

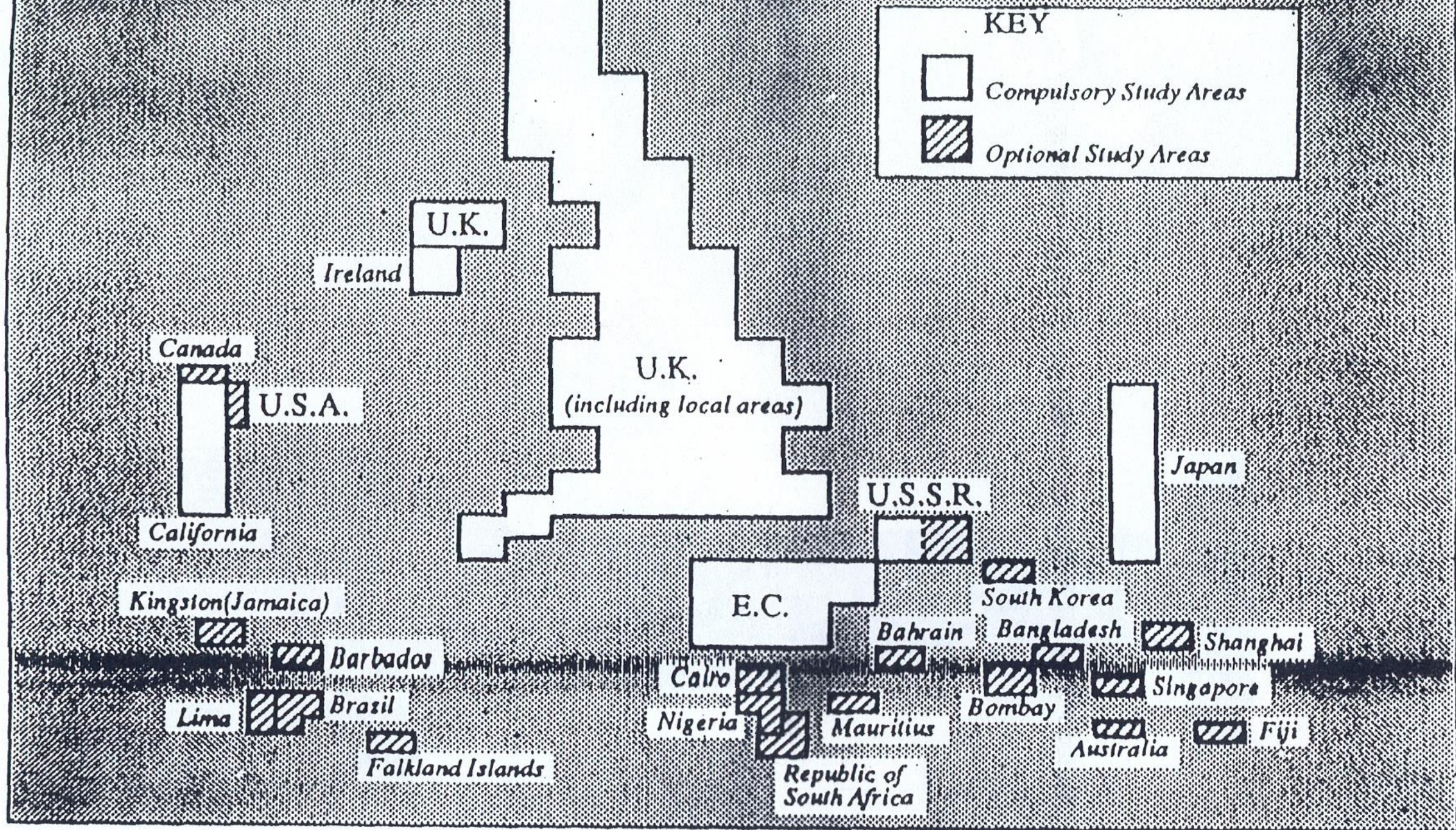
Educational Leaders in a World of Complexity and Covert Threats: Leading into Unknown Territory

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Three Central Questions

- **What kind of threats am I talking about?**
- **What are the implications for educational leadership from such threats?**
- **Do current models of Leadership need changing or adding to, to better cope with the challenges ahead?**
- **What is meant by 'Covert'?**
- **A covert map of the world....**



The Sir Leslie Fielding Map of the World

Four Covert Processes

- Exponential growth
- Positive feedback
- Believing the world consists more of 'tame' problems than systemic or 'wicked' ones
- Tipping points
- What potential threats result from these?

The major
threat from such
processes :

Overestimating..

- The gradual nature of change;
- What can be understood and controlled;
- The predictability of events;
- So how do you make God laugh?

Process 1: Exponential Growth

- A single bacterium is placed in a bottle at 11 am.
- It belongs to a species which divides into two every minute.
- An hour later, the bottle is full.
- At what time was the bottle half full?
- A: 11.59
- If you were a bacterium, at what time would you realise that you're running out of space? 11.55am, when the bottle is still 97% empty? Or later?
- Exponential growth is the process by which problems of population growth, resource consumption, and environmental damage all increase. How close to 12 o'clock are we?
- The urgent need for an enhanced steward leadership role explaining such processes...

Process 2: Positive Feedback

- **Positive Feedback:** the more feedback occurs, the more the situation accelerates
- Methane hydrates and Global warming
- Damaging effects on human relationships:
- *'... to come home after an exhausting and frustrating day, to know you've got another two or three hours' work in front of you... to switch on the television, and find a government minister telling you that you can't be trusted, and you're the cause of the country's educational and social problems...';*

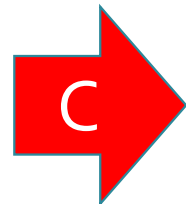
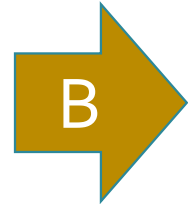
Process 3:
Assuming
most problems
are 'tame' (Rittel
and Webber, 1973)

- Tame problems are easily understood, and have agreed formulations; only one standardized 'silver bullet' solution is needed



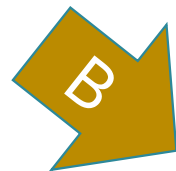
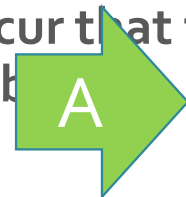
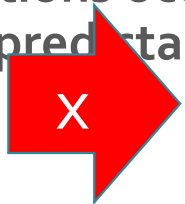
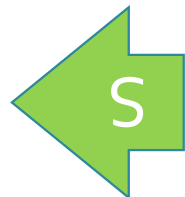
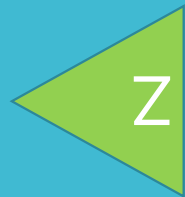
- But much of life - and education - consists of more complex processes...

The danger of viewing events as 'tame'



This is easy to understand, looks controllable...and is very easy to solve

But if events occur in systems, so many variables and interactions occur that things will likely happen unexpectedly and unpredictably



And now you have complex **systemic** causality

**Events in
complex
systems are
difficult to deal
with because...**

- **The world and its problems may then be more complex and much less manageable than might be assumed...**
- ***H.L. Mencken: To every complex problem there exists a solution which is neat, simple... and wrong.***

The threat of 'wicked' problems

(Rittel and Weber,
1973)

- **Are there any keen gardeners in the room?**
- **What are your least-favourite weeds?**
- **Weeds may be viewed a a real problem, but for other people they may simply be unimportant;**
- **'Wicked' problems are ones where there are problems about whether there is a problem;**
- **The teaching of reading in a school may be exclusively through the use of Phonics...**

Exponential growth, positive feedback, and wicked problems...

- ... can increase the speed of change;
- They can increase misunderstandings;
- They can make events less predictable and less controllable;
- And they can lead to the creation of 'tipping points'

Process 4:

Tipping points:

The straw that breaks a camel's back?

- *'....a tiny change which can dramatically alter a system, tipping it past a point of no return'* (Lenton, 2013):
- **From global methane hydrates to personal relationship issues ...**
- **The timing and severity of tipping points may be impossible to predict or control..**

Best solutions :

'Silver Bullets'
or 'Silver
Buckshot'?

- 'Silver bullet' solutions – single actions which can solve many tame problems;
- But they are unlikely to work for complex issues
 - If there is no definitive set of rules to follow (e.g. *building more trust in a school*);
 - If the situation is highly complex (e.g. *developing greater creativity*);
 - If some people see 'problems' where others don't (e.g. *insufficient art or music provision*)
- **'Silver buckshot' or 'messy' solutions** - a diversity of *ideas* from a diversity of stakeholders (including students)-

Challenges to traditional Leadership models

- **Transactional and Transformative models:** leadership normally seen as an individual role, and the talents of others may be under-utilised;
- **Distributed models:** many versions of this: (i) developing greater engagement, (ii) more democratic citizenship, or (iii) simply reducing leadership workload pressures?
- The need for a leadership role with additional attributes?

1: Stewardship and 2: Humility

- **Stewardship:** intra- *and* inter-generational equality: *'Meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs...'* (Brundtland report 1987);
- **Humility:** Is leadership more like throwing a stone or throwing a bird? (Plsek, 2009) ;
- But sometimes more than leading through others...

3. Building teams of leaders

- In a world of the unknown and the unexpected, the Leadership role may need to be more about...
- 'creating transformational environments rather than in creating the innovation itself.' (Marion and Uhl-Bien, 2001)
- Let's develop that a little...



Dealing with the unknown: The NASA Moon exercise

- You have crashed 200 miles from the mother ship; you need to get to it, and can't expect help.
- You need to prioritise 20 items to take with you; do this task on your own; then do the same in groups.
- NASA provides the 'correct' ordering and scoring. So now compare your individual with the group score.
- Team dynamics need to be critical: cooperative, trusting, rational, reasonable...
- Under such conditions, group scores are very often better than individual ones.
- In dealing with the unknown, then, this exercise suggests that using many voices is usually the best option.
- But perhaps not always...

Leading into
unknown
territory is
probably
about...

- Creating transformational environments for innovation *more often* than creating the innovation itself;
- The use of 'silver buckshot' leadership *more often* than 'silver bullet' leadership.
- And there may be no one best style of a Leadership Cocktail mix...Leadership is as much an art as a science.