

# The Adventure of Leadership

Presentation to the  
NAPD Region 7 Conference  
Faithlegg Hotel, Near Waterford City, Ireland  
Friday, 27th February 2009

**Professor David Hopkins**

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## The Nature of Adventure

If adventure has a final all-embracing motive it is surely this; we go out because it is our nature to go out, to climb the mountains and sail the seas, to fly to the planets and plunge into the depths of the oceans. By doing these things we make touch with something outside or behind, which strangely seems to approve our doing them. We extend our horizon, we expand our being, we revel in a mastery of ourselves which gives an impression, mainly illusory, that we are masters of our world. In a word we are men, and when man ceases to do these things, he is no longer man.

Wilfred Noyce

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## Adventure and Education

Adventure education has a long and distinguished tradition. Think of Homer's *Odyssey*; Plato's *Republic*; and Rousseau's *Emile*.

The notion of personal development occurring through challenge and adventure resonate with every one of us. So much so that *experience* has become the central block for many educational philosophers and psychologists such as Dewey, Piaget and Bruner.

Adventure education has an enduring relevance in a wide variety of educational contexts.

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## Life Scripts and Adventure

We all have life scripts, some of us chose to develop it others are forced to do so. Life scripts evolve as the individual confronts direct experience and adapts and assimilates it with their self. Adventure as the purest form of direct experience has the ability to develop 'life script' in the most immediate way. 'Adventure leaders' create situations where others can develop their own life scripts.

As Mahatma Gandhi said – 'You must be the change you wish to see in the world'

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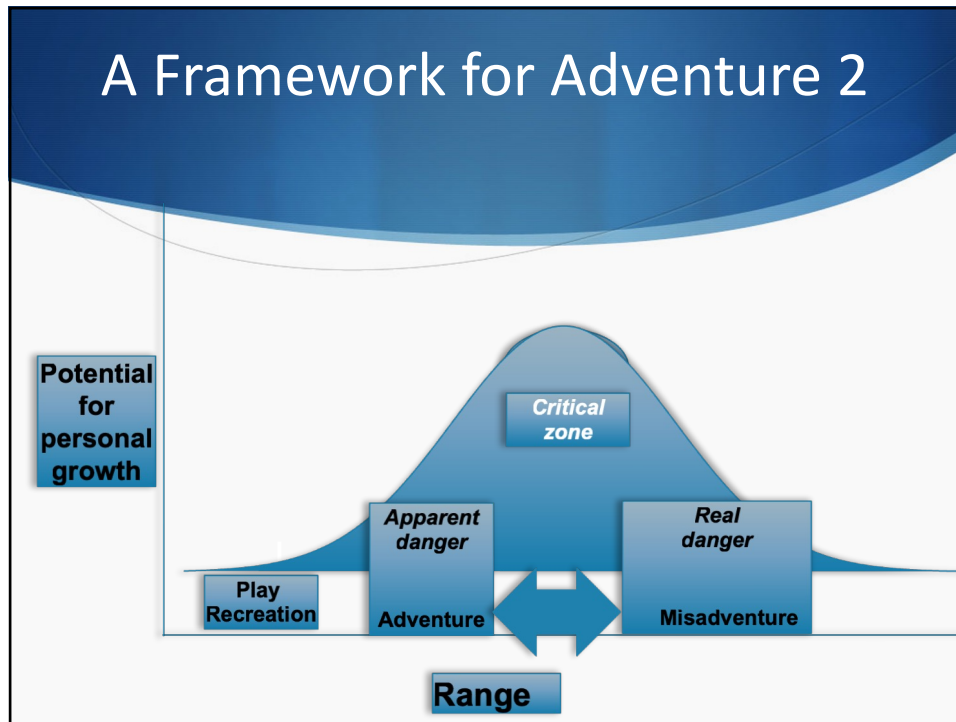
## A Framework for Adventure 1

Adventure is a state of mind that begins with feelings of uncertainty about the outcome of a journey and always ends with feelings of enjoyment, satisfaction, or elation about the successful completion of that journey....

The initial feeling of uncertainty of outcome is fear of physical or psychological harm. There can be no adventure in Outdoor Pursuits without this fear in the mind of the participant. Without the fear there would be no challenge. Fear extended to terror, however, is not adventure. This is misadventure as the journey is psychologically too demanding for the person concerned.

Colin Mortlock

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## Powerful Learning ...

Is the ability of learners to respond successfully to the tasks they are set, as well as the task they set themselves. In particular, to:

- Integrate prior and new knowledge
- Acquire and use a range of learning skills
- Solve problems individually and in groups
- Think carefully about their successes and failures
- Accept that learning involves uncertainty and difficulty

All this has been termed “meta-cognition” – it is the learners’ ability to take control over their own learning processes.

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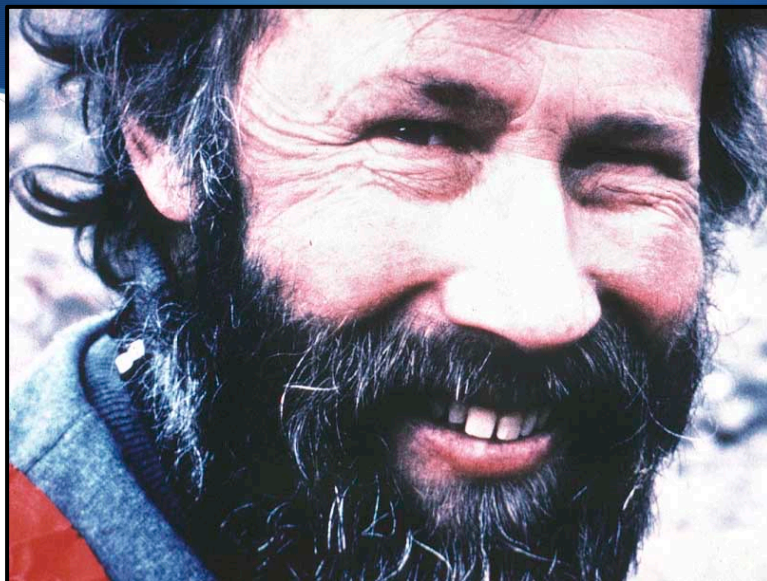
## The Leadership Challenge

“... we need to be skeptical about the “leadership by adjective” literature. Sometimes these adjectives have real meaning, but sometimes they mask the more important themes common to successful leadership, regardless of the style being advocated”.

Ken Leithwood

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## Sir Chris Bonington



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## Lord Hunt on Bonington and Leadership

Everest imposes enormous emotional strains on the climber. Upon no one was the stress so great and prolonged as on the leader of the expedition. His was the original decision to make the bid; his the choice of companions, the general strategy, the supervision of the whole complex plan and its unfolding on Everest. His was the responsibility for the lives of more than 70 men, exposed to risks of many kinds and for a considerable time ... On the leader would be heaped the chorus of criticism, if this expensive venture were to prove to be yet another failure.

John Hunt

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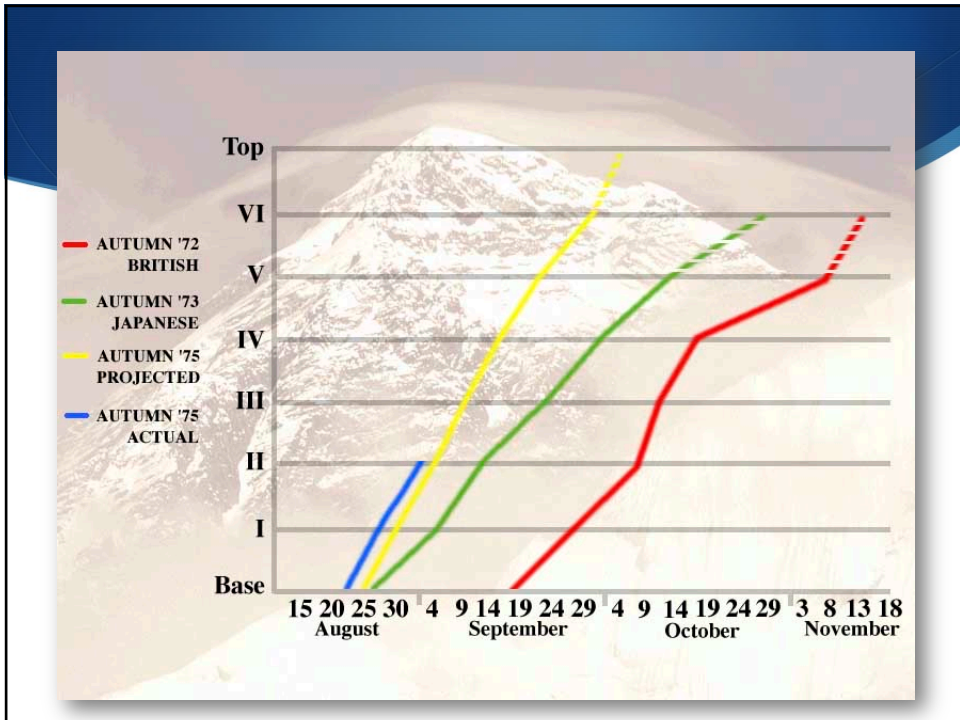
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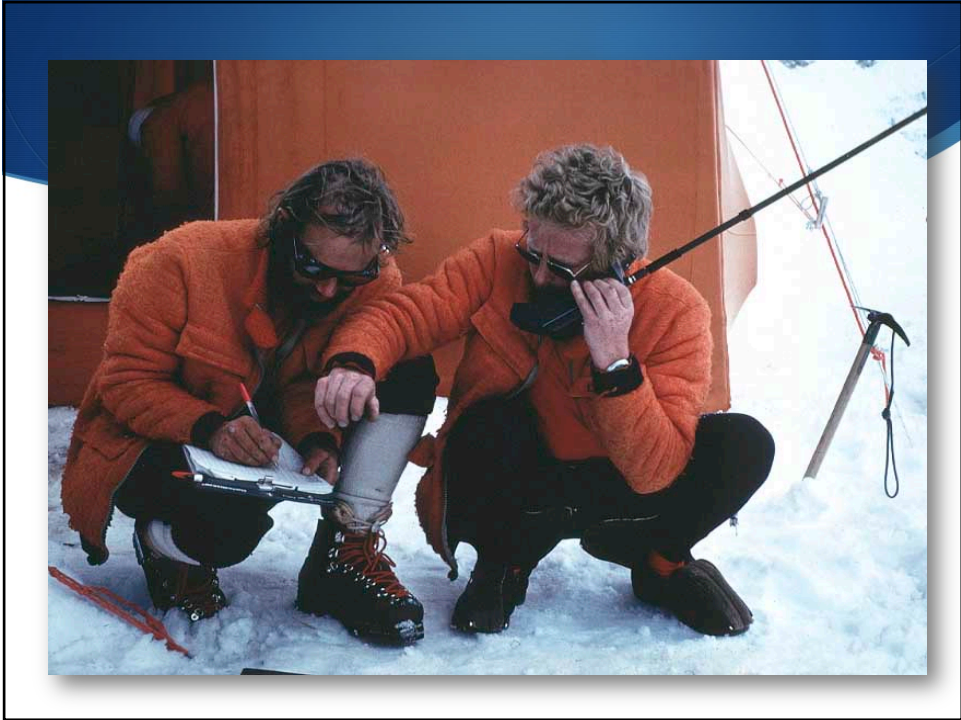
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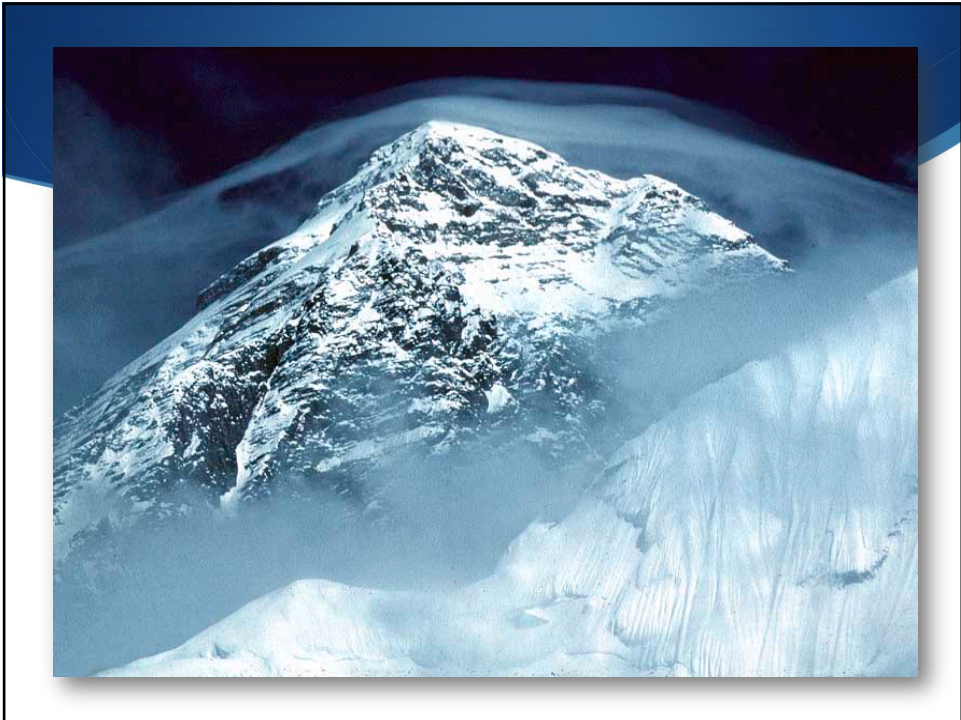
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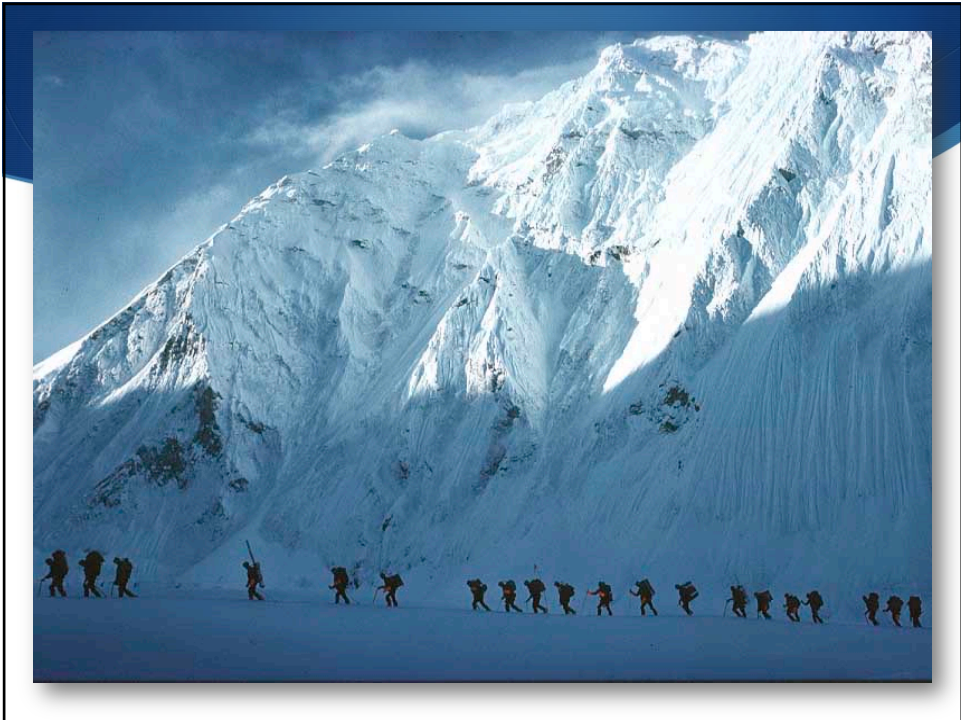
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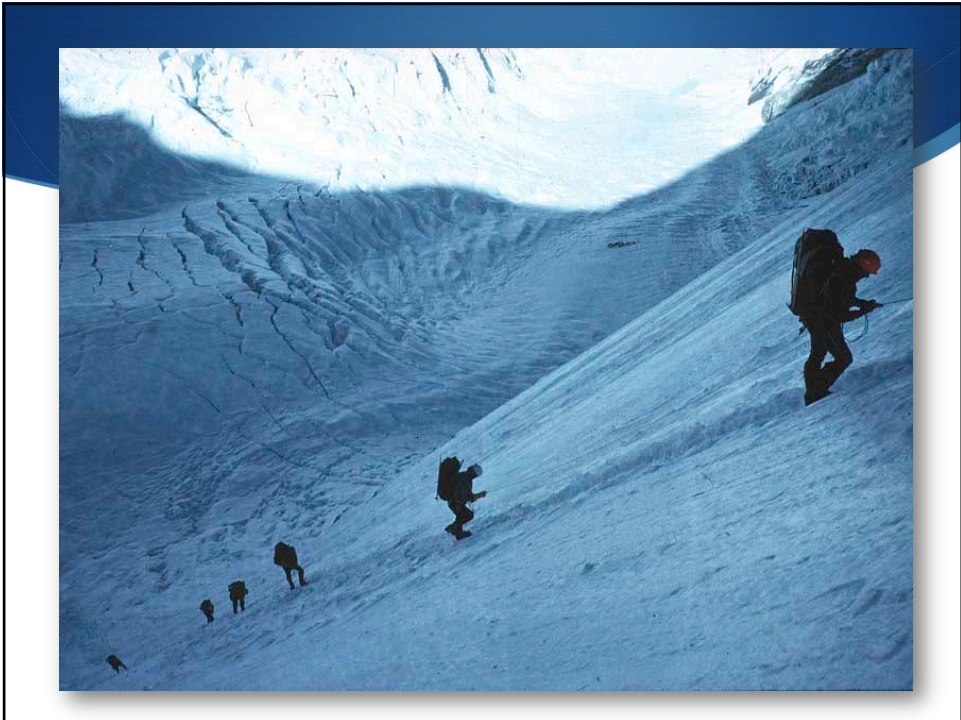
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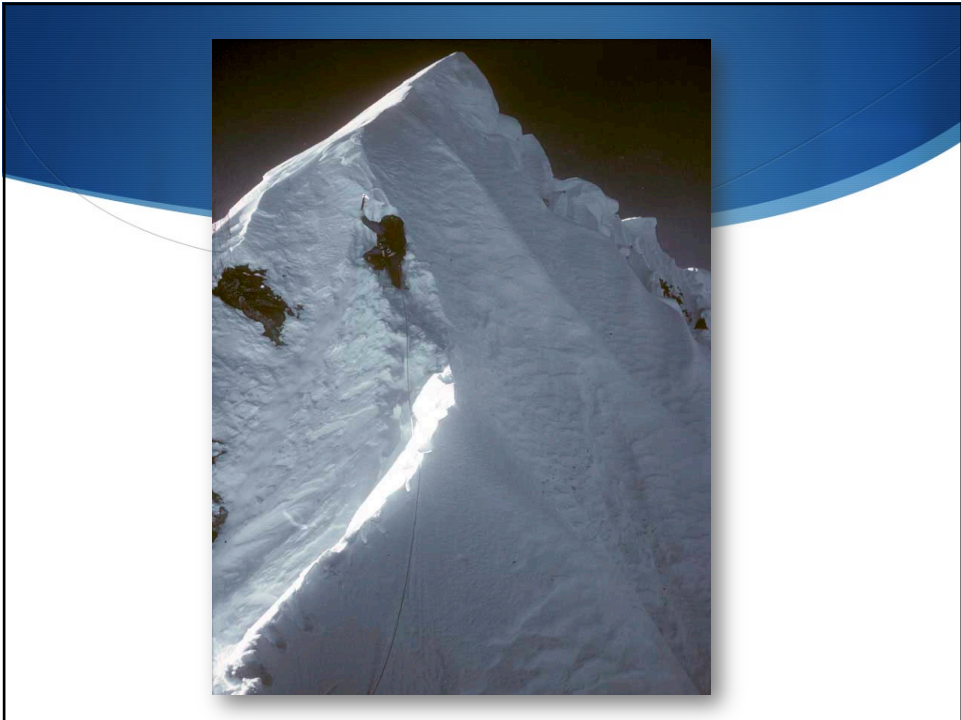


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## The Adventure of Leadership

On first appearance leading a team up South West Face of Everest may not be similar to leading your school but do you:

- Expose yourself to risk and challenge complacency?
- Have a clear objective, develop a plan then tell the story?
- Carefully allocate roles and develop people within and beyond them?
- Manage core purpose and create the conditions where every learner can achieve their potential and achieve high standards?
- Have clear operating systems, but being open to innovation?
- Set objectives and then trust colleagues?
- Cultivate the energy that direct experience and trust generates?
- Open yourself up to awareness, adventure and challenge?

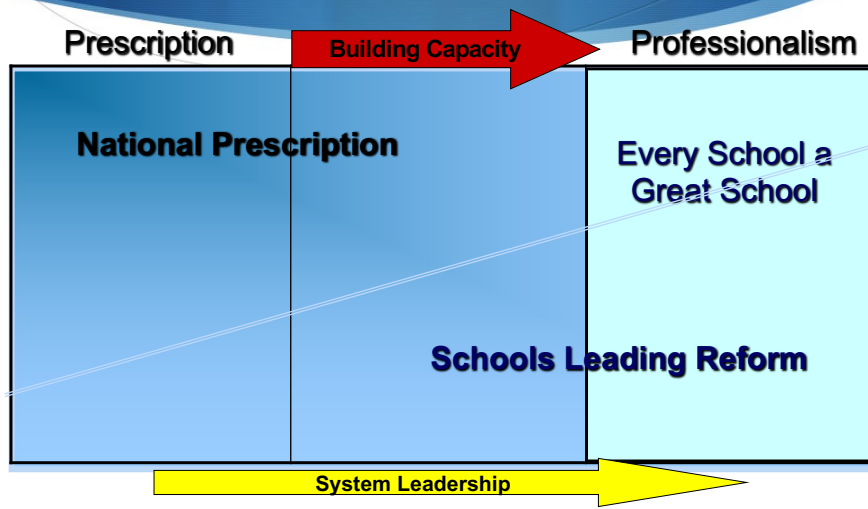
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## System Leadership: A Proposition

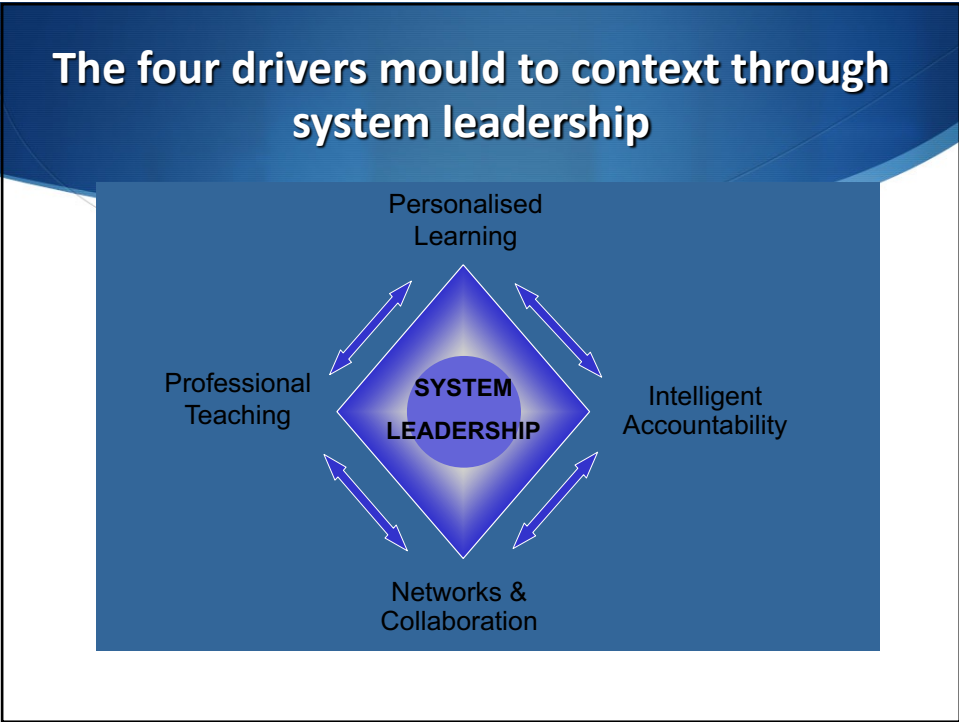
‘System leaders’ care about and work for the success of other schools as well as their own. They measure their success in terms of improving student learning and increasing achievement, and strive to both raise the bar and narrow the gap(s). Crucially they are willing to shoulder system leadership roles in the belief that in order to change the larger system you have to engage with it in a meaningful way.’

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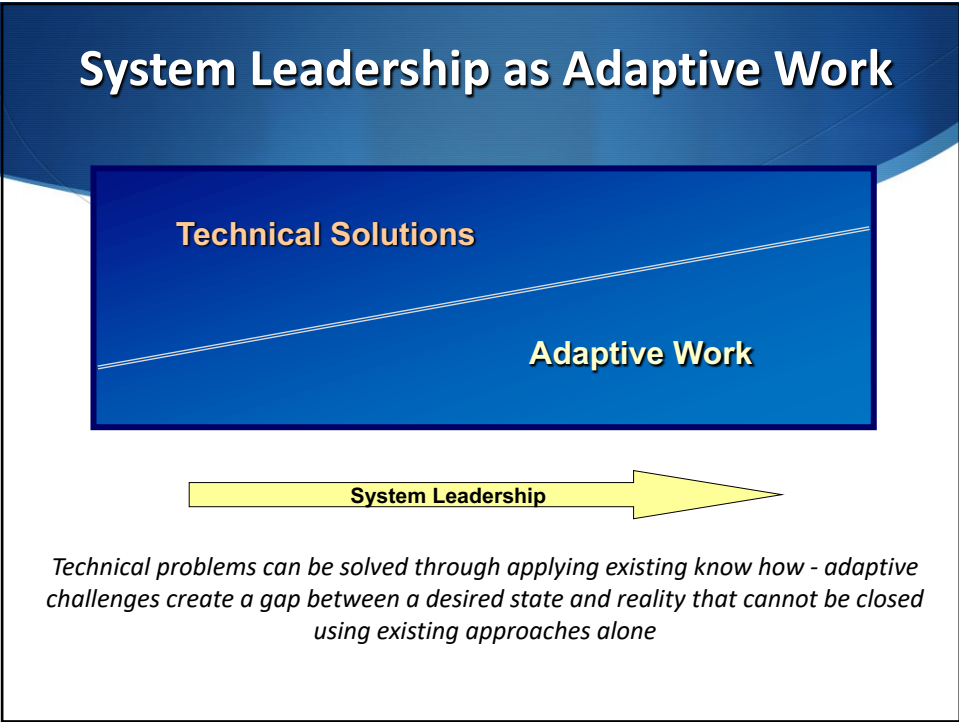
## Towards system wide sustainable reform



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## The Nature of Adaptive Work

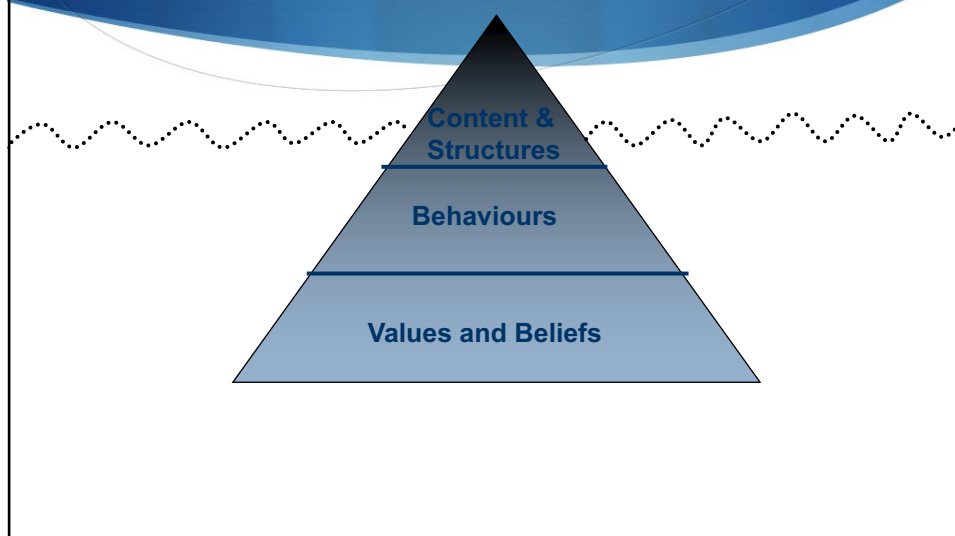
An adaptive challenge is a problem situation for which solutions lie outside current ways of operating.

- ◆ Adaptive challenges demand learning, because 'people are the problem' and progress requires new ways of thinking & operating.
- ◆ Mobilising people to meet adaptive challenges, then, is at the heart of leadership practice.
- ◆ Ultimately, adaptive work requires us to reflect on the moral purpose by which we seek to thrive and demands diagnostic enquiry into the realities we face that threaten the realisation of those purposes.

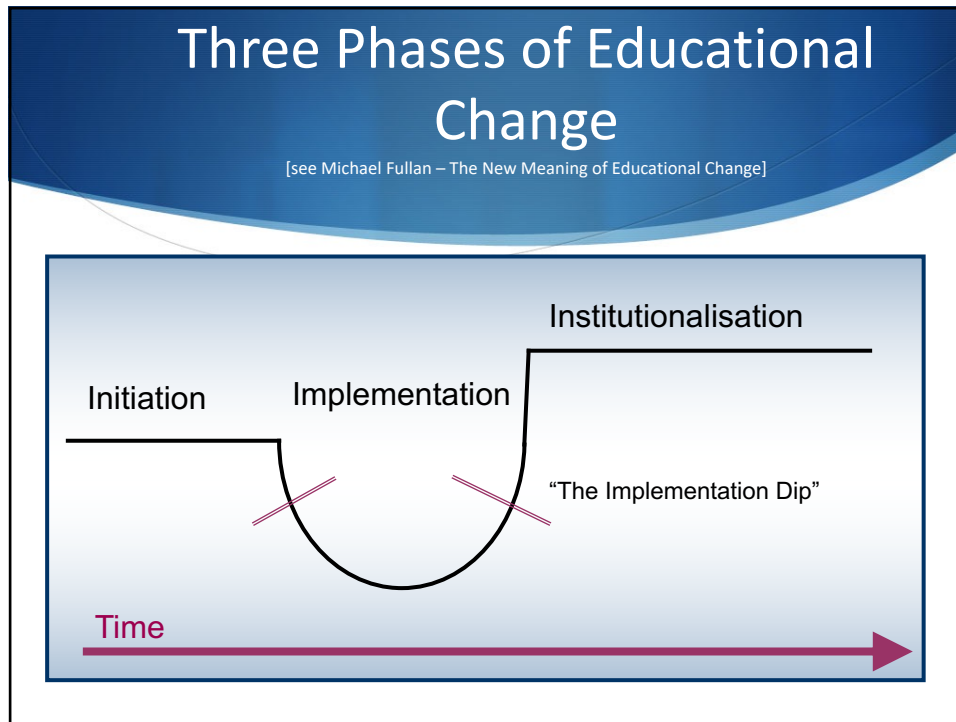
From Ron Heifetz – 'Adaptive Work' (in Bentley and Wilsdon 2003)

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## The 'Iceberg Model' of Educational Change



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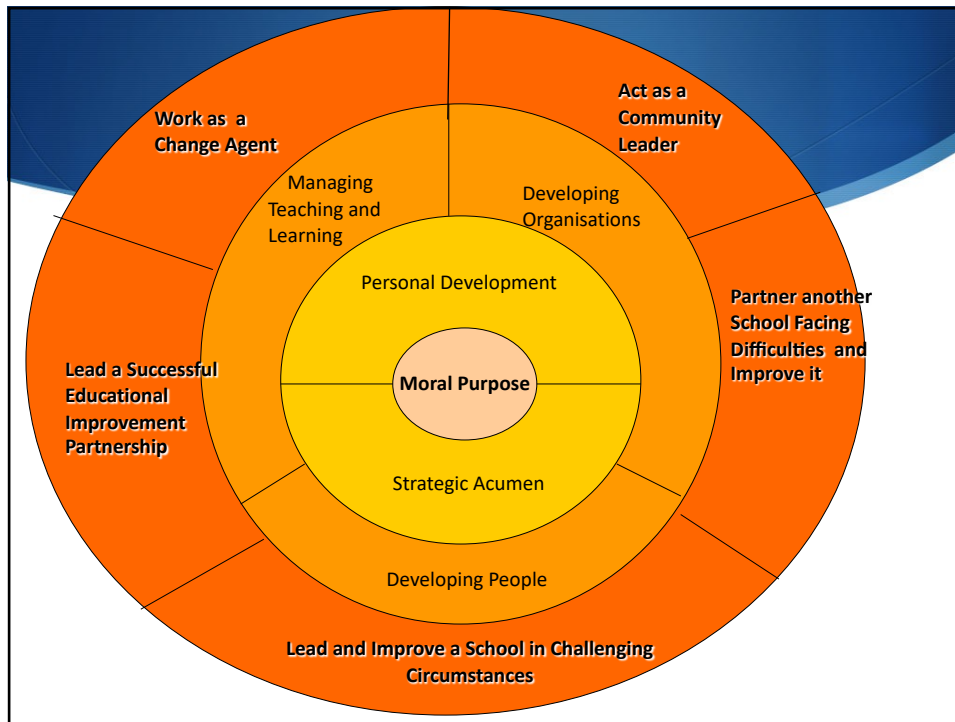
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## The Experience of Educational Change

- change takes place over time;
- change initially involves anxiety and uncertainty;
- technical and psychological support is crucial;
- the learning of new skills is incremental and developmental;
- successful change involves pressure and support within a collaborative setting;
- organisational conditions within and in relation to the school make it more or less likely that the school improvement will occur.

[Adapted from Michael Fullan – Change Processes paper, 1986]

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## System Leadership Roles

A range of emerging roles, including Heads who:

- develop and ***lead a successful educational improvement partnership*** across local communities to support welfare and potential
- choose to ***lead and improve a school in extremely challenging circumstances***
- ***partner another school facing difficulties and improve it***. This category includes Executive Heads and leaders of more informal improvement arrangements
- act as ***curriculum and pedagogic innovators*** who develop and then transfer best practice across the system
- Work as ***change agents*** or experts leaders as *National Leader of Education, School Improvement Partner, Consultant Leader*.

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## Some Questions for 'Adventure Leaders'

- How do you develop your own life script, what role does adventure play and how do you model that?
- How are you managing the shift from prescription to professionalism in your own life and school?
- How do you enable your teachers to embrace change and step out of their comfort zones?
- As you develop the 'adventure of learning' in your school, what would you see, hear and feel differently?
- How are you working with other Principals and schools to put the 'adventure of learning' at the heart of your communities?

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## Adventure in Leadership

*'Vision, values, determination and uncertainty are all to be found in the best leaders. Good management skills are essential, but can also leave one in the comfort zone. Good leadership should be a bit scary and is what we need most in our schools.'*

Sir Alan Steer

*"Never fully knowing how much further you can go; how much more can be achieved alongside the adults and young people you lead and share leadership with; and where any path may take you, but being open to all the possibilities along the journey.*

*Like a life well lived you should never feel all is achieved but rather there's still a place left to visit, another book to read and so much more to experience'.*

Vanessa Wiseman

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## Adventure in Leadership

*'The adventure of leadership is the challenge of releasing the potential of others.'*

*Sir Dexter Hutt*

*'Every interaction is an opportunity to share the vision and explore new ways of encouraging both staff and students to strive for bigger and better things. Leadership is all consuming and brings immense satisfaction as you observe your developing leaders, particularly young leaders, break new ground whilst keeping their focus firmly on putting students first. The adventure comes from challenging the process, from taking small risks and sometimes questioning received wisdom if you are convinced there is a better way to meet students needs. It's about not having all the answers at the beginning but pursuing the goal with 'confident uncertainty', sure that celebration will follow!'*

*Michael Wilkins*

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## The Nature of Adventure

*You cannot stay on the summit forever:  
you have to come down again....  
So why bother in the first place?  
Just this: What is above knows what is below,  
But what is below does not know what is above.  
One climbs, one sees, one descends, one sees no longer.  
But one has seen.  
There is an art of conducting oneself in the lower regions by the  
memory of what one has seen higher up.  
When one can no longer see, one can at least still know.*

*Rene Daumal*

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## Professor David Hopkins

David Hopkins is Professor Emeritus at the Institute of Education, University of London, where until recently, he held the inaugural HSBC iNet Chair in International Leadership. He is a Trustee of Outward Bound, holds visiting professorships at the Catholic University of Santiago, the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Universities of Edinburgh, Melbourne and Wales and consults internationally on school reform. Between 2002 and 2005 he served three Secretary of States as the Chief Adviser on School Standards at the Department for Education and Skills. Previously, he was Chair of the Leicester City Partnership Board and Dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Nottingham. Before that again he was a Tutor at the University of Cambridge Institute of Education, a Secondary School teacher and Outward Bound Instructor. David is also an International Mountain Guide who still climbs regularly in the Alps and Himalayas. His recent book **Every School a Great School** is published by The Open University Press.

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