

Mediation and translation: the professional as policy actor

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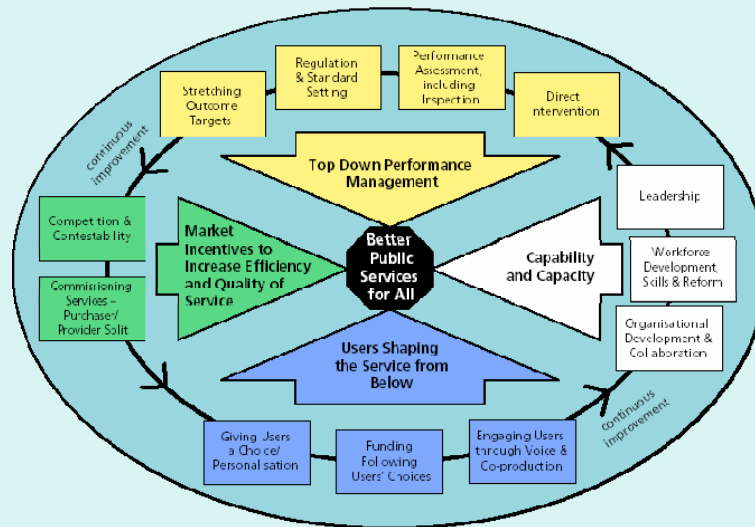
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Why discuss the professional as policy actor?

- Professionals see themselves as 'subject' to policy rather than 'policy actors'
- This perception is a reflection of the governance landscape and the reform of the public sector
- Weak professional voice in policy-making
- We will argue for a model of governance in which there is an integral role for professionals and researchers as 'legitimate social partners'

The role of the professional in public service reform?



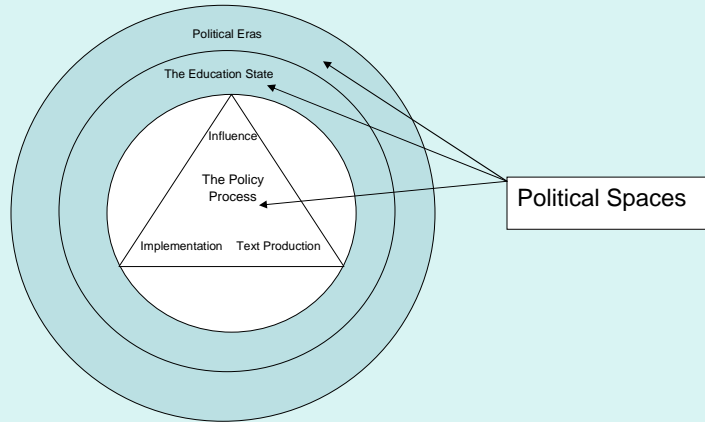
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The wider governance landscape

- New Labour's 'double shuffle' - dominant neo-liberal and subordinate social democratic themes
- Governance - top-down performance management and markets
 - Arms length regulation - policy levers, unintended outcomes and transactions costs
 - Central/institutional dominant - regional/local subordinate
 - Privileges certain voices (e.g. employers) and weak social partnership
 - LSS to be divided on age and on governance lines which divides professionals
 - Policy busyness and constant change - diverts and excludes professionals

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Power and political space



Professionals working in this governance landscape

Our work on mediation and translation builds on the work of Shain and Gleeson (1999) on 'strategic compliance'. How institutions 'translated' policy levers into institutional systems and practices

1. Translation problems (e.g. over-interpretation)
2. Compliance and reproduction of policy levers
3. Ethical gaming (examples from adult learning)
4. Shielding practices by managers
5. Resistance (e.g. responses of cohesive communities of practice)
6. Exit

Three principles of a new settlement for lifelong learning



- Teaching, learning and education at the heart of a lifelong learning system
- Greater equity for learners and professionals within the LSS and between the LSS and other sectors
- New means of forming, evaluating and redesigning policy with a more moderate pace of change

Features of a new system: devolved social partnership



- National agencies to provide broad policy steers with a greater role for regional and local action and feedback loops from professionals
- Policy frameworks rather than policy levers
- Involvement of the full range of social partners (including professionals) in formation, evaluation and redesign of policy
- An ecological perspective on institutional relations at the local level - the actions of one affect the health of another

'Freedom from' and 'freedom to'



- From Lawrence Pratchett on local autonomy and democracy
- *'Freedom from'* = **top-down view; autonomy as "primarily about freedom from higher authorities"**
- *'Freedom to'* = **focussed on what can be achieved at local level; scope to undertake initiative to improve outcomes locally**

Creating political space for a new settlement



- *Political space* - the extent to which debate and decision-making is either limited or facilitated
- Spaces are possible in all parts of the system
- They are generated by:
 - Fundamental political change (e.g. new political era)
 - Long-term battle of ideas (e.g. unified systems)
 - Conjunctural crises and their effects
 - 'Tipping' debates at critical moments
- The issue is how to identify spaces and how to create them

Policy engagement: the role of research



- Criticism, compliance and engagement
- Identifying, creating and working within 'political space' - the role of tipping debates
- The role of the researcher - towards policy engagement
- Research alliances - working with the 'practitioner base' and policy communities

Further reading



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