1

An introduction to performance management and improving practice

This book has been written at a time when the issue of improving teacher effectiveness is at the very centre of policy development in the field of education. In the UK we are experiencing the rapid implementation of a raft of initiatives to restructure the way in which the work of both schools and particularly teachers is defined and managed. Occupational standards for teachers, a National Curriculum for initial teacher training, frameworks for career development and continuing professional development (CPD), the re-launching of appraisal, evidence-based assessment of performance and performance-related pay (PRP) are part of this current drive to achieve the 'modernisation' of the education service in England and Wales. In Scotland, too, similar developments are underway under the aegis of the newly formed Scottish Executive.

Finding a place to stand in the middle of this storm of activity is quite daunting but very necessary because the risks involved in this headlong rush to reform and restructure are considerable given the very real questions about the purpose and nature of education raised by current social, economic, political, technological and ecological changes. In such an unpredictable environment, making the right choices becomes increasingly difficult, as has been underlined by the recent riots in Bradford and Oldham. The government's commitment to encouraging increasing diversity in the choice of schooling for various groups was seriously called into question by these events, particularly given the findings of the inquiry into the school system in Bradford, chaired by Herman Ouseley in 2001, which had identified a racially segregated schooling system as a cause for concern.

We do not pretend to have any answers to these issues but we do want to make a contribution to the debate about performance management based on our experience of working with teachers and school

managers in the UK over a number of years in developing work-based learning programmes designed to improve performance. Thus our particular focus is on professional development within the context of performance management. There are two particular issues we want to explore. The first of these, in line with the commitment in *A Strategy for Professional Development* (DfEE, 2001b) to investigate the impact of CPD, is to explore what it means to alter or improve performance; the second is to argue for an approach to performance management that fixes on the longer term and the need for the teaching profession to be able to respond to ongoing change rather than to conform to a set of teaching prescriptions based on the here and now. For us the kind of reliance on the precepts and practices of human resource management inherent in current policy is worrying. To lapse into the purely anecdotal it is worth remembering that an avowedly excellent performance management system did not save a leading British retailer from becoming ineffectual. Management practices cannot serve as ends in themselves, they need to be shaped and modified in the light of purposes and needs.

Of course, improving performance can be viewed crudely as 'getting them to pull their socks up' on the assumption that with good control mechanisms and sufficient pressure staff will perform better. While this approach may bring about dramatic changes under certain circumstances, it leads only to limited short-term improvements because it is essentially non-developmental and it is predicated on a very narrow definition of what the nature of the 'performance problem' is. Given the demands placed on the education system through successive waves of reform and restructuring and the continuing need to respond to change, we believe the 'problem' of performance is far more complex than a matter of ensuring conformity to a series of performance indicators.

We shall touch on some of these complexities in the course of our discussion but our major theme is that worthwhile and sustained improvement is only achievable through a process of learning in a supportive environment. Our core concern in this book is the developmental aspect of performance management. We hope our insights into this process will help to inform the choices of some of our readers, whether based in schools or other branches of the education service.

Whilst we will be concentrating on individual performance this will be continually set in the context of the school because, as we shall argue, we do not see the individual performance of teachers and the organisational context in which they work as separable. Although we

are looking at issues of development for individuals, we also feel it is important to remember, as Deming (1982) and Juran (1989) constantly reminded managers in industry, that most performance problems are due to faulty systems and processes within organisations rather than to individuals.

In this chapter we shall concentrate on defining some of the key concepts pertinent to our main discussion of the parameters for improving professional practice, in particular 'performance management', 'performance' and 'improvement'.

Defining performance management

Within the education service, as in other public services, performance management is a contentious issue (Bottery, 2000). Underlying the debate is the question of the role and status of teachers. The contrast is made between treating teachers as technicians, whose role is to carry out prescribed tasks, or as professionals, who are trusted to develop practice appropriate to the learners in their care. This could be dismissed as merely being an argument about vested interest with teachers and educationalists fighting to retain professional autonomy, but it touches on two more fundamental issues:

1) What will be required of teachers in the future? Will they become technicians responding consistently within a fairly limited range of practice or will they need the capability to act flexibly and responsively across an increasingly complex field?
2) What kind of organisations should schools be and what values and principles should underpin relationships in institutions which provide education?

In making practical decisions about how improvement of performance should be approached in schools these issues can be seen as fundamental in determining decisions about policy and implementation.

There are a number of ways of defining performance management:

1) As a particular set of practices implemented by managers and aimed at influencing the behaviours and the outcomes achieved by individuals in organisations.
2) As a range of managerial techniques aimed at influencing the outcomes achieved by groups and individuals at both organisational level and across groups of organisations.
3) As an approach to improving their own practice used by individuals and groups.

Broadly 1) and 2) are characteristic of a managerial approach to improving performance whilst 3) is generally regarded as consistent with an approach to improvement advocated in professional settings. As our discussion will indicate, despite the polarisation of the debate, the division in terms of practice remains mixed both in education and the commercial field.

Managerial approaches

For many people, performance management is defined by a very specific set of practices developed to control the behaviour of individuals in commercial organisations. Through formal appraisal systems and PRP, organisations seek to ensure their employees are motivated to work hard and effectively. Goal-setting theory (Locke, 1997) provides much of the underpinning logic for the practice in that people are to be motivated by working towards challenging but attainable goals they regard as worth while. The DfEE's guidelines *Performance Management in Schools* (2000b: 5) provide a typical example of this formulation. The document (*ibid*.) defines performance management as 'an on-going cycle, not an event' consisting of three annual stages:

1) *Planning* – discussion and recording of priorities and objectives and how progress will be monitored.
2) *Monitoring* – constant review of progress providing support if necessary.
3) *Review* – evaluation of the teacher's performance taking account of progress against objectives.

The thorny process of assigning pay on the basis of review is confined to an annex.

During training for managers, the appraisal cycle has often been represented in this manner as a discrete set of activities divorced from other means of improving organisational performance. More generally, however, it is seen as part of a more elaborate system, as suggested by Armstrong and Baron (1998: 7): 'Performance management is a strategic and integrated approach to delivering sustained success to organisations by improving the performance of people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of teams and individual contributors.'

The characteristics of an organisation that practises performance management are that it:

- communicates a vision of its objectives to all its employees;
- sets departmental and individual performance targets that are related to wider objectives;
- conducts a formal review process to identify training, development and reward outcomes; and
- evaluates the whole process in order to improve effectiveness.

In addition, 'performance management organisations':

- express performance targets in terms of measurable outputs, accountabilities and training/learning targets;
- use formal appraisal procedures as ways of communicating performance requirements which are set on a regular basis;
- link performance requirements to pay, especially for senior managers (*ibid.*: 45).

This more systemic approach to performance management is often further elaborated to provide a set of complex procedures that, for example, within the schools sector, operate at the levels of the individual teacher, the school and the local authority:

> In virtually all sectors, operational decentralisation has been accompanied by the extended development of performance management systems. Such systems seemed designed both to monitor and shape organisational behaviour and encompass a range of techniques including performance review, staff appraisal systems, performance-related pay, scrutinies, so-called quality audits, customer feedback mechanisms, comparative table of performance indicators including 'league tables', charter marks, customer charters, quality standards and total quality management (Hoggett, quoted in Mahony and Hextall, 2000: 32).

A professional approach

These managerial systems for performance management are often contrasted with the professional model where the management of performance is seen as the responsibility of the individual professional. Hoyle and John (1995) suggest that ideas about professionals being autonomous sit alongside ideas about responsibility. Implicit in this notion of professionality is a sense of duty to perform to a level necessary to ensure the well-being of the client. By simply 'being a professional' a person understands and acts upon the obligation to carry out the tasks effectively for the benefit of the client.

Eraut (1994) identifies a number of aspects in the accountability of the individual professional, clearly indicating that it is now an essen-

tial attribute of professionalism. The issue of providing an appropriate service is still strong within this approach ('a moral commitment to serve the interests of clients'), but equally strong is a self-directed process of ongoing development and performance enhancement: 'a professional obligation to self-monitor and to periodically review the effectiveness of one's practice; a professional obligation to expand one's repertoire, to reflect on one's experience and to develop one's expertise' (*ibid*.: 236).

This model has a major drawback from an accountability perspective in that the obligation to self-evaluate is not open to scrutiny and, therefore, whilst some professionals might put this at the centre of their practice, others might not. However, Eraut's fourth and fifth items ('an obligation that is professional as well as contractual to contribute to the quality of one's organisation' and 'an obligation to reflect upon and contribute to discussions about the changing role of one's profession in wider society' – *ibid*.) provide a basis for professionals to render account to others.

We can conveniently contrast the two approaches by placing them at the extremes of performance management as constructs at the 'hard' and the 'soft' end of a continuum. The differences between these two positions centre on issues of responsibility and relationships and they are expressed through different forms of practice (see Table 1.1).

But is this dichotomy as secure as it looks? The more widespread adoption of the notions of reflective practice within a number of sectors, partly under the banner of total quality management (TQM), demonstrates a growing congruence between managerialist and professional approaches with an emphasis on self-evaluation, growth and participation, 'democratic' decision-making and shared values. Indeed the approach has even extended into classrooms where many teachers are increasingly involved in a 'performance management cycle' in their work with young people – negotiating targets and

Table 1.1 Contrastive approaches to maintaining and improving
performance

Line management hierarchy	Individual autonomy
Establishes systems of control:	Sense of duty pervades:
• Policies.	• Obligations.
• Codes of practice.	• Self-regulation in interests of client.
• Performance criteria, standards.	• Maintain and enhance expertise.
• Formal appraisal.	• Self-monitoring of performance.

acting as mentors and coaches as part of raising attainment and fostering independent learning. As Bottery (2000: 94) points out:

> TQM appears to provide individuals with more motivation, more involvement, more control over their work. Furthermore, the concept of the internal customer indicates that internal hierarchies, should where necessary be turned upside down in order to empower front-line individuals, or at the very least to permit them to work out the best way of serving their 'customers'.

It could be argued therefore that TQM is potentially subversive of the managerial agenda and its use in schools could be supportive of increasing the power and decision-making role of those who are in the front line of serving children and young people allowing them to challenge and overturn central directives. Maybe, as Bottery intimates, this accounts for its lack of popularity with policy-makers – the adoption of such initiatives as Investors in People and the European Foundation for Quality Management has been supported because they have not so far threatened the supremacy of inspection as the major strategy for quality control.

This parallel between TQM and professional models creates unease in some quarters. As the description of the practices of the two approaches becomes more congruent, some educationalists feel that acceptance of personal responsibility and the obligation to self-monitor could be used manipulatively to undermine allegiance to a public service ethic. These elements of the professional model could be used to promote a rather different set of values at odds with practice based on a moral purpose for education (Hartley, 1997).

Defining performance

The professions have always had a concern with performance and the maintenance of standards by practitioners even if this was largely motivated by a desire to ensure that only members of professional bodies were seen as competent and employable. Initially, competence to practise was defined in intellectual terms and established by the use of qualifying examinations (Eraut, 1994). This remains as a key feature of entry into many of the professions.

Once someone enters work there are basically two approaches to assessing the quality of his or her performance. The first concentrates on the outcomes he or she achieves and the second on the behaviours he or she displays, and this is expressed in performance management systems through using different sets of performance measures:

- setting goals and targets defined in quantifiable terms which the individual or group must achieve; and
- delineating specific and observable sets of behaviours to be displayed.

The next obvious and logical step is to combine these two measures by specifying the behaviours that lead to positive outcomes to create a means both for assessing performance and arriving at a basis for improving it.

There is a body of work, originating largely in the USA but increasingly popular in the UK since the 1980s, that seeks to define what constitutes competent performance and to use the resultant frameworks as a basis for staff development (Esp, 1993). Despite the increasing use of such performance measures in the field of education, many have voiced strong opposition to these initiatives. Professional practice is regarded as too varied and context specific to make such a detailed approach to specifying behaviour either useful or desirable (Barnett, 1994). Areas of professional action are not so easily defined because they are shaped by:

- context
- clients' needs
- accumulated knowledge
- experience
- judgement.

Additionally, what constitutes competent performance for any given profession depends more upon current opinions about what makes for a good practitioner and the circumstances under which such practitioners are expected to operate than any ultimate 'scientific' yardstick for performance. For instance, in teaching a particular mode of engaging the learner may be more or less effective depending on the context in which the teaching takes place. A technique that works very well on a one-to-one basis may well be ineffective when applied to a group of 30 learners. Any current basis of judgement (for example, the TTA Teaching Standards or OfSTED ratings as to what makes for effective teaching) is based upon a set of cultural assumptions about schooling and appropriate forms of provision for the education of young people. Thus in addition to the general questions about what constitutes good performance we have to remember this can never be defined in wholly objective or absolute terms. The characteristics of the good schoolteacher are dependent on changing definitions of education, schooling and teaching and learning.

The criticism of the use of competences (behaviours derived from

functional analyses) has led to a slight broadening of definitions. In a recent survey of current practice in relation to performance management in industry, Armstrong and Baron (1998: 8–9) saw performance management as being concerned with:

   Outputs – the achievement of results
   Outcomes – the impact on overall performance of this achievement
   Competencies – the processes required to achieve these results
   Capabilities – the inputs in terms of knowledge, skill and competence.

There have also been compromises made in the public services to make competences compatible with a public service ethic through the inclusion of values in competence frameworks. Perhaps the best known of these are the ASSET (Winter and Maisch, 1996) standards in social work. In higher education the use of the term 'capability' to cover both behavioural and conceptual aspects of practice represents another approach to reconciliation.

   However, it is worth remembering that standards did not always have the demonised status that is currently so prevalent in the academic literature. At one time, as Mahony and Hextall (2000) remind us, they were seen as a means of promoting social justice. The profile of 'criteria for good practice' for student teachers developed at a London teacher training college in the 1980s was motivated by a progressive attempt to promote equal opportunities. The profile was intended to be transparent (and therefore open to challenge); inclusive in its development of an account of good practice; supportive of student teachers' professional development by enabling them to participate in negotiating the agenda for their learning; open about the basis on which students would be assessed; more widely accountable; and responsive within a public education system (*ibid*.: 31). Mahony and Hextall go on to make a useful distinction between a regulatory approach and a developmental approach to the design and use of standards which assigns them with a very different significance and meaning. It is encouraging that the recently relaunched National Standards Framework for Teachers in England (DfEE, 2001b) shows a greater commitment to their formative and developmental use. The framework is described as being 'entirely voluntary' and as a means of enabling teachers and those who work with them to identify learning needs. None the less, we would question whether their continued avoidance of the need for examining values and purposes and therefore being supportive of critical reflection makes them as valuable as they might be.
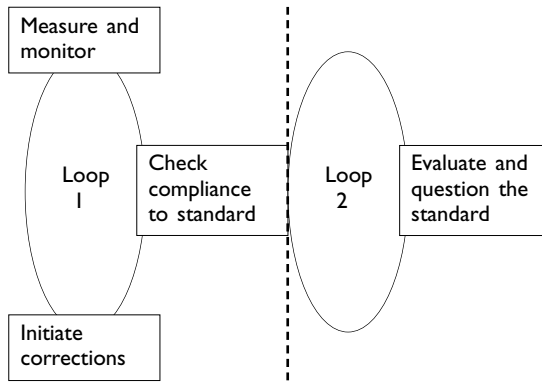
Figure 1.1 Single and double-loop learning
Source: Adapted from Baguley (1994: 19)

Defining improvement

Improvement is also a key term in our discussion and it is important to be clear about what kind of improvement is being referred to as the subject of performance management. The meanings that currently attach to the word in organisational settings can be roughly divided between understanding improvement as:

- increasing efficiency and reliability; or
- developing the ability to respond and adapt to changing circumstances.

These two definitions are not exclusive, and Argyris and Schon's (1974) notion of single-loop and double-loop learning (see Figure 1.1) is helpful in pointing to both to the differences between these two sets of assumptions and to their relationship.

Single-loop improvement

Underpinning this form of improvement is the assumption that what should be done is well known and therefore the performance problem is to make sure it is happening. This definition of improvement assumes there are no real problems with goals and purposes and that what matters are results. The key to improvement is conformity in achieving predetermined objectives and standards (see Table 1.2).

The focus of this form of improvement tends to be remedial and has been heavily endorsed and 'rewarded' by inspection systems in the public services (Rogers, 1999).

Table 1.2   Effects of single-loop learning

Efficiency	Maintaining the same standard of service for less input or raising output measures for the same level of resource.
Reliability	Ensuring the same standard of service from all units for the same input.

When systems of monitoring show that people are not acting according to specification, the logic is that adjustments in performance have to be made. Arguably, this strategy becomes more 'aspirational' with benchmarking that is fixing desired outcomes at the level achieved through best practice in comparable organisations. The more negative aspect of the process is where it is fuelled by the desire to get a quart out of a pint pot through setting higher and higher targets without increasing, or even whilst reducing, available resources.

Double-loop improvement

Here there is less certainty about the future. This definition of improvement assumes that goals and purposes as well as results must be constantly monitored so the performance problem is not simply one of conformity but of having the capacity to respond appropriately to change. For instance, it might be argued that both the ends and the means of educating children and young people are changing and therefore improvement consists in both responding appropriately to these changes and in becoming more adaptable and flexible (see Table 1.3). Double-loop improvement does not preclude concerns with efficiency and reliability but it goes beyond these boundaries and requires a rather different set of attitudes and capabilities than those needed for single-loop improvement.

Problems can clearly arise when there is a muddling of these two approaches. For instance, in the case of disciplinary problems in school, a single-loop approach would look to re-jigging discipline pol-

Table 1.3   Effects of double-loop learning

Effectiveness	Changing the nature of the service to meet new needs.
Adaptability	Increasing the capacity and capability of the organisation to provide services that meet changing needs and circumstances.

icy and tightening procedures, whereas a double-loop approach might seek to question the staff's and parents' assumptions about school discipline and explore new ways of engaging pupils.

Determining the nature of the performance problem

The growing pressure on teacher performance is in itself a symptom of a restructuring of the whole sector that continues to gather pace. In this book we view the 'problem' of performance as one of responding to substantive change. We do not believe, despite media rhetoric, that the teaching forces of the western world all suffered a disastrous and simultaneous loss of competence because of a sudden change in teachers' personal characteristics and their adoption of misguided notions of what education was about. Rather we believe that any 'loss of competence' was the outcome of the restructuring of the education service and the major economic, technological and social changes that have taken, and continue to take, place. Teachers and headteachers are now expected to perform a substantially different role from that performed even ten years ago.

The causes of these changes in role are both ideological and practical. They have been driven partly by a particular set of beliefs about the role of the state and the public services (Clarke and Newman, 1997; Bottery, 2000) and partly by changes in the social context that have substantially altered attitudes, expectations and relationships in the schools sector (Levin and Riffel, 1997).

Whilst single-loop improvement will always be an issue in schools, as it is for most organisations, we believe the main performance problem facing teachers and schools is going to be coping with double-loop improvement. On this basis we believe that learning how to learn and developing the capacity to adapt, work jointly with others and be both inventive and prepared to take risks are appropriate goals for improvement in performance in the education service in the longer term.

Selecting the means for improvement

The major battleground in performance improvement lies between those advocating a competences-based approach to professional learning and those supporting the notion of the reflective practitioner. This argument is about the nature of professionalism and a continuation of the debate about the practicality and desirability of defining performance in the professional field. A 'behaviourist' approach to the

improvement of professional practice is regarded as inadequate by many people because its formulaic character over-rides the key ability of the professional to be appropriately responsive to circumstances. The debate therefore also centres on the mechanisms of personal change and whether a simple focus on knowledge and skills is adequate to bring about behavioural change. Reflective practice, with its testing of beliefs and assumption, places far more emphasis on cognitive processes, internal factors and personal growth within the job than the more straightforward process of 'gap filling' implied by a techno-rational approach to development where one identifies a missing skill or area of knowledge and undertakes an appropriate course to 'fill it in'.

In this book we shall argue that a key aspect of improving performance is the nature of the learning that must underpin any change process and that changing practice within a professional context is not simply substituting one set of routine actions for another set. Given our belief in the need to improve effectiveness it follows that models of learning that can support the improvement of performance need to be explored. This may involve opportunities for 'new' learning or opportunities to review and reorganise prior learning which, in turn may, lead to 'new' learning. A critical outcome is the facility to reshape or reconstruct practices by constructing knowledge about and through action.

Eraut (1994), in critiquing the common distinction between knowledge, skills and attitudes in discussion of teacher development, argues that, in this formulation, knowledge is limited to 'propositional' knowledge that does not include any suggestion of performance: it is 'knowing that'. However, for successful performance another form of knowledge is critical, what he calls 'process knowledge' (which can incorporate propositional knowledge): 'as knowing how to conduct the various processes that contribute to professional action' (*ibid*.: 107).

Increasingly, the literature on the continuing development of teachers and school managers acknowledges the importance of 'process knowledge'. A variety of terms are used to describe this. Hagger (1997), discussing initial teacher education, refers to it as teachers' 'craft knowledge' and is concerned with student teachers being able to access the craft knowledge of experienced teachers within the classroom. This view of knowledge is now regarded as underpinning the development of experienced teachers and managers. The acquisition of this process knowledge is dependent upon the formation and testing of ideas in action by the practitioner (Bourner *et al.*, 2000: 25).

In this sense professional development has at its heart a willed personal/professional 'transformation' that implies that issues of motivation and self-perception are critical. Part of developing process knowledge will be the development of ideas and beliefs about education; equally important are ideas about the self as a practitioner/professional. Often specific approaches and practices used by teachers in classrooms are based on their beliefs about education and what kind of teacher they are. These beliefs may relate to a broad area such as relationships with pupils, for example ('I am the type of teacher who is friendly and positive with the children because I think they need to feel secure to learn') or to a specific pedagogic practice ('I like to concentrate on the teaching of spelling because I am the kind of teacher who believes in giving the children a good grounding in the basics').

In reforming practice, an important dimension is the potential change or modification of the self-concept as part of the learning process. Fundamental improvement of performance has to be explored in terms of a learning process in which both cognitive and emotional processes come into play as practitioners rethink their own role within an organisation and within the wider environment. Nixon *et al*. (1996) argue for a recovery of the Aristotelian conception of what it is to develop as a person over the whole of one's life. This argument places personal growth within the social domain where we have a mutual responsibility towards each other: 'To learn, then, is to develop understanding which leads into, and grows out of action; to discover a sense of agency that enables us, not only to define and make ourselves, but to do so actively participating in the creation of a world in which, inescapably, we live together' (*ibid*.: 50).

In professions such as medicine, social work and teaching, the process of interaction with a fellow human being or group of fellow human beings is the core of the practice of that professional. However, we need to move further than that and to recognise that Eraut's (1994: 236) fourth area of accountability ('an obligation that is professional as well as contractual to contribute to the quality of one's organisation') is essentially about growth within a social setting. This approach highlights both the significance of the social domain as a place of learning and the importance of the workplace as a learning context. As Nixon *et al*. (1996: 51) propose: 'it is not just that any competence is learnt with and through others, but that the subjectivities which define what we become as persons, and therefore our agency, are social creations.' Our concerns with the dynamics of organisational learning, personal learning and improved performance will be evident in subsequent chapters.

Having set out some of the parameters for the book in this introduction, the rest of the text is divided into three broad sections. The first of these looks at the development of the policy agenda for performance management in the schools sector and it gives an overview of current developments in the field. The second explores some of the more theoretical issues involved in improving professional practice and different approaches to work-based learning. The third looks at the practical consequences of introducing a mixed approach to improving performance and some of the lessons that emerged for schools, individuals and those supporting them in implementing the Scottish Qualification for Headship programme.