Module 7

Alternative models in reforming school supervision

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Module 7

Introduction

School supervision services have been the subject of much criticism in recent years. Schools, governments and international agencies alike consider this service to be inefficient: their role in monitoring is simply procedural, rarely innovative and their impact on the quality of schools seems insignificant.

In response to this inefficiency, many countries have attempted to reform their supervision service. Some of these reforms have been fairly marginal, at times not going much further than to rename the service. Others, for example in England, New Zealand, in Finland or in Chile, represent a global transformation in the organization and the regulation of the education system. They stem from a deep reflection about the role and usefulness of supervision, which mirrors similar thinking about the role and effectiveness of the state. In some cases, the supervision mandate has been submitted to thorough questioning and reinterpretation. A growing number of countries are reflecting on a similar global reform.

Diverse supervision services have been developed, each inspired by a different vision of the role and effectiveness of the supervision service. We can, based on these different experiences, identify four models. The term 'model' should not be understood as 'an ideal example', but as a 'typical case', which is a simplification of reality. Such simplification allows for more clarity in the description of each model. In reality, most countries have borrowed elements from different models and their service can be considered a hybrid. This is probably best: these models are not presented here as examples to be followed, but as sources of inspiration. Each model has a number of assets, but also implies risks, and its success depends strongly on the context, within which it is implemented.

What this module will discuss

This module consists of three sections.

A first section identifies and briefly discusses three strategic choices that distinguish one model from another. These relate to the principal role of the supervision service, the importance given to different monitoring tools and the type of accountability that is emphasized.

The second section presents four models of the supervision service, which we have called:

- the classical model;
- the central control model;
- the close-to-school support model: and
- the school-site supervision model.

This section comments on the structure of each model and on its advantages and challenges.

The third and last section offers some warnings. On the one hand, these models do not reflect the reality of a particular country (although they are based on real-life reform efforts), but are simplifications of such reforms, by highlighting their most important characteristics. On the other hand, such models cannot and should not be imposed upon any country. They should act as possible sources of inspiration for building specific national supervision systems adapted to the context and needs of each country.

Expected outcomes

At the end of this module, participants should be able to:

- discuss the main strategic choices that need to be considered when defining an overall supervision policy;
- identify four different models for the construction and organization of the supervision service;
- comment on the strengths and weaknesses of each of these models; and
- identify elements within these models that would be useful to their own country and adapted to their context.

Three strategic options

Before presenting the different supervision models, it is important to identify the strategic choices that distinguish one model from another. There are a wide series of differences between models, but three fundamental questions stand central and explain much of what distinguishes one from the other:

- What will be the principal role of the external supervision service? The response to this question will have an impact on the organization of the service, its structure and the location of the supervisors.

- What significance will be given to the major monitoring tools when evaluating the functioning and efficiency of schools and teachers?

- To whom are schools and teachers accountable? And how is such accountability interpreted?

- Each of these questions warrants some explanation, much of which will refer to points already raised in *Modules 1* and *2*.

The role and objectives of school supervision

Question

Can you remember from your previous readings which are the main roles of the supervision service? If necessary, go back to Module 2, where this issue is addressed.

As we discussed in *Module 2,* in most countries supervision has to combine three roles: control, support and liaison. Each role has two dimensions: pedagogical and administrative. In principle, in addition to individual teachers, inspectors can also take an interest in schools as institutions and in the education system as a whole.

The table 1 below (which was discussed in *Module 2*) summarizes the three main tasks, the two dimensions and the three levels (teachers, school, system).

Each supervision system can be analyzed as to the relative emphasis placed on different cells. We will see that the four models presented below have indeed given a different role to the supervision service.

Table 1: Key functions of supervisors

Tasks	Dimension					
	Pedagogical			Administrative		
	Level					
	Teacher	School	System	Teacher	School	System
Control						
Support						
Liaison /link						

Tools for monitoring the functioning of schools

Question

Can you remember from previous modules which are the three main tools to monitor the functioning of schools?

To monitor the functioning and efficiency of a school, three principal tools are available: the external supervision service; the school's internal evaluation; and

examinations and assessment. The relative importance of these tools, their degree of use, and their objectives and characteristics differ profoundly from one model to another. The previous modules have commented in detail on external supervision, which can be carried out by different actors, but which, in general, comes under the responsibility of a department of the Ministry of Education or a more or less autonomous agency linked to the same Ministry.

Module 6 discussed the internal evaluation of an establishment. This could be an authentic self-evaluation in which each member of staff examines his or her performance and all members of staff evaluate the school as a whole. It could be carried out by the school's headteacher or principal, in conjunction with the heads of departments from time to time. At times, the community close to the school could be involved. The school can initiate this process and follow the guidelines developed autonomously by its staff. A different scenario is one in which self-evaluation is an obligation imposed on the school by the Ministry, in which case it will follow a precise procedure developed by the Ministry. The main objective could be to improve the school or to provide an evaluation of its performance to an external body.

A third tool is examinations and assessment. In a growing number of countries, these are no longer used simply to select students for certification and further progress. Rather, exams results and the ranking of schools on these results are now used to judge the performance of each school. These results are regularly made available to schools, together with the national and regional averages, as a source of information and an encouragement to self-improvement. In various countries, these results are also made available to the public. It is hoped that this leads them to put pressure on schools or even that the public uses exam results to choose schools, thus creating competition to be the best amongst schools. Evidently, in many, if not most countries, such choice does not exist and what schools need is not more competition but collaboration.

The accountability of schools and teachers

A third option to take, when developing a supervision system, is to offer an answer to the question: to whom are teachers held accountable? In *Module 1*, a distinction was made between three types of accountability, each of which gives a different reply to this interrogation.

▰ Question

Contractual accountability: teachers are held responsible to the person or the unit with which they entered into a contractual relationship (their employer), and this is in general the Ministry of Education represented at local level by a school director or inspector. Teachers are seen as civil servants; as such, they form part of a bureaucracy and are in a hierarchical relationship. The term 'bureaucratic accountability' is used from time to time as a substitute.

Professional accountability: teachers are viewed as professionals. They belong to a professional community, characterized by a unique body of knowledge and skills. There are two options: one is that each teacher can only be held accountable to him or herself. This option allows for no external supervision and is nearly non-existent, except perhaps in selected higher education institutions. A second option is that each teacher, as a member of a professional community, is accountable to this community and its code of ethics. In other words, the teacher is responsible to the body to which he or she belongs, and thus control is exerted by his or her colleagues.

Public accountability: teachers are seen as members of a 'public service' and are therefore accountable to the public or, in other words, to the clients of the education system. There are two possible interpretations of the term 'client', with different implications. On the one hand, the students and parents of a specific school could be viewed as the immediate clients of that school. The teacher is accountable to the local community. Accountability is then enforced through parent meetings or reports prepared for limited distribution. On the other hand, the term 'clients' could be interpreted as the public of the education system in general. In this instance, teachers and schools are held accountable to the general public through the publication, for example, of exam results or supervision reports.

Each of the four models that we will present below offers its own response to the issue of accountability and relies on a different mixture of the three accountability types. This is strongly related to a country's context. This involves, among other things, opinions about the professionalism of teachers, the effectiveness of the government's bureaucracy or the civil service and the interests of parents and the community in education.

Four models in school supervision

The following section analyzes in greater detail each of the four models, beginning with a presentation of the role assigned to the supervision service, its structure and some of its strong and weak aspects. We shall then examine the importance accorded to the different monitoring tools as well as the concept of accountability that underlies each model.

The classical supervision model

The first model came about as a result of the adaptation of the supervision service to the expansion of the education system and to the deconcentration of the administration that accompanied it. Supervision retains the **role** it was first assigned: that is, to control and provide support in pedagogical and administrative areas. In addition, coverage is supposed to be global: each school and teacher has a right – or could be submitted – to supervision.

In order to undertake this ambitious mission, inspectors find themselves in all the echelons of administration: at district level, where, in general, they exercise control over primary schools and provide support to teachers; at regional level, where they have the same tasks but in secondary schools; and at central level, where their role might include an evaluation of the evolution of the education system, like that of the General Inspectors in France or the Standards Control Unit in Zimbabwe.

Table 2: The structure of the classical supervision model

Central level	Central supervision service	Responsible for the elaboration of supervision policies, global planning, training and system control
Regional level	Regional supervision office	Responsible for supervision in secondary schools, control of the development of education in the region
District level	District inspectors	Responsible for supervision in primary schools, control of education development at district level
	Advisors and resource centres	Advise primary and secondary school teachers
School level	Principal or headteacher	Informal supervision of teachers

This model can be called 'classical' as the essence of the supervision exercise has little changed since its creation. Even though there have been some reforms in response to some demands of teachers – for example the creation of pedagogical advisors or the demand for more transparency by announcing visits and systematic debriefing sessions – these innovative elements have not profoundly modified the service.

This model was implanted in most developing countries, particularly in the previous British and French colonies. Tanzania is a good example, among many others. A supervision service in the Ministry is responsible for the definition of policies and training. Seven zonal offices organize supervision in their zone, supervise secondary schools and supervise the operation of the district office. The district offices, which are expected to have nine primary school inspectors, undertake the genuine school inspections. Alongside these inspectors, there are resource centres that organize training sessions in schools and in the centres. At a level closest to the school are Ward Education Officers. They were originally in charge of supervising adult literacy classes, but are now helping inspectors in particular with the control of school finances.

The **two assets** of this model are:

- its global coverage: in principle, all schools have an equal chance of being supervised and none is forgotten; and

- its comprehensive role: the inspectors accompany their control and evaluation with support and advice.

But the model has a number of **weaknesses**. The most important of these is that it is costly, with its many offices and quite high number of professional staff. In fact this model was originally developed in countries where the services of the state were effective and well financed and was then in some cases implanted into an almost totally different environment: a weak state without resources. The model works best in countries that have a competent public service, with civil servants that are rather well paid.

In countries with such characteristics, two other problems nevertheless crop up:

- the first is well known: supervision is characterized by role conflicts, which stem from an ambiguous description of the post, combining control and support while covering administration and pedagogy. In general, administrative control is given more importance to the detriment of pedagogical support;

- the second weakness is the cumbersome structure. Co-ordination between the levels and among the different actors is complex. The most worrying effect is that there is little follow-up to the recommendations from supervision visits. The distance between the person who drafts the recommendations and the one responsible for action is long and not always very clear.

In its pure form, this model places a strong emphasis on the external supervision service, which is the most important **monitoring tool** of the establishment. The internal evaluation of the school is weak and exam results are used to inform the supervision process, but play no further role in controlling schools. The concept of **accountability** that underlies this model is clearly contractual accountability: the teacher is accountable to his or her employer, the Ministry of Education, and is controlled by this body – through the intermediary of ministerial agents, the body of inspectors.

However, it is important to emphasize that even though this model remains the main inspiration in many countries, almost everywhere reforms are put in place that aim at integrating other tools in the monitoring process. The publication of exam results and the preparation of school improvement plans are the best-known examples. And these tools reflect an accountability that is not purely contractual.

◤ Task

Has your country started using exam results as an accountability tool? If so, according to you, what type of accountability does this tool help to develop?

Completing the task: some hints

Every country has of course examination results at its disposal, but in most countries they are used simply to evaluate and select students. Exams are school accountability tools only when they are being used to evaluate the performance of teachers and/or schools. If these results are only available within the education administration, their purpose is to strengthen contractual accountability. If they are sent back to teachers and schools to incite them to improve their performance, they aim to strengthen professional accountability. If they are made available to the school community (either a school board, with parent representation, the PTA or all the parents), an effort is made to develop public responsibility through partnership between the school and the local community. When they are published and everybody has access to them, and when that allows for a comparison between schools, public accountability of the 'market' type is being promoted.

The central control model

Weaknesses of the 'classical' model were a source of inspiration for reforms, which have led to the development of what we will call the 'central control' model. This model is based on the following convictions:

- supervision should concentrate on one task – control. It is harmful to ask supervisors to combine support and control as the conflicting roles that this entails renders ineffective their interventions in the two domains;

- the heavy bureaucracy that characterizes the classical model is not only expensive, it also prevents it from functioning effectively: there are too many small offices and the different levels lengthen the time between the supervision visit and follow-up to its recommendations;

- external supervision cannot on its own lead to school improvement. This is the responsibility of the actors at school level (the principal, the teachers, the board, the parent association). But school inspection can be an incentive to start internal school reform, by informing the school and the public of the school's progress and weaknesses.

The **role** of the supervision service is therefore fairly simple: to inspect each school from time to time and to publish a public report. Such an inspection and its report examine all the aspects of the school's functioning and could be considered an 'audit'. The structure of this model, which is presented in table 3, reflects its role: strong central control and few, if any supervisory actors at lower levels, while support is made available through private providers.

Table 3: The structure of the central control model

Central level	Central inspection body (autonomous)		In charge of full inspection of all schools every 3, 4 or 5 years and informing the public
Regional level		No specific officers	
District level		No specific officers	
School	School board		Supervision of school management
School	Headteacher		Regular supervision of teachers; decides on the need to purchase advice from private providers
Private service	Private providers		Offer advice to schools and teachers upon their request

Example

*This model reflects the situation in **England & Wales** and in **New Zealand**. In both countries, the construction of a new system was intrinsically linked to a more global reform of the public service and the management of the education system. The context of this reform was an economic crisis and strong criticism of the public service – the public education system in particular. The system of inspection was also criticized: it was accused of being characterized by a heavy inefficient bureaucracy, a derisory impact on school improvement and a body of conservative and individualist inspectors. These criticisms brought about a profound restructuring of inspection. In New Zealand, a very classical structure was replaced with an independent unit, the 'Education Review Office', while local and regional offices were abolished. This Office has a mandate to inform the Ministry and the public of the effectiveness of the system and all its schools. Each school is inspected every three years. During these visits, the review officers do not offer formal support. Schools are expected to use their own budgets to buy support (for example training courses) offered by universities and other training institutions. The report is a public document and contains a summary that is specifically addressed to the local community. Each school has a 'Board of Trustees', an elected administrative board, which recruits the school principal and supervises its management. Each school must develop an evaluation system through which the principal and the senior staff assess the performance of the teaching body.*

This model has certain evident **assets**:
- The role of the supervision service is simple – to control the school in a comprehensive manner. This control covers all pedagogical aspects,

administration and management. The inspector or review officers are not confronted with conflicting roles because they are not supposed to offer advice.

- The organization of the inspection service is also simple. Due to the fact that its sole task is to inspect schools every three years or more, it is better for this body to be centralized than dispersed in many small offices. The distribution of functions is clear: the inspection controls and private service providers offer advice, at the request of the school. This avoids role overlaps and the co-ordination between actors and services causes few problems.

- Inspection visits are meant to provoke schools to assume responsibility for their own improvement through the preparation of an action plan. This model therefore assigns responsibility for improvement to those actors who can make the difference.

However these assets rapidly reach limits, particularly with schools facing difficult circumstances. The following can be mentioned as some of the **weaknesses**:

- Schools receive too little support. Many teachers in England and New Zealand complain that an incitement to improve is far from sufficient if it is only accompanied by some recommendations but without any help towards this process of renewal. Of course, successful schools suffer less from this lack of support. Schools facing difficulties are however left feeling de-motivated after a process that stresses their weakness and offers few solutions.

- The process puts too much pressure on the schools and above all on their principals. Principals complain about excess responsibility due to the fact that they are the last in line, and of excess work, in particular regarding administrative tasks, to the detriment of their pedagogical role.

- The inspection visit conditions the future of the school. A critical report, especially if it is published, can create a vicious cycle that brings about the downfall of the school. Before the visit, the preparation period is one of great anxiety, which causes conflict among teachers and in some cases kicks off a process that deteriorates more than it improves.

This model can in principle rely on inspection visits and reports as its only **monitoring tool**. In general, however, the role of exams and assessment tests is also being strengthened at the same time; and the publication of results in league tables has become probably the best-known and most controversial form of intervention in the monitoring system in a country such as the UK. Self-evaluation also develops, but mainly as a stage in the process of external inspection. It takes place before an inspection visit and has two objectives: first, to facilitate the inspection process by gathering documents and preparing an initial analysis of the status of the school; second, to get the school ready for this external audit so that it comes out better. Indeed, quite a few schools use this self-evaluation process as a rehearsal for the audit. In many schools, however, the obligation to prepare an internal evaluation report before the visit has helped the school in developing a culture of self-review.

In this model, the school and the teachers are **accountable**, on the one hand, to their employer – the Ministry – which exerts control through the regular inspections and, on the other hand, to the public. The publication of inspection reports and exam results are intended precisely to make the school feel directly responsible towards its 'clients' and to allow these clients to choose a school and to put

pressure on schools. Their conclusions are at the same time used as advertisements by schools: praising quotes decorate their websites and information brochures.

Different countries have adapted certain elements of this model, particularly the institutional audit carried out by a specific corps of inspectors. These countries have nevertheless kept a classical supervision process, which concentrates more on support than control. The objective of the audit is to reinforce the evaluation of schools and give it a formal structure and character. This allows for a more intensive use of the reports of these audits which remain, however, confidential, in contrast to the situation in for example England.

◢ Task

Could you identify elements within this model that either exist already in your country or that could be introduced and would have a beneficial impact on school supervision?

Completing the task: some hints

Few countries in the developed or in the developing world have completely adopted this model. Some of its elements, however, have been integrated by some countries in their inspection service. Among the more popular elements are:

- the setting up of a central service or unit, with quite some autonomy from the ministry, so as to allow it to play a role in the evaluation of the implementation of the education policy;
- the undertaking of school audits, which give an overall view of the school and of all its aspects, rather than focusing on teachers or on pedagogical matters only; and
- making some conclusions and/or recommendations of this report available to the school board or the PTA.

The latter two steps could indeed be useful to schools, but on condition that the weaker schools in particular be given support when they have been informed of the conclusions of the school audit.

The close-to-school support model

This third model started off, as did the second model, from a criticism on the classical model, but drew very different conclusions. It is based on the following reasoning: the main weakness of the classical model (and of the central inspection model) is to consider all schools as rather similar units. The supervision system can therefore treat all schools as equals and use the same strategies towards all. But schools have very different characteristics: their environment, pupils, teachers, parents, resources and so on are all specific to each school. And the supervision system should take those diverse needs into account.

This diversification of the supervision strategy becomes even more necessary when we consider that the core role of the supervision service is to assist the weakest schools by offering them advice and guidance on how to improve. With such a purpose in mind, each school will need to be treated differently and supervision will have to adapt itself to the needs of each school. The drawback of the 'classical' model is precisely that by trying to cover all schools without distinction, it fails to give due attention to those schools most in need of its intervention.

What those 'weaker' schools need is not control alone, and surely not a three-yearly audit, but consistent pedagogical support and therefore regular visits by support-oriented supervisors.

These points have implications for the supervisory structure. To enable supervisors to make regular visits, most are based as close to the schools as possible, while central and provincial officers no longer visit schools, but are in charge of policy-formulation and training respectively. To avoid supervisors spending too much time on administration, a specific cadre of administrative controllers may be created. And to ensure that they focus on the schools most in need of their support, a database identifies a fairly limited number of schools with which each supervisor has to work. The following structure is thus developed.

Table 4: The structure of the close-to-school support model

Central level	Central supervision service	Small team in charge of development of supervision policies
Regional level	Regional supervision office	Small team in charge of training supervisory officers
District level	District Supervision officers	In charge of offering intensive and development-oriented supervision to those schools most in need
	Administrative controllers	In charge of controlling in particular the finances of all schools
School	Headteacher	Informal supervision of teachers

Example

Chile, following the return to democracy in the 1990s, developed such a supervision system. The authoritarian regime of General Pinochet had introduced a series of reforms that led to a more efficient system, but was characterized by far deeper disparities. For the incoming democratic government, addressing these disparities was a priority. Education plays a key role: from being a creator of disparities, it should become a tool for more equality. School inspection, which under the military regime had been a control agent of the State, was transformed in different ways: its

name changed from 'inspection' to 'technical-pedagogical supervision' and its role has become to support the schools facing challenging circumstances. As such, it forms part of a much wider 'compensatory programme' that through the provision of various resources assists the poorest schools.

This model has three strong points:
- the structure is top-light: by far most personnel is in offices closest to schools, which makes it easy to undertake regular visits;
- supervision is freed from its administrative work overload, and can therefore concentrate on its essential work – offering support; and
- supervision becomes a flexible service by adapting itself to the characteristics of schools – effective schools are to a large extent left to get along on their own, while supervisors concentrate on the neediest schools.

◤ Question

What might be the challenges of introducing such a model in your own country?

The following challenges might be encountered and have indeed been preoccupations in the case of Chile:
- supervision does not cover all schools. This will not be a concern for the best performing schools, but there might be a large group that is not sufficiently weak to benefit from supervision and not sufficiently strong to function without any support;
- setting up such a needs-based model demands a strong database on the characteristics and needs of schools, which goes beyond a simple league table. Chile has such data, but few other countries do; and
- the most intricate challenge resides in the need to change the culture of the supervision service, from one of control over a large number of

schools towards one of supporting a few selected schools, in other words from an authoritarian to a democratic and collegial relationship.

In Chile, such a cultural change was achieved but not through what could have been the easiest way, namely a radical replacement of existing staff. The same staff was used, but several steps were taken to change its outlook and practice, including training, new job descriptions, taking away all control functions and new working tools.

Supervision visits, in this model, are an important monitoring tool, but there is a close linkage between such external supervision and the school's self-evaluation. The supervisor, when in school, works with the school's staff on identifying its strengths and weaknesses and on developing a school improvement plan. Supervision becomes thus a stage in the process of school self-evaluation and improvement, while in the preceding model the school's self-evaluation is a phase in the external inspection process. In other words, in this model external supervision helps the school undertake its own evaluation, while in the central control model self-evaluation helps the external inspectors to carry out their inspection. Exams play an important role, namely to allow the Ministry and the supervision service to know which schools to focus on and to monitor the reduction of disparities. Their role in monitoring schools is thus very different from in the previous model, where exam results are public information and parents use them to choose a school.

The close-to-school support model incorporates two concepts of accountability. On the one hand, contractual accountability: school staff are accountable towards the supervisors, who are representatives of their employer, the Ministry. There is, on the other hand, a strong aspect of professional accountability: the involvement of the teaching staff in a self-evaluation and school improvement process implies a sense of responsibility towards their colleagues. In the same way, the change of the supervisor from a control-agent to a collegial advisor expresses a desire to instill a sense of professional accountability.

Could you identify elements within this model that either exist already in your country or that could be introduced and would have a beneficial impact on school supervision?

Completing the task: some hints

This model does not exist in many countries, but some of its elements can be sources of inspiration in a reform programme that wants to turn school supervision into a quality improvement tool. Three seem particularly important:

- placing inspectors as close as possible to the schools, if necessary by transferring staff from the regional and even central office to the district office. This, however, is not always easy to achieve, as the district offices are in many cases situated in places without the necessary basic services and as these offices do not always have posts at the same level as those in central or regional offices;

- focusing inspection on the most needy schools. The main challenge here will be to ensure that all needy schools are covered. In some countries, and especially in remote places, a majority of schools might be in need of extra support;

- changing the relationship with teachers from an authoritarian into a collegial one. This is surely something teachers appreciate, but many supervisors have found it difficult to change their attitude and give up their position of power. A training programme will be indispensable, but so might be an actual change in the legal framework.

The school-site supervision model

This model has not been developed in reaction to the inefficiencies of the 'classical' model. It is to some extent typical of countries with the following characteristics: great homogeneity, a society with few disparities, well-motivated teachers, public trust in their professionalism and strong parental interest in

education. In such an environment, the teachers and the local community might appear the best monitors of the quality and the functioning of the school. They are sufficiently close to the classroom to have a direct impact on the teaching process. The conviction exists, moreover, that the teaching staff have the skills and professional conscience to participate in self- and in peer-evaluation without being supervised from outside, and that the local community is willing and competent to exercise some control over the school.

In other words, there is no need for a formal supervision service organized by the Ministry of Education. At the local level, there are different scenarios. The self-evaluation can be very informal, without much structure or organization, relying on the individual initiative of the teachers; or it can be the responsibility of a specific structure such as a school governing board, which can be in charge of one or a few schools. While there is no external supervision, there are central-level tools to monitor the schools, such as examination and test results and indicator systems.

The following table shows the structure of this model, where all supervisory actors are based at the school-site, at local level or in the school.

Table 5: The structure of the school-site supervision model

Central level	No specific supervision officers	No external school inspection as such, reliance on indicator systems, examination and test results
Regional level	No specific supervision officers	
District level	No specific supervision officers	
Local level	School board or council	In charge of supervision of the management of the school: the role of the headteacher
School	Headteacher and senior staff	Regular supervision of teachers; decide on the need to ask advice from teacher training officers
	All staff	Involved in school self-evaluation and development of school improvement plans

Example

In Finland, the external inspection service was abolished in 1991. In the same vein, the strict national curriculum was replaced in 1994 by a much lighter framework. Schools were encouraged to undertake their own evaluation, although no national strategy or guidelines were developed on how to do so. The schools took that initiative, many of them pushed into doing so by the municipality. But allowing schools so much autonomy in their evaluation does not mean that the central government is not preoccupied with the quality and functioning of schools. Their preoccupation is expressed in at least two ways:

- *the Ministry organized optional achievement tests, has developed national performance indicators and proposes evaluation procedures that the municipal level can employ. A 'National Board of Education' has been set up that, among other things, evaluates the education system through for example examining the operations of educational institutions; and*

- *the abolition of the inspection service and of the national curriculum was counterbalanced by the development of a framework, with norms and indicators that allow the Ministry to compare between schools.*

This model has two important assets. First, it puts a strong emphasis on the role of the school, the teachers and the local community in improving teaching and learning. Experience has shown that for a school to change for the better in a sustainable way, the commitment of the school-site actors is a requirement. Quality cannot be imposed from the outside. A second asset is that the supervision service, which can represent a fairly heavy bureaucracy and has become a burden for the government and a constraint on school initiatives, is absent.

There are several challenges:

- the absence of governmental control and a support structure could become a problem for 'weak' schools that do not have the internal resources to start off an improvement process. In some countries, the group of 'weak' schools could form a majority. In such a situation, breaking down all external supervision could be interpreted as an abandonment of responsibility;

- secondly, this model functions well if the absence of a supervisory structure is balanced by other evaluation mechanisms, such as exams and tests and a comprehensive and regularly updated indicator system, and by a good normative framework;

- thirdly, there is a risk that national policy objectives will be threatened if there is little external control on what goes on in schools and in the classrooms. A country such as Finland, characterized by great homogeneity and few disparities, nevertheless had that preoccupation and after some years started to tighten the regulatory framework. In multicultural countries, this issue might be much more serious.

It will have become clear that, in the absence of external supervision, the role of the other two monitoring tools, exams and assessment and self-evaluation, have grown in importance. Where these are functioning properly, it could be argued that teachers might actually have less autonomy in their classroom than in a system in which reliance is mainly on an external supervision system that is not functioning efficiently.

Question:

What interpretation of 'accountability' characterizes this model?

The school-site supervision model relies on a combination of professional and public accountability. Teachers are held accountable towards their colleagues, with all participating in a self-evaluation process. Relying on teachers' professional

accountability makes sense when there is trust in their professionalism and when efforts are made to develop teaching into an attractive career. There is also an element of public accountability: parents and even pupils play a role in the school evaluation process and exercise some control. Their involvement is very different from what the public is expected to do in the central inspection model. They are meant to put pressure on and collaborate with 'their' school, to motivate the whole school community to improve rather than to go and look for the best possible school to send their kids to. We can refer here to the distinction made in *Module 1* between the 'free-market' and the 'partnership' model. Parents are considered in this model as partners of the school rather than as clients.

A warning about the use of models

Models are not realities

The presentation above may have given the impression that these four models are complete contrasts and mutually exclusive. In reality, the differences are somewhat less evident, for at least three reasons.

First, the adoption of a new policy at central level does not immediately imply its realization at local level. In other words, what happens precisely in the schools and in the classrooms is influenced by national policies, but also by a set of formal and informal factors, including the culture of the supervision service, the relationships between teachers, the principal's leadership and the resources available.

Second, countries that have adopted a radical position are at present shifting towards a more mixed one. The UK, Chile and Finland are three examples of this. In the UK, OFSTED is now requesting its inspection teams not to limit themselves to controlling, but also to give some feedback and advice to the teachers, whom they observe. In Chile, the Ministry feels at present that its supervision system does not exercise enough control and that there is a need to find a new balance between support and control. And in Finland, as the preceding section noted, the autonomy of schools in its evaluation is being tempered by the strengthening of national frameworks and the setting up of a national evaluation board.

Third, in each model the state continues to exercise its regulatory and monitoring functions. Each puts in place a system to evaluate and control schools and teachers. The strategies, actors and tools used differ from one model to another, but nowhere has the state given schools complete autonomy.

There is no ideal model

Such a comparison between models almost automatically raises the questions: Which model is the best? Which model should countries follow? The answer is straightforward: there is no best model. Education systems with very different characteristics have obtained equally good results. International studies that compare education systems have shown that there is no one single formula that all systems should follow.

The search for an ideal single model is unproductive for at least two reasons.

First, the four models presented above assign quite different objectives to the supervision service. These also reflect different preoccupations. It is true that the

final objective is the same for all four: the improvement of the schools and of the education system. But behind that shared general objective, a significant variety appears. The classical model is preoccupied above all with the respect of rules and regulations; its objective is conformity to those rules. The central control model aims to develop a sense of public accountability in the school. It wants schools and teachers to feel more directly responsible for the quality of the education they offer, and it therefore allows its supervision reports to be made public. Its objective is not so much that all schools conform to the central regulations, but that they respond to parental demand. The close-to-school support model argues that a system cannot be considered effective as long as it is characterized by strong disparities. Its objective is to help the weaker schools catch up. The school-site supervision model aims to develop a close and fruitful relationship between the different actors at the school level: teachers, parents, students and the local community or the local authorities. Such a relationship will engender a sense of professional and public accountability among teachers, a guarantee for long-term improvement.

The second factor that renders a comparison between models futile is that the effectiveness of a supervision model depends above all on its adaptation to the context of a country. Each model is appropriate to a specific social and educational situation. Relying strongly on school self-evaluation and parental involvement, as does the school-site supervision model, makes sense when teachers are strong professionals, parents show great commitment and there are few disparities between schools. Where teachers are poorly trained and motivated and where parents express little interest, an external control system strengthened with some pedagogical advice might be much more appropriate.

The complicated exercise that each country has to undertake is to reflect on the current strengths and weaknesses of its supervision system and to identify, within the above-mentioned models, those elements that could help enrich its present system so that it becomes a genuine tool for quality improvement.

Lessons learned

Question:

The expected outcomes of this module were that you would have a better idea of the strategic choices that define a supervision service and that you would be able to define and present the strengths and weaknesses of four different models of supervision. Summarize briefly what you learnt by studying this module. Does it compare with what follows?

When reflecting upon the present state and the reform of any supervision service, **three strategic choices** stand central:

- What should be the role of the service? (more towards control or support? focus on teachers or on schools?)

- What should be its relationship with other school monitoring devices, such as exams and tests and internal evaluation?

- To whom should teachers be made to feel accountable?

Supervision services give different answers to these questions. On the basis of these answers, **four models** can be identified. The following table presents the core elements of each of these models:

Classical inspection model	
Role	Offer support and exercise control over all schools
Structure	Deconcentrated, following the educational administration
Strengths	Covers all schools quite systematically
	Offers support and exercises control
Weaknesses	Costly
	Co-ordination is complex
	Heavy bureaucracy
Accountability	Mainly contractual
Central control model	
Role	Control all schools through comprehensive inspections
Structure	Centralized in an autonomous unit
Strengths	Clear distribution of tasks
	Little bureaucracy
	Makes schools responsible
Weaknesses	Too little support
	Too much stress on schools and principals
	A single inspection report decides on the schools' future
Accountability	A mix of contractual and public (market) accountability

Close-to-school support model	
Role	Strong support to needy schools and light control over all schools
Structure	As deconcentrated as possible
Strengths	Top-light
	A flexible service: focus on needy schools
	Releases supervision of administrative tasks
Weaknesses	Does not cover all schools
	Demands a strong database …
	… and a change in supervision culture
Accountability	A mix of contractual and professional accountability
The school-site supervision model	
Role	No external inspection as such; supervision by staff and, maybe, community
Structure	School-site based
Strengths	Puts responsibility on actors, who can make the difference
	Little bureaucracy
Weaknesses	Stress on schools; what about *weak* ones?
	Needs a strong national evaluation system
	What about national policy objectives?
Accountability	A mix of professional and public (partnership) accountability.

School supervision services exist in nearly all countries; they have played a key role in the development of the public education system, by monitoring the quality of schools and by supporting their improvement. However, in many countries, these services are under increasingly heavy critique, because of their failure to have a positive impact on quality of teaching and learning. This failure is, in part, the result of a strategic challenge: the mandate of the service outweighs by far its resources, and is also caused by a series of poor management and planning decisions.

Against this background, many countries have attempted to reform their supervision system. These reforms are also inspired by the need to improve educational quality and by the recent trend towards more school autonomy. Indeed, the ability of schools to use their greater freedom effectively will depend to a large extent on the support services on which they can rely, while supervision may be needed to guide them in their decision-making and to monitor the use they make of their resources. While these reforms have met with mixed success, their overall analysis allows us to gain profound insight into what can be achieved in a specific context. This set of training modules takes the reader through a systematic examination of the issues that a Ministry of Education, intent on reforming its supervision service, will face.

The public, which will benefit most from these modules, are senior staff within ministries who are directly involved in the organisation, planning and management of supervision services, staff of research and training institutions who work on school supervision, and practising supervisors.

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