sense idea that individuals are the "best" or the "only appropriate" judge of value; and further that the idea of value consists largely of things that are described as "good for the individuals" making the

judgment as to value. It is not a necessary feature of utilitarianism that “the good” be identified exclusively in terms of material conditions and economic consumption, but it is often viewed primarily in these terms. When the philosophy of utilitarianism is used to make judgements about the organization of economic, social, and political systems, a core principle is that economic, social, and political systems ought to be arranged to ensure that the system produces the “greatest good for the greatest number,” with the “good” being defined by individuals, in largely material terms.

While such a principle seems obvious in our current utilitarian age, for many, this principle creates a moral problem since it would seem to allow some important individual rights to be sacrificed if that sacrifice would cost the individual asked to make the sacrifice only a little, while offering a significant benefit to many others.

That moral problem brings the second philosophical system into play. It is called “deontology.” That philosophical system is less concerned with “the good” than with “the just” or “the fair.” In this conception individuals are viewed as having *rights*. These can be certain kinds of procedural rights such as the rights to live, to own property, to sell one’s labor, to speak, to freely associate with others in the pursuit of individually held ideas of a good life, to petition the government, and so on. But these can also be substantive rights – for example, a more or less limited right to water, food, shelter, medical care, education, etc. regardless of ability to pay. Both to define and ensure these rights, governments are established to make and enforce the rules regulating what exactly it is that we owe to and can expect from one another as a matter of justice and fairness.

Because governments have the right and the responsibility to make rules that set out the rights and responsibilities of others in the society, they have to find a way to legitimate the rules that they create. The rules that governments create gain their legitimacy by a complex blend of utilitarian and deontological reasoning. On one hand, when government makes a rule, it has to be concerned about the effect of that rule on individual and collective material welfare. It has to be able to show that, if reliably enforced, the rules will promote the general welfare – that is, to ensure that the material and social conditions of individual and collective life are advanced rather than retarded by the rule. On the other hand, it also has to be concerned about the justice and fairness of the rule, and the particular way in which the burdens and benefits of the rule are distributed across the population. At a minimum, the government has to be concerned that the rule is uniformly and fairly enforced. But it may also have to be concerned about whether the rule advances or departs from a broader idea of justice.

Because governments make and enforce rules, and use state authority to do so, they have to develop shared ideas, institutions, and processes the legitimate their rule – that give proof to those who are asked to live by the rules that the rules not only advance the common good, but are also just, and fair, and advance the cause of public ideas of justice as well as the public welfare.

Governments differ from one another in their ultimate source of legitimacy. Theocracies seek to establish their legitimacy according to the dictates of religion; hereditary monarchies through the weight of tradition; autocracies usually through the claim of a particular individual who successfully represents him or herself as the personification of a national identity and destiny; technocracies on the claimed “expertise” of those in governing positions; democracies on the will or the consent of its citizens. Each form of government has to develop concrete institutions and processes that sustain their legitimacy – that persuade those who are governed that their rule is not only in their collective interest, but also just and fair.

It is important to realize that among these different forms of government, the one that gives “the public” the most importance as an arbiter of “public value” is democratic government. Fundamental to democratic government is the idea that the “public” as a whole should decide the rules that will order their relationships to one another – what each can expect from and owes to others in the society. The reason derives from the fact that rules necessarily constrain the

liberty of individuals. It requires individuals to refrain from actions that harm, or to take actions that benefit others in the society. Each right established – whether procedural or substantive – creates an obligation on others.

This seems to create a paradox: if individuals have substantial individual liberty rights in democratic societies, how can that expansive view of individual freedom be sustained in a world that has a government that can create rules that infringe on individual liberty? The philosopher Hannah Arendt had an answer to that question. She argued that the only liberty that was either possible or worth having was to have the right to participate in creating the architecture of our mutual constraint. That implies that the *political rights* to participate in creating authoritative rules that establish economic, social, and political rights and duties in a given polity are primary because they create the conditions in which we can exercise this most important individual right to liberty – the right to participate in the making of the rules that advance the common good and assure a tolerant and just society as well as a prosperous one.

This quick tour of political philosophy suggests that when we are thinking about the important dimensions of public value, we ought to be identifying dimensions of public value evaluated as good or bad, at the individual or collective level, and whether the dimensions of public value make claims on our individual judgments about value through utilitarian, deontological, or democratic procedural values.

Table 5 presents a matrix that identifies the specific, philosophically defined categories within which concrete ideas about the public value of education can be recognized and located.

Table 5: Categories of Public Value in Education

	THE GOOD **Material benefits and public welfare**	**THE JUST** **Vindication of rights and social justice**
Effects at the individual level	Client satisfaction Individual wellbeing	Protect individual rights Impose duties justly and fairly
Effects at the collective level	The achievement of social outcomes	Fair treatment of individuals Establishment of a just social order

The Practice of Public Value Accounting: Empirically Exploring the Definition and Measurement of Public Value in Education

The discussion above suggests the philosophic complexity of defining the varied dimensions of public value that are at stake in the performance of the educational system. We want to be able to at least be sensitive to, and ideally be able to observe and empirically measure these different dimensions because the categories all have some philosophic relevance to the choices made, and the performance observed.

One can easily see that this *philosophical* complexity reflects the *political* complexity confronting those who seek to establish a governance system that can remain cognizant of, make decisions about, and take action to improve the performance of a national educational system. Each of the categories in the matrix described above can be populated by a particular

political faction that takes one or more of the values in each of these categories as the single most important dimension of value to be advanced in political discussion and realized in concrete action.

As noted above, given the philosophical complexity, we might wish to avoid the frustrating, conflict-laden effort to articulate and measure the performance of a national education system. But if the goal is to improve the actual performance of the system, we cannot avoid this effort. Without naming the purposes we seek to achieve, and without having the empirical means for determining whether those purposes are being realized in the concrete world in which we live, how can we possibly know either what we want and whether we are getting it?

To avoid the work and the frustration, and still meet the demands for leadership, direction, and evaluation, many nations agree to talk about performance in terms of either grand aspirations (e.g., quality education for all; preparing individuals for 21st century skills, etc.); or very narrow technical measures (tests of skills in reading or mathematics). But neither broad aspirations that cannot be linked to empirical measures, nor empirical measures that cannot be easily linked to broad aspirations are the answer to the dilemma of measuring educational performance.

The answer lies instead in two key ideas. First, we have to accept the idea that we have as much work to do in naming and measuring the valuable results we hope to achieve as we do in figuring out better ways to produce on those measures. It is a developmental process – not one where we can leap to a solution, but also one that we have to keep adapting, improving and celebrating as we grope our way forward.

Second, there will be many different dimensions of value that will be important to name and measure, and to learn about the relationship among them as we experiment with different micro, meso, and macro efforts to improve the system. The task of learning to define and measure the public value of education would be achieved when we could capture the many different dimensions of value that were at stake in the national educational system at both a conceptual and empirical level. That in turn could improve our ability to see what exactly was being achieved and what lost when we introduced a new intervention into the system, or scaled an existing intervention, or altered a portfolio of interventions into the system (Moore 2013).

To get started in building a Public Value Account for a national educational system, it is useful to begin by looking both broadly and closely at what has been claimed as the important purposes and benefits of the system to individuals and to the society as a whole, and what has been recognized as the important costs and impositions that have been made to support the operations of the system. This important information is contained in the broad policy statements that have served as legislative, administrative or court mandates promulgated to justify and guide system operations. It is also useful to review the criticisms that have appeared in such documents as audit reports, policy and program evaluations, and even media stories that have pointed to particular incidents that suggest either good or bad performance of the system or have provided more in-depth coverage of larger patterns of good or bad performance.

The point of this exercise is not to judge the truth or accuracy of the claims, but simply to identify what particular features – what dimensions of value -- are being used to identify good or bad performance. The goal is to create a set of metrics that can be used to monitor the current operations and performance of the school system along different collectively valued dimensions of performance. While the systematic review is primarily intended to develop the array of valued dimensions of performance, it can also help to provide a rough, variegated picture of the overall performance of the system at the time the work was done. This would allow one to “pencil in” what is currently known about the performance of some parts of the system on some particular dimensions of performance. The eventual goal would be to displace this cobbled-together system with something that was both broader and more comprehensive, but also more detailed

and complete, and therefore a more accurate and balanced picture of the performance of the system.

The End Result: A Useful Public Value Account

Success in developing a strategically useful Public Value Account would consist of an ordered set of dimensions of public value that would have philosophical and political resonance, alongside technical means for measuring them, incorporated within managerial systems for developing them. How else could we know whether the end to be pursued could muster the kind of legitimacy and support from the population that would be asked to pay for it, produce it, and evaluate it as something that they as individuals, or as a collective thought was desirable to introduce? It is in the linking of the concrete, empirical goals and measures to individual and collective aspirations that both the rationale and the energy to make the educational changes can be found.

Finally, the array of goals would have to guide not only the evaluation of particular educational innovations that were undertaken, but also influence their design, implementation, and continuous improvement. The existing curriculum, pedagogy, and school management systems would have to be changed in ways that held some chance of improving performance on one or more dimension of value.

Most importantly, perhaps, the links between the array of values, the potential sources of legitimacy and support that could be mobilized behind those values to support significant changes in the scale, quality, scope and co-ordination of educational service delivery, and the operational capacities that could be used to reliably execute the planned changes would have to be both complete (all bases need to be covered) and coherent (each part of the system was to be consistent with and support the others,)

Table 6 presents a rough, incomplete description of the array of value dimensions that might be useful as a guide to whether the educational system was improving its performance. This is what we could call a Public Value Account for a national educational system. It is a suggestion to be substantially altered is it is used in political discussions about the broadest purposes, the highest priority goals, and the concrete objectives to be advanced through a national reform effort that will ideally be sustained and become more knowledgeable about what should be and can be produced, more enthusiastically endorsed by the society as a whole, and more effective in improving economic, social, and political conditions.

Table 6: Public Value Account for Education

Public Value Produced by National Education System Academic Achievement of School Aged Population Traditional Goals 21st Century Skills Community Building Through Schools: Engagement of Parents/Taxpayers/Citizens National Social and Political Development Through Educational System
Resources Expended for National Educational System Public Tax Dollars Public Regulatory Authority Public Spirit Philanthropy Volunteerism Private Spending by Parent

Guiding Action II: Maintaining, Improving and Developing New Operational Capacities

The next part of the national strategy for improving the performance of the national educational system is to create an overview of the *existing operations* of the system cataloguing what resources are being spent on what activities with what impact on national purposes, goals, and objectives.

It is important to remember that a huge infrastructure that uses public and private money, social and political commitment, professional knowledge, and human labor already exists, and is producing some individually and collectively valued results – at least when compared with doing nothing to support a National Educational System. It is also important to remember that the scale of that infrastructure has grown dramatically in developing countries over the last three decades or so. That has not only created significant progress compared to previous systems, but also created some significant growing pains. So, the problem is not to start from scratch. Nor is it simply to root out corruption and inefficiency. It is, most importantly, to find ways to improve on many different dimensions of public value. Broadly speaking, we could see that effort in terms of:

- ensuring the financial and operational integrity of the largest pieces of the system so that no public funds are being diverted either to private pockets, or to private purposes that are at odds with the national goals of the educational system (no corruption or undermining of established goals and objectives of the system);
- improving the quality and impact of the largest pieces of the system through changes in the administrative systems, managerial practices, and operational methods of the many educational suppliers operating within the National System (continuous quality improvement through frequent experimentation and innovation);
- expanding the reach and enhancing the equity of the system through changes in administrative systems, managerial practices, and operational procedures that can deliver educational services to under-served populations, and achieve better educational outcomes for students who are having difficulty learning within the existing systems (enhanced equity for individuals and a more just economic, social, and political society);
- becoming more accountable, responsive to, and engaged with those who are supporting, participating, or affected by the system as it is now operating, and will continue to operate in the future

Note that there is a certain tension between efforts to ensure the "financial and operational integrity of the national education production system" on one hand, and to "encourage the kind of innovation and change" envisioned in the next three components of the national plan (Moore, 1993). The best way to ensure financial and operational integrity, of course, is to have a tight financial accounting system that keeps close track of the use of material resources within the system, and written policies and procedures that guide the day-to-day activities of everyone working in the production system – including those who are on the frontlines of delivering the services. This, of course, is the strength of a tightly organized bureaucratic system since it reduces both the *de jure* and *de facto* discretion of those producing directly delivering the educational services.

It also, incidentally, is the best way to ensure a particular kind of "fairness" – namely, that "like cases will be treated alike." This only works, however, if the system recognizes only a small number of kinds of cases. If students differ significantly from one another in ways that matter in terms of their ability to use the provided services for the collectively desired purposes, then one will have to either expand the rule book to include different prescribed treatments for different categories of students (with the result that the rulebook becomes very thick), or to allow a

certain amount of de facto or de jure discretion to exist – ideally, not enough to allow financial corruption, or social discrimination, or obvious risks to the welfare or rights of students, but enough to allow those at the front line to adapt existing policies to the complex realities they see in front of them.

The implication of these observations is that if one wants to deploy an educational system that encourages continuous learning among those *delivering* the service as well as those *receiving* the services, one has to create room for variation in practices, since it is only through variation that we can reach all students and discover whether there is a better way to accomplish agreed upon goals than the methods we are now using (Moore and Spivack, 2022).

Possible Kinds of Innovation

The operational question then becomes: how many, and what kind, of innovations are we looking for?

- Do the important innovations focus on new methods of instruction – perhaps particularly those that take advantage of digital technology?
- Or would it be important to develop cheaper, more precise, and quicker measures of individual student development so that instruction could be more tailored to individual student learning trajectories?
- Or perhaps it would matter a lot if we found better ways to engage the support of parents and peers in the educational process of particular students?
- Or it could be that what is needed are new ways to recruit, develop, motivate, and compensate the individuals who take on the arduous task of teaching?
- Or it might be that new managerial processes could be developed that could be used by school leaders to organizational cultures committed to teaching and learning – not only among the students, but also among the teachers?
- Or perhaps it would be important to change the form of accountability now used to finance, manage, control, and evaluate public school systems that would cause the public schools to be more consistent and energetic in doing their routine work; quicker to embrace and adopt practices that differ from theirs but have been shown to produce better results elsewhere; and more creative on their own in seeking to find better ways to educate.
- Or maybe the key is to re-shape the entire sector by re-allocating the overall social effort across the different educational suppliers now distributed across the public, nonprofit, and commercial sectors?

The wide range of possibilities suggested above could be seen as a somewhat arbitrary list of possibilities. But each of the broad possibilities suggested above has, in fact, been proposed as the panacea for improving educational performance.

Furthermore, a close reader might have noticed that the possibilities are not listed entirely arbitrarily; they are arrayed in a particular order. The order moves:

- *from* the most concrete and particular (but enormously widespread) activity that involves interactions between students and teachers in the presence of a curriculum presented through a particular pedagogy (Elmore, 1996);
- *through* the (equally particular but equally ubiquitous) intimate influences brought to bear on a particular student's chances to learn by siblings, parents, peers, and relatives;
- *back* to the socially or governmentally organized systems that create and distribute a pool of teachers that end up standing in front of classrooms;

- *up* to the acknowledged influence of particular school leaders on how all the elements described so far have been combined and operate in a particular school;
- *up* to the systems of public accountability that are used to animate, guide, and evaluate schools and teachers; and
- *up and out* to the wider society of educational suppliers who provide educational services outside the direct management control of government, and sometimes without any government funding, to those who wish the particular kind of education they offer, and are willing to volunteer or pay for that particular education out of their own time and pocket books.

Faced with this daunting array of possible categories of innovations (each embodying hundreds if not thousands of even more particular possibilities), it is hard to know exactly how to proceed -- to find and make best use of the particular innovations that could define the path towards improved educational performance at the national level. Yet, that is precisely the task that faces us.

Cataloguing Innovations: Micro Operational Change v. Macro Institutional Change

Two points seem important at the outset. First, it is probably important to embrace the wide set of possibilities that exist for improving the performance of national educational systems suggested by the list above. Since there is no particular reason to exclude or to home in on one particular kind of innovation, and since they all seem to be "on the table" for discussion, we might as well consider them all.

To make our task slightly simpler, we could make one crude but important distinction: that between "*micro-operational innovations*" on one hand, and "*macro institutional innovations,*" on the other. The set of micro-operational innovations would include those that occur within smaller social institutions such as individual schools or even classrooms that affect the basic processes they use to promote educational goals – for example, the adoption of a new pedagogy for teaching reading to young students, or a new way to engage parents in their children's education, or a new way to test the development of problem-solving skills among adolescents.

The set of macro- operational innovations, in contrast, would include those that happen within large social institutions and involve changes in the large operational processes those large institutions rely on to accomplish their tasks – for example, the processes of certifying individuals to become teachers, or changes in national financial support or evaluation of the performance of public, non-profit, and commercial schools. Table 6 shows the rough results of this effort below.

Table 7: A Catalogue of Kinds of Education Innovations

	Micro level innovations	*Macro innovations*
Classroom level Curriculum and pedagogy Continuous, personalized measurement Classroom discipline/management	Smaller, operational innovations	Diffusion across system through some process
School level Parent/peer engagement Teacher selection/motivation/evaluation School leadership, management, governance	Larger innovations that include managerial changes at organizational level	Diffusion across system through some process
National level Teacher professional development system Financing/monitoring systems Curriculum requirements and certifications	Even larger innovations that include system restructuring and financing	No diffusion since refers to whole system

One important result of making this simple distinction is to see that some of the proposed innovations can be tested relatively quickly and easily because they are small, relatively easy to implement, and produce results that show up relatively quickly (Moore and Spivack, 2022).

This is not to say that the aggregate value of these innovations could not be large. If the small, operational innovations prove to work for purposes and circumstances that are widespread in the system and able to be diffused rapidly, the impact on system level performance can be very important.

Other innovations, however, involve both a great deal of money, time, and risk to implement, and cannot be easily divided into bits that can reduce the wide uncertainty about the likely effects of the larger scale, more institutionally complex innovations.

For example, at the limit, it is hard to know how one could experiment with wholly different national level systems for financing, organizing, and evaluating educational systems -- partly because the experiment would be so large, but also because there is only one site where the experiment can take place. One could, of course, take advantage of international or historical comparisons of different national educational systems. Moreover, federalist systems allow for state level variation in national systems. Finally, one could make some marginal changes in particular operational or administrative features of a national system and observe the net effect.

But the point is that these efforts are of a different kind than smaller scale experiments with the micro-operational processes that can produce improved learning of different kinds, in different subjects, for different age groups.

Innovators, Innovations, and Innovativeness

Second, as one goes through this exercise, reaching for larger, more aggregate institutions encompassing larger populations, more learning objectives, and more variety in the particular things they have to keep in motion to produce the desired results, it seems that our

approach to innovation seems to change. One becomes less interested in *particular operational innovations* related to the intimate processes of learning, and more interested in *finding, developing and encouraging innovators* on one hand, and *creating institutional frameworks and processes* in which individuals can feel free to experiment.

Table 8: Innovators, Innovators, and Innovativeness

	Substantive Innovations in Processes that Produce Learning	*Developing and Encouraging Innovators*	*Create Institutional Frameworks That Allow or Promote Innovativeness*
Classroom Level Curriculum and Pedagogy Continuous, Personalized Measurement Classroom Management	Innovations in Classroom Methods	Find and Support Innovative Teachers	Innovative and Adaptive Teachers
School Level Parental/Peer Engagement Teacher Selection/Motivation/ Evaluation School Leadership, Management, Governance	Innovations in School Level Strategy and Leadership	Find and Support School Leaders Who are Willing to Experiment	Creating Schools that Can Learn
National Level Teacher Development Systems Financing/Monitoring Systems Curriculum Requirements and Certifications Research, Development and Evaluation	Innovations in National Systems	Find and Support Political Officials Willing to Change Education Policy	Creating a National System that Can Learn

Of course, the freedom to experiment comes with a cost. Those who seek to innovate at any level of the system have to recognize that they are, in fact, experimenting. They do not know the results for sure until they try it. That imposes a burden on them to ensure that the reasoning and evidence that justifies the experiment is sound. Perhaps even more importantly, the experimenters have an obligation to *pay attention to what happens in their experiments, and to report the results to others who are experimenting in similar areas.*

In short, we have to have system level processes that have two key properties: 1) they encourage not only *innovations* in all these different domains, but also *innovators, and*

innovativeness at all levels of the system; and 2) they have the capacity to capture and accumulate the results of the experiments that are undertaken.

Avoiding Supply System Capture

Unfortunately, this idea of how best to organize a continuously learning national educational systems has a key institutional vulnerability: it is vulnerable to capture by forces that could *prevent* rather than *encourage* innovation and learning (Dal Bo, 2006).

This should not necessarily be the case. We ought to be able to develop a rational approach to improving the performance of the educational system. In principle, all we have to do is to define what constitutes the goals of the national educational system, develop measures to determine the degree to which those goals are being achieved by the existing system, identify shortfalls in the national level performance, and imagine and test alternative ways to improve our performance by making changes in substantive operations or in organization and management at different levels of the system. That approach would simultaneously allow us to *challenge* the *status quo* and find ways to *improve* it.

And yet, one of the most important and surprising features of complex social production systems is that they do not easily change in response to changing conditions, or new goals, or new technical opportunities. The question is: why?

The Power of the Status Quo and "Institutional Mimesis"

Machiavelli offered one explanation. In his view, the status quo acquires many supporters and friends. Because individual suppliers are supported in the current activities, and they would prefer not to face the trouble and risk of change, there is little drive to experiment and change. Because current demanders have become accustomed to what they are currently getting, and either cannot imagine anything better, or worry that any change might be worse for them than what they are currently getting, there is no pressure or urgency on the suppliers to change. As a result, there is nothing that encourages or forces a change in what the system is producing, who is consuming it, or how the product of the system is being produced.

This is surely part of the explanation for the surprising power of the status quo. But the second part of the explanation for the power of the status quo was provided by sociologists Paul Dimaggio and Walter Powell (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). They observed an important empirical regularity in the world: organizations operating in what they called a specific "organizational field" came to look a great deal like one another in many aspects of their structure, conduct, and performance. This phenomenon – which they called "institutional mimesis" – seemed to be present in all substantive fields and all sectors – commercial, non-profit, and government. They argued convincingly that the surprising homogeneity among firms in any given organizational field was generated by not just by the social and political power of the status quo, but by the motivations and calculations of those managing the firms. Even in commercial industries, the managers of producing firms and organizations were motivated less by the desire to produce results measured in financial terms, and more by a desire to be seen as "legitimate" in their industry and their society.

The commitment to "legitimacy" was not driven by the intrinsic value of acting legitimately, but more by instrumental values that viewed legitimacy as a useful means to the end of survival and success. If they were legitimate in the eyes of society, commercial firms could more easily raise money, hire workers, and sell their products. (Note how this concept helps explain why some firms might be particularly interested in corporate social responsibility – as an idea that helps them maintain or expand their social legitimacy, and with that secure a more solid "license to operate" with some degree of respect and freedom from criticism and close oversight by the society at large (Moir, 2001).

And the easiest way to maintain their legitimacy, of course, was to look as much like everyone else in their industry as they could. They might need some small ways of differentiating themselves in the products and services they offered to deal with competitive pressures (e.g., a "brand"). But to no small degree, it was in their interests to mute these competitive pressures, and to try to look like everyone else. That made less work all around: they did not have to invent much that was new, didn't have to run the operational and market risks of trying something new, didn't have to think too much about problems that had not yet appeared.

This theory was developed primarily to explain why it was that commercial firms in given industries tended to look the same along many different dimensions that described their activities: the products and services they produced (which defined the industries); the organizational structures and systems they used to produce these products and services, the materials and production processes they used to produce their products and services.

Economists, of course, had their own explanation for why the firms in a given industry ultimately came to look like one another. Their account was that competitive pressures to claim market share and increase profits forced every firm to find the efficient organizational and operational means for producing the particular good and service. They were all forced out to what economists called the production possibility frontier, and there they settled with the one best method for producing the product or services that defined the industry.

That answer was good in theory, but it could not explain in practice why it seemed that *many commercial enterprises seemed to be operating well inside the production possibility frontier* – in a realm where they could improve their performance on many or even all dimensions of performance without necessarily having to increase costs (Garvin, 1988). Every time established industries faced a competitive challenge (which was rarer that we thought because the challenge had to be at the industry level rather than the firm level), it turned out that the established firms could find better ways of producing the products and services they had on offer. That fact made the hypothesis that established commercial firms pursued legitimacy within an industry rather than performance seem plausible.

Why the Status Quo and Institutional Mimesis are Particularly Powerful in the Public Sector

If the drive for legitimacy was decisive in shaping the conduct and performance of commercial firms in a given industry – even when financial return was a good measure of performance and competitive pressures to improve financial performance were powerful – then how much more powerful would these forces be in the public or voluntary sector where the measures of performance (at both individual client and social levels) were less developed, and the pressures forcing them to hit performance targets much weaker?

The answer to that rhetorical question is a scary one: *it seems quite possible that many firms in social or public sector production systems would be driven much more by concerns about legitimacy than real, demonstrated performance with respect to the values held by their "customers," or to those held by the third parties who were often providing the funds to achieve desired social results above the aim of satisfying the desires of their customers.*

Think also about the dangers in such a world of defining some particular activities as "best practices." This designation might be fine if we really knew them to be best practices (at both individual and social levels).

But even if that were true, such designations might stop all further inquiry, and encourage the homogenization (standardization!) of activities and outputs in the social sector, and prevent both adaptation to different client populations, and the search for better, more robust methods that could work better across all clients, customers, and local social preferences. If we were not sure that these methods worked but only guessed that they did,

then the designation of best practices might lock an entire social production system into mediocre performance for many years.

The plausible claim that the managers of producing firms in all sectors, but particularly those in the public and nonprofit sector, might seek to pursue legitimacy rather than real performance has enormous significance for the likely impact of a centralized government managed research and development system on generating improvements in the national educational system. The reason is that such a system would be unsurpassed in terms of its ability to establish what practices in the educational system could be viewed as legitimate and which suspect. Once one has some system that is empowered to establish the important purposes of the educational system at the individual and social level, to evaluate performance in those terms, to encourage innovations and experiments that could plausibly improve performance, to judge whether the innovations and experiments were successful or not, and to encourage the adoption of the new and the abandonment of the old, one has essentially created a system that has a monopoly on legitimacy as well as performance. The system has the standing to define public value in education, and to say what practices are consistent with producing that value, and, either implicitly or explicitly, to define the legitimacy of any educational provider in the system.

Such a system would have a great deal of power to influence the practices of a national educational system even though that system consisted of many different educational suppliers, users, and evaluators in different positions. Indeed, in a system where things seemed undisciplined, unfocused, indifferent to results, and out of control, it would be reassuring to think that we could organize the complex system through a process that united government with professionalism and with science to make steady progress while preventing frauds from entering the production system. As long as the coalition of government, professionals and science could be relied upon to act for the overall public good using the best available knowledge even as we kept testing and searching for better, that system could work as desired.

But it should also be obvious that if this system ever became dominated by the existing status quo, and the powers of institutional mimesis, it could become a significant obstacle to change. Instead of challenging the status quo, it would support it. Instead of testing it, it would keep certifying it (Rolleston, 2016).

Critical Functions and Potential Weaknesses in the Innovative Part of the National Educational System

Naturally, this puts a great deal of pressure on the imagination, integrity, accuracy, and speed of the parts of the national educational system that are actively working on evaluating and improving the system rather than directing and controlling the existing status quo. This, after all, is the part of the system that constitutes the “growth plate” for the system as a whole and will improve its future.

An important implication is that the dynamic part of the system – the one that is focusing on change and improvement -- has to be the boldest part, and to take on the biggest and most stubborn problems in the national educational system. And it is here that this system might have the greatest problems.

1) It might not be bold enough in taking on the largest institutional and performance problems facing the system (e.g., ensuring a minimum quality of performance across the system as a whole; finding effective means for reducing large, persistent differences in academic achievement associated with race, economic class, and geographic location; successfully integrating immigrant populations; developing an adequate response to persistent educational achievement differences across race, class; etc.)
2) It might not have enough standing or knowledge to have an impact on these big problems (the social and political support/demand for educational performance might be

too weak or too spotty to allow sustained, significant pressures to improve across the system as a whole; there may be many problems in promoting learning across a heterogeneous population that we simply do not yet know how to solve)

3) It might be too slow in developing the certain knowledge that could provide some part of the power and influence those examining the potential for change could make (increased knowledge about what things work to improve educational performance is a key asset to the innovators making change, and its production a key goal of the GSCRD system, but its methods for determining what works may be too expensive and too slow to produce reliable knowledge)

It follows then, that the challenge of improving the performance of the National Education System across any or all dimensions of public value is to find some means to ensure that the part of the system that seeks to encourage, guide, and develop ideas for change that can stay focused on the kinds of changes that could be developed and vetted at reasonable speed, and, once tested and diffused, would have a large impact on the performance of the system at a social level.

Stimulating and Managing the Search for Improved Educational Performance

Just as the effort to manage the National Educational System in general cannot be either a simple top down or bottom-up process, so the effort to manage the part of the National Educational System that seeks to improve performance through the encouragement of different "innovative policies and practices" has to have elements of top-down, side-in, and bottom-up processes. Of course, some innovations are of a type and scale that the system as a whole has to change. But even that will require significant top-down, side-in, and bottom-up political efforts to mobilize the necessary social and political commitment to such a sweeping reform. Similarly, many side-in and bottom-up innovations can be encouraged by policies established at the national level that can recognize, tolerate, and support innovations initiated at lower levels of the system. So, there is no question but that the National Government has to be involved in managing innovations of various types and sizes in the system (Moore and Spivack 2022).

But a crucial element of the overall success of the effort to move the system forward is to authorize, recognize, support, evaluate, and help to diffuse innovations that are nominated by actors distributed across the system, informed by their local experience, motivated by their particular values, and supported within their local context. The volunteerism and public spirit of those in the existing educational supply system that simultaneously: 1) shapes the overall social demand for education; 2) generates concrete ideas about how system performance can be improved; and 3) supplies the resources to carry out the experiment; is a valuable resource in providing both the will and the way for making educational progress, and it needs to be recognized and supported, not given short shrift by the powers that be.

As an empirical matter, those seeking to lead a broad educational reform movement, who understood that such a movement depends on the overall innovative capacity of the system as a whole, might embrace an analytic view of the system's capacity for improvement that focused on the empirical features of the system described below in Table 9.

Table 9: Simple Analytics of Innovation and Learning in Complex Social Production Systems

Simple analytics of innovation and learning in complex social production systems
• The number of innovations tried • The size, character, and (system) location of tried innovations • The supply, capacity, and (institutional) position of potential innovators • The scope of social authorization and financial support for innovation at different levels • The evaluative terms to be used in assessing the social or public value of a proposed idea • The *ex-ante* assessed potential of the innovative ideas that were authorized and supported • The *ex-post* evaluation of the empirical results produced • The capacity of the system that provides financial and social support for new ideas to distinguish good ideas from bad and to provide sufficient financing and support for the spread of ideas of proven value • The capacity of the system that provides financial and social support of the status quo to recognize and act on the potential for replacing the old with the new.

To be able to initially gather and continuously update the performance of the part of the system that is reaching beyond the existing status quo in a search for improved performance, the national actor would have to develop the capacity to

- Recognize where innovations are occurring in the system (with or without explicit authorization)
- Increase the amount of *de jure* discretion in the system to widen the number of platforms from which innovations can be tried
- Complement the increased authorization to experiment with both incentives and resources for innovators to use in exchange for an obligation on the part of the innovators to justify their ideas at the outset, and to accurately monitor and evaluate the results
- Review the overall portfolio of innovations to ensure not only that there are enough to keep the system focused on learning as well as continuing the status quo, but also exploring a broad enough part of the space of possibilities to increase the likelihood that important, performance enhancing innovations will be found.

To ensure that the maximum system learning could be wrung from the innovations that were explicitly introduced into the system at some level for some kind of purposes, the national actor would also have to build a broad, distributed technical capacity for empirically describing, monitoring, and evaluating the innovations that were tried. This might be achieved through training programs that certified individuals in the system as qualified policy or program evaluators in the same way that the system now qualifies financial accountants. This system could feed into the creation of a national forum in which both the substantive results of particular innovations, and improvements in the methods used in evaluation could be discussed.

Beyond the circle of professional evaluators, a different group could be assembled of the innovators, and those who authorize them, to meet regularly to support the diffusion of the ideas that seem to work in improving performance. Taken together, these efforts might help turn the national educational system from a *bureaucratic* system to a *learning* system that can provide

the flexible, adaptive performance that would allow the national system to make progress on national level goals and objectives.

Guiding Action III: Building a Sufficient Coalition for Improvement

No improvement in the performance of the National Educational System can be achieved without mobilizing widespread, deep, active support for the effort to improve and learn. As noted above, building the collective will to improve is as important as developing confidence in the particular ways that improvement can be secured.

This important point has been routinely incorporated into strategic calculations and plans through a process that is often called "stakeholder analysis" (for example see Asgedom, Carvalho and Rose 2021). The basic idea is that there are many social actors who have interests and values at stake when some strategic actor seeks to make a significant change in the existing status quo; further, that many of these actors operate outside the scope of the strategic actor's direct authority; and finally, that many of these actors control assets that the strategic actor needs to achieve their goals, and can, therefore, frustrate or help the strategic actor succeed. These facts make the stakeholders strategically important actors.

Conceptually, the observation that the success of a given strategic actor depends on engaging a group of other strategically important actors in the collective effort the strategic actor has in mind is crucially important. And it is absolutely key to the design and execution of any plan to improve a National Educational System. Without support from a sufficient number of strategically important actors, the effort will inevitably fail – no matter the potential value that exists in the proposed plan. However, the strategic triangle when used rigorously in diagnosing one's "stakeholder environment" both adds comprehensiveness to the diagnosis of who are the strategically important stakeholders and moves towards action with respect to the process of building a "sufficient coalition" of existing stakeholders to increase the chance of successfully authorizing and implementing efforts to improve educational performance.

The common approach to carrying out a stakeholder analysis has two important flaws when viewed through the lens of the strategic triangle. The first is that it usually starts *and ends* with an analysis of who are the most visible, most influential, and most powerful actors who are already on the scene using their positions to push the performance of the system to satisfy their particular interests and advance their particular values. That is obviously an important first step, and one that is relatively easy to take.

But the problem is that it does not necessarily identify *all those actors who could, or should, be included in a strategic conception of who are the potentially important players.* It simply identifies those who are *now* important players. This helps us understand why the *status quo* exists as it currently does. But it does not help us understand how the existing *status quo* might be altered in ways that could improve performance. For this purpose, it is useful to search for actors who are not now present on the scene, but could be engaged, and if successfully engaged, could change the existing political status quo (Schattschneider, 1960). Such stakeholders can often be found lurking in the shadows of either oppression, apathy, or ignorance of their potential importance. If some means can be found to awaken those actors, new values, new pressures, and new sources of operational capacity might be found that can alter the existing status quo.

The second problem is that the stakeholder analysis does not necessarily help us identify all those external actors who are or could be important because it looks primarily at those who have interests or values at stake in the existing or future performance of the system. Again, that is a good place to start, but it is not necessarily the best place to finish the environmental diagnosis and begin the operational planning to build a stronger coalition focused on all the important values at stake and including all those who can make strategic contributions.

The strategic triangle reminds us that social actors can become strategically important in three different ways – not just one. Stakeholder analysis guides us towards those actors who have interests or values at stake – essentially, those who are keyed into the dimensions of value that are captured within the public value circle or the public value account. Each time we add a dimension of value to that account, we can pose and answer the question about which social actors might have a larger or smaller interest in how that particular dimension of value will be advanced through the national educational system as it now is, and as we hope it will become in the future. That helps us identify more actors than are now on the radar screen who can emerge as important supporters or detractors.

The strategic triangle, in contrast, reminds us that actors can become strategically important not only because they have interests and values at stake, but in two other functionally important ways. The strategic focus on the authorizing environment, for example, reminds us that there are actors in the environment who *control legal authorizations, and public financing for educational initiatives who are not narrowly or specifically focused on education*, and may not be engaged in discussions about educational policy. Elected and appointed political executives, elected legislatures, even courts may have significant formal authority that could be deployed to shape the National Educational System, but they are not currently consciously engaged in the effort.

Similarly, there are important actors who have *relevant knowledge and operational capacities that could be useful in improving educational performance* but are also not currently engaged or self-conscious about their particular ability to support educational efforts through their direct labor and activity. In effect, the strategic triangle suggests that social actors become strategically important actors due to the fact that they have *functional capacities* to authorize and implement changes required to improve the performance of the system, as well as interests and values that motivate them to become interested. Being clear about the values to be advanced through educational improvements is an important method of engaging their interests and commitments.

Identifying actors with functional capacities to authorize and implement value-creating initiatives not only helps to widen and to complete a diagnosis of those actors that could be usefully combined in a sufficient coalition to support educational improvement carried out along particular initiatives designed for that purpose, but also gives us a clue about the *relative strategic importance of each actor*, and therefore *the priority that ought to be given to recruiting them to the broader cause, and the specific means ways in which they might be successfully recruited.*

In these respects, an analysis that goes beyond *current stakeholders* to include a larger set of *strategically important actors* along the lines laid out by the three points of the strategic triangle could improve the capacity of a strategic actor to visualize and help create a sufficient coalition of actors who have not only interests and values at stake in efforts to improve educational performance along particular dimensions of value, but also control over vital resources, and key operational capacities.

If building both the *will* and the *way* to improve the performance of the national educational system through the creation of a sufficient coalition of quasi-independent actors is key to success, then the critical importance of creating a public value account in which potential parties in that coalition can find their particular interests and values reflected becomes a critically important tool for engaging strategically important actors. After all, it is the value that can be produced by the system, and the interests that can be satisfied, that provides both the motivation and justification for individual actors to join the coalition. Similarly, it is the dimensions of value, and the way that the production of those values are linked to the operations of the system that provides guidance to those who evaluate existing, and design improved operational capacities.

In this respect, the Public Value Account provides a critical point of entry and engagement with strategically important actors. Ideally, using this frame, individual actors can see where they might fit into an overall national scheme, and could be recognized and supported in their efforts. The public value account could act simultaneously as a *political recruiting device*, and an *operational target and discipline* for those who want to join the coalition.

In deploying the public value account as an organizing tool to help the national strategic actor develop, authorize, implement, and evaluate interventions to improve educational performance, however, one has to keep in mind that those being recruited to the cause will be the ones who decide whether to join the cause, and how hard, and in what particular ways they will work to achieve the results. High levels of engagement and work cannot be commanded – even by a national government. It has to be invited, recognized and encouraged if the national strategy is to succeed.

One way to think about this is that when one is observing both the current and future operations of a national educational system (in terms of conduct and performance of the suppliers; and the resourcing and political negotiations among the varied demanders) one is looking not only at the strategic triangle of the national actor, but the *strategic triangle of all the local suppliers and demanders with resources to offer or not.* The challenge for the national actor is to accept the fact that the key actors in improving the performance of the system will decide whether and how to participate and will do so in light of their own interests, values, sources of support, and operational capacities. The national strategic plan has to capture their purposes, leverage their resources, and capitalize on their existing or developing operational capacities, and keep track of how that complex network of commitment and action is accumulating to improved educational performance.[1]

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[1] When teaching mid-level government managers about the strategic triangle, I was often asked whether that framework could be used by mid-level managers, or even front-line workers in government agencies. As my work expanded to include the leadership and management of voluntary sector organizations, commercial organizations, and collaborations across organizational and sectoral boundaries, I was also asked whether I thought it applied to managers at the top and middle of these enterprises. In response, I liked to tell a story about Atlas and the Greeks. I explained that we owed a great deal to the Greeks because they established a tradition of curiosity – of asking hard questions about obvious things that we often took for granted. For example, at one stage in history, they began thinking about this: "What holds up the world?" It was in many ways an important, but not obvious question since it was not clear that the world was "hanging in space" and therefore needed to be supported. It seemed much more likely that the world was solidly anchored, since the Greeks knew what it felt like to fall, and they didn't feel like they were falling all the time. They did know, however, that the world was surrounded by sky, so it wasn't clear what was holding them up. They thought about this for a while and came up with an acceptable answer – an answer that was very common in Grecian times. The concluded that the world was being held up by a strong man – namely, Atlas. They made statues of this very large, strong man with the world on his shoulders. That was satisfactory answer for about 100 years or so. But, then, with their insatiable curiosity, they asked another question: "What was holding up Atlas?" That was a poser, but they soon came up with an answer: he was standing on a turtle! That certainly made sense, if you had to hold up the world you didn't want to be standing on anything that was frail, active or slick. It had to be something that was sturdy, slow-moving and slightly abrasive. That answer was only good for about 50 years, when they asked another awkward question: what was the turtle standing on? At this point, the Greeks could see where the discussion was going, and decided they needed an answer that would end the matter so they could get back to practical things. That answer was the following: "It's turtles all the way down." I think that is a good answer for the strategic triangle as well. When trying to improve complex social systems, it is turtles all the way down and around – i.e., actors of various types, standing on particular platforms, facing and solving strategic issues.

Guiding Action IV: Envisioning and Developing the National Actor: An Executive Capacity for Mobilizing, Performing, and Learning While Doing

The discussion above identifies the important work that has to be done by some concrete actors standing on particular platforms, and exercising effective influence over the definition of purposes and evaluation of performance of the National Educational System, the operational efforts made simultaneously to discipline existing systems and develop better methods of reaching and affecting the upward mobility of heterogeneous student populations, and the political efforts to mobilize increased legitimacy and support for the efforts being undertaken. It has also emphasized the fact that it is unlikely that that all the actors that are influential in determining the performance of the system can be brought into a single, static structural body. It might be better to think in terms of a somewhat fluid "sufficient coalition" of influential actors (and those who could and should become influential in shaping the performance of the system with some help from the National Government) that could effectively assume the responsibility for performing six key "leadership" functions in guiding the National Educational System towards improved performance:

- *Taking the responsibility for articulating goals and objectives for the National Educational System in a Public Value Account that can inspire, guide, and appropriately evaluate the performance of the National Educational System*
- *Continuously adapt and improve the nominated Public Value Account as the system learns more about the purposes that are both valuable, authorizable and doable,*
- *Identifying and engaging a "sufficient coalition" of "actors of strategic interest" in the processes of defining purposes, mobilizing assets, encouraging innovation, and evaluating performance*
- Recognizing, authorizing, and evaluating variation in the methods used to produce valuable educational outcomes, tied to important economic, social, and political goals
- Supporting the broad and deep diffusion of learning across the system with respect to both ends, means, and the processes of empirical valuation to enable continuous learning
- Sustaining a focus on a plausibly effective path of improvement chosen from a broad portfolio of potentially important innovations.

Note that the functions described above are those associated with the effective governance of a social production system that is seeking to learn to improve its performance. There is authority and influence being exerted by the strategic actor over the system as a whole, but it is important to keep in mind that the actual *power to do* – that is the collective power to produce and sustain publicly valued results from a national educational system – depends critically on the active participation of a large, decentralized army of public value creators devoted to a cause that they value and have ideas about how to achieve. *The power to do, comes from exercising power **with** and **for**, not simply power **over.***

Conclusion

Taking steps to significantly improve the performance of National Education Systems is a daunting but vital task. This essay has proposed an adaptation of the Public Value Approach that can be used to support analysis of the status quo in education systems and inform interventions that can advance strategic goals. Our hope is that this approach can be useful to the leaders in education systems engaged in this important work.

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