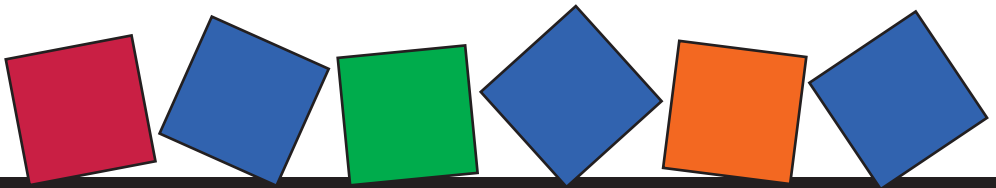


How do you measure impact?

Next Practice in System Leadership

Gathering baseline data



Future scenario: All action and no reflection

A teacher from Largeville Improvement Partnership reflects on the last eighteen months of the project

Back in 2006, in pursuit of supporting practitioner innovation around system leadership, partnerships like mine were given license to determine their own baseline indicators, designed around our particular purpose and learning themes. We collected data, both hard and soft, at regular intervals, and that enquiry process in itself helped to unlock some tricky challenges and to inform our work. At less frequent intervals, (once or twice a year) this formative data was aggregated to serve a more evaluative purpose. This way, the schools, services and community groups in our locality only had to concern themselves with data they were going to collect anyway to achieve progress towards our learning themes. What's more, it has made us more aware of the important outcomes that we have set ourselves. They are radical aspirations and we have clarified the

ways that we would be able to indicate movement towards them.

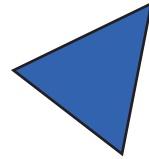
Unfortunately, we wasted a month or so at the start of the project trying to define the indicators we would use, and that created frustration for some of our leaders. They thought the project was about concerted and orchestrated action, not getting bogged down in discussions that struggled to reach agreement. The breakthrough came when we finalised the shape and capacity (the people and time) that we were empowering to lead for us, and they were freed up to make decisions like this. They did it really quickly then!

The people in our project also found it quite difficult to relate to some of the other projects to start with because they didn't seem to have the same frame of reference or context. It was also quite frustrating

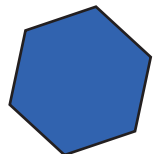
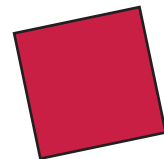
because after we'd developed our enquiry questions and indicators, the consultant from The Innovation Unit (IU) and National College for School Leadership (NCSL) came back and asked us to change some of our enquiry questions and add a further questionnaire to be completed by all the leaders involved and another one for completion by some of the students. It was all to do with developing common enquiry questions across sites looking at similar issues to us (which in our case was leadership

for Every Child Matters), but it was useful in the end as it meant we were looking at similar issues and could compare our work with other sites more easily, even though we are dissimilar.

In truth, we felt a certain amount of pressure from knowing that DfES officials were aware that the Minister wanted early evidence that this focus on Next Practice innovation was having an impact and also both The IU and NCSL wanted to share outcomes and examples from the work with a wider community of interest.



“The breakthrough came when we finalised the shape and capacity ... that we were empowering to lead for us, and they were freed up to make decisions like this.”



Gathering baseline data: An introduction

Feedback is essential to learning - it enables reflection and informed change. For this reason alone it is desirable for each Next Practice site to gather baseline data at the outset and then periodically throughout the project.

Each site needs to gather data concerning the changes that it is implementing around leadership and governance arrangements – and about the focus area of that leadership – so that it can improve. Similarly The Innovation Unit (IU) and National College for School Leadership (NCSL) need to gather data from each of the field trial sites – and, possibly, in common ways across all the field trial sites - so that learning between sites and the impact of the whole programme are increased.

Of course, it is all too

easy to be data rich but knowledge poor: you can collect all the data in the world, but if it is not meaningful and focussed on illuminating tightly designed enquiry questions to which all those involved in your project genuinely want to know the answers to, then it will simply swamp or confuse you. Thus the starting point must be good enquiry questions. **What is it that you want to learn about together, through this process, over the next 18 months? More effective leadership? Greater community engagement? Happier and more productive staff? More joined up provision? Improved outcomes for children and learners?**

We all know that pupils cannot improve their learning without

constructive feedback from their teachers and others. In order for field trial localities to learn together they, too, need feedback data. They will need to gather data about their own current practices, strengths and weakness, so that there is something upon which to reflect together in order to make evidence informed changes. This holds true for each field trial and, of course, for the programme as a whole.

In addition to giving you feedback on whether you are being successful in your enquiry areas, your baseline and ongoing data collection will also enable you to tell a powerful story about your work to your colleagues, both locally and nationally. When devising your baseline data strategy, we think you should aim

to have the evidence you think you will need to persuade a sceptical leader elsewhere that the approach you have taken has been worthwhile and made a difference: 'we saved x thousand pounds on salaries'...'The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) worked an average of x hours less a week by the end of the project than at the start'...'Post-16 participation across the town rose by x percent and truancy was down by half'.

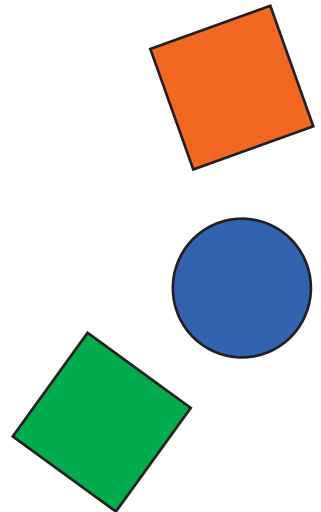
However, gathering baseline data is about much more than just validating your work. In truth, it is dissatisfaction with current work that has led to this field trial. Whatever the data, you want to do so much better – and you believe that a more systemic approach to leadership and governance will liberate you to achieve that together.

This field trial will enable you to collectively place leadership and learning at the heart of your energy for change.

Systematically gathering data relating to your learning themes is only a starting point for that learning to take place. It enables each of the seventeen sites, and the programme as a whole, to periodically stop and reflect:

- ◆ **Where did we start?**
- ◆ **Where are we now?**
- ◆ **Where are we heading?**
- ◆ **Where do we want to be and how will we know?**

“We all know that pupils cannot improve their learning without constructive feedback from their teachers and others.”



The field trial baseline strategy

There are five strands to our baseline strategy:

1. Submissions data - Statement of Intent and Initial Visit Report

The IU and NCSL will hold a comprehensive record of all successful statements of intent to become a field trial. We have both the first and the revised submissions. In addition, we have the reports from the initial visits and the

letters that were sent to sites prior to re-submission. By tracking how the foci and scope of work and levels of activity change, we hope to show just how far the work of each site has travelled towards the revision of aspirations

through the work. We may well ask key contacts and local leaders to revisit the revised statements of intent during the project to provide a third perspective on the maturity of these intentions.

2. The first Account of Practice

This is a jointly conducted enquiry within each field trial site – a partnership between the site consultant and internal personnel. It will be co-designed and co-conducted, visiting locations of interest and a strategic ‘cut’ of key personnel and stakeholders. It might take one or even two days in total.

The final outcome will be the ‘account’ – a jointly authored Account of Practice for use both within the site, and to be made available for other sites and (via the project website) for others in the community of interest. One key section in the Account of Practice will be a jointly agreed set of baseline data findings – evidence from which

the project will map its progress in key areas of leadership, governance and the outcomes of leadership.

It is hoped that the activity itself, the analysis it enables and the joint writing task will be invaluable to the work of field trial sites. It will also provide an agreed framework to revisit in order to assess progress in a project that will be difficult to map if we do not have agreed bearings

“... a jointly agreed set of baseline data findings – evidence from which the project will map its progress...”

at the outset.

Baseline indicators must mark the work that we are currently doing and how we are presently

doing it – the measures do not mark out the path to be followed. They will become a guide to where we were, although not where we should go. The

Account of Practice offers a tool that will enable discussion about that using the evidence from the enquiry.

“Baseline indicators must mark the work that we are currently doing and how we are presently doing it – the measures do not mark out the path to be followed.”

3. Public school performance data

In terms of public accountability, School Evaluation Form data, OfSTED, attainment, value-added data, participation-rates and attendance data etc remain an important way in which the progress of schools (and, aggregated, localities) is made visible. However, as practitioners we know that what this data says about pupil learning is extremely complicated, and often misinterpreted. Nonetheless, the Next Practice in System Leadership (NPSL) project is built on a premise that collaborative practitioner

innovation around leadership and governance in pursuit of better outcomes for students will lead to improvements in achievement, attainment and attendance.

Our aim will also be to develop innovative ways of measuring improvement in the growth in motivation levels, or aspirations, or to use aggregated locality data, collective growth in value added scores, or the post-16 participation of students. However, even if you are using 2006 performance data as a baseline, there will

only be one set of public data available before the scheduled end of the project.

“...collaborative practitioner innovation around leadership and governance in pursuit of better outcomes for students will lead to improvements in achievement, attainment and attendance.”

4. Locality data collection

NPSL sites are at the forefront of innovation. It is not a big step, therefore, to suggest that each site is likely to be committed to gathering evidence of their progress in relation to their content focus (e.g. 14-19, Every Child Matters, community engagement) and to leadership and governance. Each site has been totally free to

define its own purpose. It follows that they must each then develop their own approach to data collection and analysis.

Where interesting instruments or methods or strategies are developed, we would hope that sites will be willing to make these publicly available. We may want to publish

effective tools that individual sites develop so that they can be shared widely within the programme and beyond. This way we can improve the quality of evidence that schools use for their own innovation processes, and reduce the time wasted on low level data collection and analysis of mediocre data sets.

“Each site has been totally free to define their own purpose. It follows that they must each then develop their own approach to data collection and analysis.”

5. Cross-site data collection

When the core team and consultants pull together all the enquiry questions and baseline data approaches for all the 16 sites, it is more than likely that we will identify common themes and data approaches across the sites. If 4 sites are all looking at joined up 14-19 provision, delivering the 5 outcomes, or achieving

efficiencies of scale, say, then it will make sense to try to join up their enquiry questions and data collection approaches as much as possible so that we can build a more powerful picture.

Equally, we are interested in whether there may be a common questionnaire that we could use with

all the leaders involved in the project (and possibly outside) that could assess the impact and extent of system leadership approaches. We are looking at the options for this at present, but will only be able to develop and pilot something once we are clear on all the enquiry questions.

What can our field trial do now?

Designing a rigorous enquiry for the Account of Practice activity is a good place to start. Your consultant will help you with this. Existing context and public performance data can also be collected and stored in ways that make it easy to revisit. Also, local data collection is an important aspect of the work, and it needs to be a success (low on effort and high on leverage) if goodwill is to be maintained and learning optimised.

In order for sites to gather data specific to their focus and purpose – and its leadership – they will need first to identify a set of suitable indicators that have the potential to demonstrate progress towards locally set objectives.

These indicators will need to do four things very well. They need to:

- ◆ Measure
- ◆ Simplify
- ◆ Communicate
- ◆ Lead to action

Examples of effective indicators would be:

- ◆ a sign in your doctors' surgery showing how many appointments were missed last week
- ◆ a measure of the number of bags of litter that are collected after a lunch break in school
- ◆ a road-side sign showing how many deaths there have been on that stretch of road
- ◆ the signs in railway stations showing the trend over six months of late train arrivals.

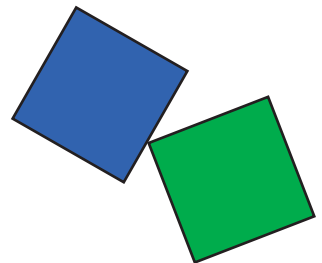
We would also argue that if engagement with this data is to motivate already hard-pressed professionals and others, then the process of data collection needs to be both user-valued and generative of relevant learning. In other words the indicators need to be valuable at the point of data collection

“people won't use them if they don't find them indispensable”

(“people won't use them if they don't find them indispensable”). Finally, they should be adaptable over time and allow for innovation in activity and how we measure that activity. A useful rule of thumb is 'they should provide optimum inference for minimum hassle'.

Below we set out some guiding questions that may help you in designing your own local baseline activity:

- 1. Are all partners in your locality clear about the focus and purpose of your field trial learning?**
- 2. How can your focus and purpose be converted into objectives with indicators that adequately reflect progress?**
- 3. What data collection instruments will you use for each indicator?**



◆ **What data instruments do you currently use? Does your locality (or any of its constituent members) have any good models of practice now that can be more widely adopted?**

◆ **What instruments have other localities or universities developed that could be useful? e.g. Repertory Grids, staff or student attitude surveys, community attitude instruments.**

◆ **What new instruments do we need to create and who can help us?**

◆ **Will the data that is generated be comparable**

and transferable between locations and potentially between sites?

4. Will your data collection and analysis processes provide valuable learning opportunities for those involved in new leadership and governance roles, and will it help to improve student learning?

5. How will you share ideas about baseline data with your consultant and other sites?

Once you have chosen and refined your data collection instruments, and how you

will administer them, you can set about collecting data. Gather and process your data and then share widely the information that you have collected – your consultant is always there to help with this, though you will ultimately have to own the data and the process if it is to be useful. These three steps can form a single iteration of the baselining process – and it can be done as a part of the Account of Practice activity. If the processes are repeated, they should produce rich learning for those within your site and beyond.

“Gather and process your data and then share widely the information that you have collected – your consultant is always there to help with this, though you will ultimately have to own the data and the process if it is to be useful.”

Summary

It is only possible to capture the emergent learning from this project if intelligent base line data exists. From the outset, our seventeen sites have committed to learning on behalf of others.

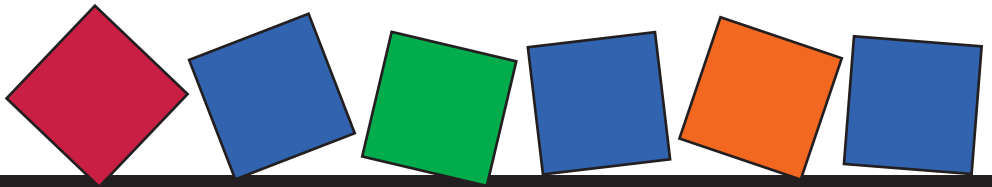
By systematically collecting evidence of the progress that we make together we are committing to the learning also of the wider system.

Matthew Horne

John Craig

David Jackson

Toby Greany



Future scenario: **Perseverance brings its rewards**

A leader from one of the projects in the Midlands reflects on the last three years of their Next Practice project

Back in 2006, projects like ours were told by The Innovation Unit and NCSL that we would have to collect baseline information so that we would be able to assess whether the leadership and governance focus of our work had actually made a difference. In particular they wanted us to focus on whether the new forms of leadership and governance we were developing were more 'effective' than our existing models. It happened very early in the project – the launch event, to be exact – and we were a bit surprised at the time, partly because it felt a bit of a top-down imposition and partly because not all our thinking was formalised at that point. We had worked hard with the other schools and partners involved in our field trial to agree our vision and complete the Statement of Intent over the summer. However, we still weren't clear about leadership and governance issues.

To make it worse, the project team (The IU and NCSL) also

wanted us to undertake visits to other sites, to do a weekly blog describing our progress with the project and to make time to work with a consultant, as well as find time for the central events like the launch and to help trial new tools they were developing. So finding time to identify and collect yet another set of data to satisfy the project requirements felt a bit overwhelming.

However, we persevered. The project was exciting and we wanted to do it well. In the event we found that clarifying our leadership and governance enquiry questions and evidencing the starting position helped us to focus collectively on the things we really wanted to achieve. Our consultant helped a lot because she supported us to undertake the Account of Practice process – we did an enquiry together, wrote it up collaboratively and included some basic baseline evidence within the account. Within a

month, not only had we created our enquiry themes (which were around whether we would achieve economies of scale through the partnership, how leadership behaviours in our new structure would need to change and whether our community engagement and governance model would lead to greater motivation and family learning), but had also found that we already collected 90% of the data we needed. The the extra work would be minimal.

One problem we still faced was that we just weren't confident that after only 18 months we would have enough measurable progress. But our consultant identified what she called the 'proxy indicators' of our ultimate aims

– the changes that would need to be happening as pre-conditions of our big picture changes. In our case, for example, we came up with an approximate assessment of how governors spent their time now, and what they did. We made the assumption that if community governance used time differently and did different things such as spending less time in meetings and more time in engagement activities with parents and the community, then this would be a proxy indicator for other changes. We were so right. It also helps us to tell the story now – we can show people real changes that they can understand.

The Next Practice in System Leadership project now has lots of sites in

which people can see innovative practices, and hear the testimony and understanding of leaders within them. It also has evaluation evidence from across the programme. NCSL and the IU has research from a number of strands across the project. Beyond that, though, each site has graphs and tables that can show movement against the baseline data we initially established.



“The project was exciting and we wanted to do it well.”



