

Inspiring leaders to
improve children's lives



National College
for School Leadership

Schools and academies

Performance beyond expectations

Executive Summary

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Resource

A joint initiative



Specialist Schools
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1 Introduction

“The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low and achieving our mark.”

Michelangelo

“Aim for the sky and you’ll reach the ceiling; aim for the ceiling and you’ll reach the floor.”

Bill Shankly, former manager of Liverpool Football Club 1913–81

In 2007, a transatlantic research team directed by Professor Andy Hargreaves of Boston College in the United States, and Professor Alma Harris of the London Institute of Education sought and secured funding from the National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services and the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust in England to undertake an unprecedented, firsthand research study of organisations that perform above expectations in business, sport, education and health. As far as the researchers could determine, no study on such a scale, using firsthand data in public and private sector organisations across a range of personnel beyond the CEO, had ever been conducted or published before.

The study addressed three key research questions:

- What characteristics make organisations of different types successful and sustainable, far beyond expectations?
- How does sustainability of performance beyond expectations in leadership and change manifest itself in education compared with other sectors?
- What are the implications for schools and school leaders?

The research is based on detailed case studies of 18 organisations, in multiple sectors, across 5 countries and 3 continents. We recorded and transcribed more than 220 interviews, and after extensive individual case and cross-case analysis wrote case study reports of between 8,000 and 16,000 words each to be approved by the participating organisations according to the ethical protocols of the two universities¹. Except in one geographically remote instance, at least two of the nine research team members conducted each of the case studies to strengthen their reliability and validity.

Each case was eventually included only because of clear evidence that it met one or more of three clear performance criteria, demonstrating:

- sequential performance beyond expectations over time through revival or awakening after previous poor performance, or attainment of high success following unheralded early beginnings
- comparative performance beyond expectations in relation to high levels of achievement compared with peers
- contextual performance beyond expectations as evidenced in strong records of success despite various indicators of relatively weak investment, limited resource capacity or very challenging circumstances

Finally, all included case studies had to meet standards of organisational responsibility or ethical performance beyond expectations in their treatment of workers, clients and the community – not because these ethical criteria are consistently related to high performance, but because the project has no interest in investigating and thereby elevating organisations that achieve high levels of measured performance by ethically questionable means, such as investment from anonymous and non-transparent ownership in sport, disregard for environmental responsibility in business, or manipulation of achievement data in education. This study is about understanding performance beyond expectations, not uncritically celebrating it. Moreover, just because the organisations in this study have performed above expectations at one point or for some time does not mean or guarantee that they will perform above expectations forever.

2 Cases of performance beyond expectations

A total of 18 organisations were studied and analysed by the research team over a two-year period (see the Appendix for a summary of all case studies). It was easiest to access the nine educational sites – all in England – because schools and local authorities are fairly accustomed to being researched, familiar with the sponsors, and cognisant of the professional and published work of the research directors. This sample comprises two local authorities (Tower Hamlets and Walsall), a partnership involving one school improving with the support of another (Central Technology College in Gloucester), two secondary schools (Grange Secondary in Oldham and John Cabot Academy in Bristol), three primary schools (Kanes Hill in Southampton and Limeside and Mills Hill in Oldham) and a multi-site special education centre (West Oaks North East Specialist Inclusive Learning Centre).

Nine non-educational sites completed the case portfolio for this research project – five in business; four in sport. In business, the case studies comprised leading retailer Marks & Spencer (M&S), international auto manufacturer Fiat Auto, the internet shopping site Shoebuy.com, US-based craft (real ale) brewery Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, and the co-operatively run chemical company Scott Bader. In sport, the four cases consist of international cricketing leader Cricket Australia, championship football (soccer) club Burnley Football Club, Hull Kingston Rovers Rugby Football Club, and Kilkenny Hurling (or Kilkenny Cats), the most successful hurling team in Ireland.

3 The F15 factors of leadership

This study has revealed important commonalities for performing beyond expectations across different sites and sectors. While there is no blueprint for performance beyond expectations, there are powerful combinations of factors and core sets of leadership, change and improvement principles that make performance beyond expectations much more likely and achievable. Consequently, the study has generated a data-derived, heuristic framework of 15 factors (F15) for performance beyond expectations. The alphabetical orientation is a deliberate device to present the findings of the research in a memorable and accessible way, though the factors themselves (first known by other names) have emerged from many stages of data analysis within and across the project case studies. The F15 framework should be regarded not as a collection of independent variables but as a set of interrelated principles that are illuminative rather than prescriptive or predictive.

The F15 factors represent a kind of journey in which performance beyond expectations connects a firmly grounded point of origin to a clear and compelling destination, locates the pathways for proceeding, and charts the progress that is made along them, establishes drive and direction, and both develops and co-ordinates everyone's capacities to undertake and complete that challenging journey over time.

Destinations and departures

First, leadership in organisations that exceed expectations requires a definable destination or dream to reach for, an inspiring connection between the desired future and a more distant yet treasured past, a sense of fear that prompts movement to a better place, and a fight or struggle against a formidable and resisting challenge. This is evident in:

- **F1: the fantastic dream** – these organisations aspire to and articulate an improbable, collectively held fantasy or dream that is bolder and more challenging than a plan or even a vision.
- **F2: the fear** – these organisations often face failure, ridicule, humiliation and even extinction in a way that galvanises a commitment to change.
- **F3: the fight** – the impossible dream and improbable challenge produce a response of fight to overcome or avoid obstacles instead of flight to avoid them.
- **F4: fundamental futures** – these organisations create an inspiring future by connecting with the fundamental meaning of a classic and honourable past. They do this through the legacies of long-serving leaders who emerge from within the organisation and through the inspiring symbolic narratives of leaders that evoke collective memories of the best of what they have been before.

Progress and pathways

Second, leadership in organisations that exceed expectations establish pathways for and mark progress on the improvement journey. They do this by creating foundations for departure through viable business models and constructive relationships of developing trust, inner reserves of fortitude and resilience when they encounter obstacles and opposition has to be confronted, a counter-intuitive readiness to take unbeaten paths and unexpected directions when necessary, adoption of fair, just-in-time measures for tracking and nudging along progress, and an orientation to sustainable growth rates that do not reach beyond capacity, use resources imprudently, lose connection with core purposes or burn people out. This is evident in:

- **F5: firm foundations** – these organisations' seemingly sudden and spectacular impact of high-profile leadership and meteoric success is often underpinned by years of foundation building by others in halting previous decline, developing better business models, building new relationships and creating new infrastructures of financial, physical and human resources.

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- **F6: fortitude** – these organisations depend on leaders who have inner reserves of strength and resilience that enable them to bounce back from adversity, undertake dangerous tasks or dirty work before anyone else is ready to do it, and persevere despite opposition and setbacks.
 - **F7: counter flow** – these organisations are prepared to run against the mainstream, and to move ahead not by going with the flow but against or around it.
 - **F8: fast and fair tracking** – these organisations use indicators and targets of progress and performance that are personally meaningful, publicly shared and demonstrably fair measures of what leaders and followers are trying to achieve.
 - **F9: feasible growth** – these organisations pay prudent attention to sustainable growth rates that do not compromise the future by improving too quickly in ways that produce only false recoveries by exhausting resources, incurring excessive debt, attracting star performers with only transient loyalties, or by burning people out.

Culture and collaboration

Third, leadership in performance beyond expectations keeps people together through active trust among a team whose members work effectively together; through vibrant teams of strong people prepared to exercise distributed leadership in interchangeable roles and positions; through community development of staff, recruits, and customers or supporters who help the organisation continue to perform; and through pragmatic rather than ideological combinations of competition and collaboration in the service of a greater good that extends beyond but not at the expense of individual survival and success. This requires:

- **F10: high fidelity** – these organisations have a deep faith in and faithfulness to their colleagues and the people they serve, and a higher purpose greater than any one of them.
- **F11: fraternity** – these organisations build and sustain four kinds of community: communities of recruitment, communities of service to customers or clients, communities of professional practice within the current organisation, and communities of support that surround them.
- **F12: flair, flow and flexibility** – these organisations engage a talented team in which risk and creativity are valued and members participate and play in interchangeable roles and positions.
- **F13: fallibility** – these organisations are confident but not overconfident; they make and acknowledge mistakes and expect others to make mistakes also. They know they are not infallible.
- **F14: friendly rivalry** – these organisations combine competition with collaboration (what we call collaborative edge), recognising that their success partly rests on the success of others, and they have a sense of social justice in providing service to less fortunate neighbours.

Drive and direction

Fourth, leadership in performance beyond expectations requires drive and direction through the fusion of many kinds of leadership – inspiring, courageous, distributed and sustainable among others – leadership that pushes people forward, raises them up and brings them together in pursuit of a common and inspiring purpose that is greater than any one of them. This is expressed as:

- **F15: fusion leadership** – these organisations invest in leadership and followership that raise and rally the performance of the organisation by lifting up its members morally, emotionally and spiritually, through a combination and progression of leadership styles and strategies.

4 The F15 factors at work

These F15 factors combine within the practice of those leaders who through their leadership help their organisations perform above expectations. While some leadership practices in the performance beyond expectations could be categorised, for example, as transformational, charismatic, distributed or sustainable, these labels did not entirely or accurately represent or capture the form, nature and type of leadership within organisations that perform beyond expectations. Rather, the study found that organisations that perform beyond expectations exhibit 'leadership fusion'².

Leadership fusion is characterised by an amalgam of personality, acumen, judgement, risk-taking, resilience, purpose, passion and perseverance. Leaders who perform beyond expectations have all of these characteristics but also know how to acknowledge, embed and evolve these qualities in others throughout the organisation and over time. Leadership of performance beyond expectations, therefore, is both an individual and an organisational quality. It fuses different leadership styles and qualities as leaders combine their individual influence with their ability to mobilise energy among those around them. This is the leadership of predecessors and successors, of peers and even rivals, stretching over time and space for a widely distributed and long-term leadership effect, more than the leadership acts or competencies of particular individuals within shorter timeframes. It is this release of energy and pursuit of stability and sustainability that allows the organisation to reach exceptional performance and to succeed, often despite many doubters and against considerable odds.

What binds these leadership elements together and gives them coherence is the purpose and journey that leaders pursue in lifting the performance of their organisations to achieve their desired goals.

Destinations and departures

Leaders who perform beyond expectations have an absolute determination to succeed whatever the odds, but not simply to be top, best, world class or number 1. Rather, they have an inspiring and definable destination to reach for – a compelling dream rather than a core purpose or vision, still less a numerical indicator of superiority. Burnley Football Club's motto in 2008-09 was 'dare to dream', which characterised and defined their improbable route to the premiership. In Tower Hamlets, the dream was that poverty would not prevent students from achieving age-related standards at school. Educators at Limeside Primary School just wanted to hear the sound of children laughing again. At Fiat, the dream was to be one of the largest and most successful automobile manufacturers in the world and to sell small, energy-efficient cars to American consumers. In John Cabot Academy, the head had a dream to regenerate the local area through a partnership with his school and surrounding schools working together. (He is now the executive head of three schools, which jointly raise performance for young people and increase the aspirations of the community.)

In achieving their dreams, leaders who perform beyond expectations thrive on formidable and seemingly insurmountable challenges, including the challenge of impending failure. Australia's loss of the Ashes to England in 2005 galvanised the entire nation and its cricketing authority, Cricket Australia, to 'get back' and not only defeat England, but dramatically raise national participation levels in cricket so it became Australia's number 1 sport. After over 20 years of steady growth, Scott Bader faced commercial oblivion and financial meltdown, but its new CEO accepted the job precisely because the company was at the most vulnerable moment in its history. Stuart Rose took on the leadership of M&S during one of its stormiest periods partly because he "thrives on a good crisis". After inner struggle and disappointment about the state his school had reached in the mid-1990s, Graeme Hollinshead at Grange Secondary decided to get back in and "sort it out". Christine Gilbert left her job in a leafy suburb to move to Tower Hamlets – then the worst-performing local authority in England – to become its director of education. Leaders who perform beyond expectations deliberately seek out acute challenges and exceptional crises. They move towards the danger.

For leaders who perform beyond expectations, crises are catalysts for change. At Grange School, the catalyst was a barely satisfactory inspection report. At Hull Kingston Rovers and Burnley Football Club, the turnaround was prompted by the imminent threat of oblivion or extinction. At Central School, the threat of closure led the school to secure external support and work in a different way. At Scott Bader, a financial crisis meant that core values had to be revisited and redefined in order to save the company.

Capitalism, the economist Joseph Schumpeter said, is a force of ‘creative destruction’³. So, amid all the innovation, drive, passion and enthusiasm, sustainable performance beyond expectations also requires forces of cohesion and stability to hold everything together. ‘Without stones,’ Marco Polo said, ‘there is no arch’. Our research indicates that organisations that perform above expectations value leadership stability. This kind of leadership is able to connect the inspiring future of the organisation to the collective memory of its past.

Symbolically, leaders of organisations that perform above expectations are skilled storytellers. They provide powerful narratives about the unlikely and humble origins of their companies – of M&S once being in a penny arcade, of Dogfish Head Craft Brewery having to canoe its products across the state line, of Shoebuy.com being ridiculed for believing that shoes would sell on the internet, and of Burnley Football Club being one of the most poorly resourced teams in the sport. They also know how to repress recent memories of failure by connecting the organisation’s inspiring future to the very best of its past – the tiny Fiat 500 in which today’s middle-aged male buyer once remembers his first romance; the classy brand of football that Burnley Football Club used to represent in the 1960s; the pride in wearing the shirt at Kilkenny Hurling; or the iconic figure of Australia’s cricketing legend, Don Bradman, about whom even Nelson Mandela enquired when the latter was first released from prison.

Organisations that perform above expectations also often have high leadership stability that creates continuity in the midst of crisis and change. Australia’s cricket captaincy is far more stable than England’s. Australia supports its known leaders when they do badly until they do well, whereas England has exchanged its leaders whenever results proved disappointing. Limeside, Kanes Hill and Grange schools were all led to dramatically improved performance by headteachers who had previously been the deputy. Fiat promoted many of its senior team of 23 from within other parts of the company. Outsiders can usefully inject higher expectations and new ideas, but the inclusion of trusted insiders connects the organisation to its collective memory, which can be reignited in an inspiring way by leaders with a gift for myth and narrative.

Progress and pathways

Leaders who perform beyond expectations have a profound belief in their ability to perform at the highest level and achieve their dream, although they do not always possess this straightaway. They are ambitious for their organisation and demand stretching goals, which they expect to be reached. They are resolute in their determination to succeed and set high expectations for themselves and those who work with them. Yet the goals that are set are not about delivering targets imposed from elsewhere but about developing their own demanding targets, on criteria that most people regard as relevant and reasonable, in relationships where demands are made of people who are known and trusted, and often with their active collaboration.

In Fiat and Tower Hamlets Council, goals are established deliberately to be just out of reach. The central idea is that exceptional performance needs to take people out of their comfort zone and extend their capability. Leaders who perform beyond expectations bring a clear focus together with high motivation, disciplined innovation and a clear strategy in order to achieve their objectives. They understand that achieving exceptional performance is a combination of the mastery of skills and abilities, a focus on results and on monitoring authentic progress towards them, and an absolute passion and conviction to achieve desired outcomes together.

All the schools in our study relentlessly used assessment to track individual and collective progress, and to produce feedback to support student learning. The sports teams in our study also used player performance data in this way – to engage players in conversations about improving their performance rather than using data to browbeat them into improving. At Tower Hamlets and Cricket Australia, targets are shared among and developed by the community together. In Walsall, transparency of school-by-school performance data pulled schools out of their mutual isolation. At Shoebuy.com, real-time tracking data of consumer behaviour on the shopping site actually encourages staff to innovate and take risks because mistakes can be corrected before they turn into disasters.

In times of crisis, leaders who perform beyond expectations often do the exact opposite of what might be expected or anticipated. They are unconventional and counter-intuitive thinkers who frequently operate in extremely adverse and volatile conditions.

They have a remarkable ability to size up carefully the situation before taking bold steps to improve matters. They tend to be relentlessly optimistic even in the face of evidence that demonstrates the extent of the challenge or the unlikelihood of success. Like Burnley's operational director, Brendan Flood, they know how to 'go the other way' in a critical meeting, or like Cricket Australia's former CEO, Malcolm Speed, they are ready to 'bowl uphill into the wind' as players and as leaders when they are faced with resistance.

Acting counter-intuitively against precedent, scepticism and resistance requires courage, fortitude and great reserves of self-belief. Leaders who perform beyond expectations have thick skins. They have setbacks and disappointments but know how to get over them. The collapse of the dotcom boom was potentially the darkest moment for Shoebuy.com, but because the company had grown in a cautious way and counter-intuitively refused venture capital, compared with other companies, which had overstretched themselves, it was able to survive. Graeme Hollinshead and Colin Bell at Grange Secondary School personally rounded up truants from the local park to begin to turn around the attendance record and then they redirected the curriculum to fit the visual arts in which the school's mainly Bangladeshi students were strong. As one of his first acts, Fiat's new CEO, Sergio Marchionne, entered the factory workers' toilets, pronouncing them to be an unacceptable disgrace. Kanes Hill's headteacher appealed to her staff to help her when she realised she could no longer drive everything on her own. The head of Mills Hill Primary actually instituted an external review to draw attention to the school's loss of momentum.

Leaders who perform beyond expectations have a strong sense of direction for their organisation, which they continually share and communicate. There is a constant drumbeat or core message that these leaders reiterate. In M&S, the message is 'quality, product and price'. In Kanes Hill, it is that 'every child deserves to succeed', and at Fiat Auto, it is that 'all waste is intolerable'. This relentless and non-negotiable focus allows them to navigate through the most difficult times when they are assailed by crises and demands.

The case studies show that leaders carefully select the opportunities for their organisations that secure the best result, and they refuse many opportunities that may distract them from those purposes. At M&S, Stuart Rose expanded the food franchise Simply Food and reduced the retailing provision at a time when the company was in trouble, because this created the revenue to reconfigure the retailing side of the business. In Walsall, the decision to outsource local authority services to a private provider ironically gave schools better support and greater autonomy, which lifted their performance. Expansion and innovation are never pursued at the cost of sustainable growth, however.

None of our organisations that perform beyond expectations is a nine-day wonder. All emphasise the importance of sustainable growth. Dogfish Head Craft Brewery scrapped around for suitable start-up brewing equipment rather than investing heavily in flashy copper containers, which would, as it had with some of its competitors, put it in unsustainable debt. Chairman Barry Kilby of Burnley Football club would not "bet the ranch" on ascending into the premiership or even on staying there at the risk of the club becoming overly indebted, then sinking into relative oblivion as many of its peers and forebears have done. Shoebuy.com resisted venture capital investment when it started up so it could retain control over its own purposes and growth rates. And all the schools and local authorities in this study raised achievement scores not by fabricating quick lifts by teaching to the test or working only on borderline cases, but by authentically transforming teaching and learning and the depth of student engagement.

The existence of sustainable growth is also evident in the leadership successions that characterise many of the organisations in this study. Apparently charismatic leaders were often preceded by quietly effective but unsung predecessors who established new business models, cleaned up the facilities or had begun to build new relationships and a bit of self-belief. Cricket Australia's inspirational CEO, James Sutherland, was preceded by the battling figure of Malcolm Speed, who created a new media-driven business model, which settled player unrest. Burnley Football Club's infectiously enthusiastic manager Owen Coyle followed on from the more defensively minded but solid management style of Steven Cotterill. Tower Hamlets's celebrated former leader, Christine Gilbert, is the first to acknowledge the quietly effective work of her predecessor, Anne Sofer, in establishing new relationships within the local authority. The leap in results at Central Technology College coincided with the commencement of the Ninestiles Consortium, but performance had already been improving for two years before that. Charismatic leadership is often only able to exert its effect by standing on the shoulders of unsung heroes who went before.

Culture and collaboration

Leaders who perform beyond expectations generate fierce loyalty through the demonstration of their ability to work hard and long to achieve what is wanted and to engage others in the quest. This loyalty allows them to make quick and difficult decisions without losing support. They actively build relationships and engender strong trust among colleagues in order to take high risks. They know their people and do not impose targets from afar.

Leaders who perform beyond expectations build powerful teams that connect vertical and lateral leadership to produce much better results. The team knows exactly what it has to accomplish and is motivated by high degrees of internal collaboration. Cricket teams spend many hours off the field in the pavilion together, where a long-standing captain with known presence is an invaluable asset. Burnley Football Club expects the players in its sparse squad to be able and willing to play in many different roles and positions. Shoebuy.com and Dogfish Head Craft Brewery pay great attention to the communities who work for them and not just the customers who buy from them. M&S brought all its employees into one national arena to re-vision the organisation at a single event. Scott Bader continues to draw on its co-operative foundation and legacy. The schools in our study have strong records in growing leaders from within so that teamwork brings tangible rewards as well as symbolic ones.

Leaders who perform beyond expectations also know how to collaborate with competitors and rivals. In Fiat, each section head is also a member of another team, which requires constant collaboration even with immediate rivals. Cricket Australia invests heavily in developing communities and fostering political stability in one of its major competitors, India, because almost 50 per cent of its income comes from the media revenue in that country. Dogfish Head Craft Brewery has launched a new ale in collaboration with a major competitor so they can promote their shared vision of micro-brewing together. Many of the schools in our study engaged in on-field friendly rivalry with their peers to push each others' performance higher, but not in win-lose competitions where some schools would prosper at the expense of others. Leaders who perform beyond expectations practise friendly rivalry, promote co-opetition and possess a collaborative edge⁴.

Last, leaders of organisations that perform beyond expectations understand that innovation will necessarily entail mistakes. They accept and also make honest mistakes. Many of the attempts by the staff of Dogfish Head Craft Brewery to use exotic woods for brewing barrels or to insert odd ingredients like juniper berries into new beers do not initially succeed. Experimentation in website design by many of Shoebuy.com's staff can lead to error, but it also fuels innovation and success – and this climate of innovation and risk-taking is one of the key factors behind the company's very high staff retention rates (one of the strongest in the industry). The sports teams in this study do not drop players, coaches or captains if they make one calamitous error, and in Tower Hamlets and Walsall, schools are not threatened when they fall into failure but are lifted up again with the support of their peers.

Drive and direction

Leaders who perform beyond expectations are often highly charismatic as illustrated in many of the case studies. Sergio Marchionne at Fiat Auto, Stuart Rose at M&S, New England entrepreneur of the year Scott Savitz at Shoebuy.com, Sally Stanton at Kanes Hill Primary School, Christine Gilbert and Kevan Collins in Tower Hamlets, and former male model, Sam Calagione, at Dogfish Head Craft Brewery, are all powerful personalities who are quietly determined to succeed. At the same time, like Graham Hollinshead at Grange Secondary School, they repeatedly emphasise and express the virtues of humility and of doing nothing special. Their leadership is characterised by much more than personal charm or powerful persuasion. It is carefully yet authentically crafted to have the maximum impact on individual and organisational performance by releasing and mobilising the power and energy of the many.

While some might see this study as advocating a return to charismatic leadership, leadership of performance beyond expectations is much more than simply being a magnetic personality. It is about having the ability to maximise leadership potential at all levels in the organisation through the power of example, persuasion, personality and passion. Leaders who perform beyond expectations fuse passion and purpose, and it is this combination that drives and inspires others to perform at the highest levels. Leaders who perform beyond expectations, like those at Burnley Football Club, often exude enthusiasm, but this is enthusiasm for the accomplishments of others, not for their own individual success.

Daft and Lengel point to the dangers of splitting leadership and performance into discrete and unconnected elements⁵. They advocate an alternative they call 'leadership fusion' – the coming together of different inner qualities and capabilities within the organisation or individual within a single story or narrative of leadership. Such fusion, they claim, 'unlocks powerful forces' that are to be found in the 'yearning for meaningful work', in the 'desire to contribute', in 'dreams', 'creative potential' and 'courage'⁶. Leadership fusion, they say, is about 'joining, coming together, creative connection and partnerships'⁷.

Leadership beyond expectations is a combination of charismatic and diffuse leadership, autocratic and shared leadership, and top-down and distributed leadership – defying the opposites and extremes that often define the field. It was the strongest leaders most comfortable in their own skins who were eventually most able to let go of power, thus allowing for the decisions of others. They were more likely to distribute than merely to delegate and still less likely to micromanage others' every action so as to deliver someone else's agenda.

Leadership beyond expectations is a drama narrated across time and space rather than a skill set for all seasons. Leaders and leadership are not always consistently the same. Leadership approaches can vary. The leadership team at Grange Secondary School began the improvement process through its own courageous example, then through personally inspiring others, and finally through distributing leadership to such an extent that the absence of the head from the building was scarcely noticed. Cricket Australia's gutsy, can-do Malcolm Speed was followed by inspirational and inclusive James Sutherland. Shoebuy.com began inventively and imaginatively but grew steadily and sustainably, yet still with innovation always in mind. Leadership beyond expectations cannot be timelessly categorised in a single style, described by one adjective, or confined to one set of competencies. The essence of leadership beyond expectations, rather, is its capacity to shift and flex over time and space as the organisation evolves and the circumstances require. And it is to be found in the capacity to fuse many leadership styles and components together into an integrated, self-assured, personal and collective whole, which can lift people up, bring them together and connect them to something greater than themselves to serve a common good.

The distinctive findings of this study and their implications for school leaders present a number of striking contrasts with common fallacies about and strategies concerning educational change. These contrasts carry significant implications for educational leaders at all levels and their management of improvement and change.

5 Five fallacies of leadership and change

1. The fallacy of speed: effective turnarounds can and should be fast

In business, turnaround strategies are typically very fast as profitability and viability depend on their success, though most are not successful⁸. Getting the right people to commit to improving results in an organisation is not so easy in the public sector where institutional norms include union contracts, seniority rules, and tendencies to seek solutions that will work with existing staff. At the same time, we have seen that businesses that exceed expectations over time, including those that never require turnaround, largely enjoy high rates of staff retention. They concentrate on long-term improvement as well as making the immediate changes that build confidence and enable them to survive. The temptation to change everyone and everything may be one reason why most turnaround efforts in businesses fail. Turnarounds are typically much slower in sport than in business and take at least three years⁹.

2. The fallacy of replacement: effective turnarounds require wholesale staff changes

Wholesale replacement of leadership, staff and entire organisations is a common turnaround preference within sport and business, and increasingly in education. In sport, although a change of managers can produce quick and temporary lifts as motivation is revived, players try to impress their new boss, and those who were out of favour have the opportunity of a fresh start, these effects only last a few games before performance sinks again¹⁰. False recoveries following leadership regime change or the hiring of star designers are equally common in business¹¹. All our sports cases were characterised by well-managed leadership succession and high leadership stability in the context of deeper and more lasting change efforts. Changing the manager as soon as things go badly may follow common professional sports practices, but not the best of those practices. While schools and local authorities often benefitted from injections of external expertise, several leaders had previously arrived as deputies and many members of leadership teams were long-standing members of their schools or authorities.

These are not arguments for managerial and leadership regimes to endure as long as possible even when the rules of work and the world have changed, when managers have become ineffective, when they have 'lost the dressing room' or when leaders become very ill. The challenge is to find the right leaders for the right problems at the right time and to stick with the choice when it begins to show evidence of success, which, like the Australian cricket captaincy, may not always be immediately evident in early results. Many of our organisations that perform beyond expectations grew many (though not all) of their leaders from within and relied on the power of stable leadership within volatile circumstances.

3. The fallacy of numbers: tough targets and bottom lines matter most

The data of victories and defeats, and profits and losses are the unarguable evidence of success and survival in sport and business. They are compelling and meaningful and cannot be manipulated – at least not for long, as the collapse of Enron indicated. However, the best business and sporting organisations collect data on much more than this bottom line as a foundation for bottom-line and then high-watermark success.

Businesses that perform beyond expectations collect evidence on balanced scorecards and include measures of corporate social responsibility, customer satisfaction, internet stickiness and staff retention to name just a few. Sporting organisations that perform beyond expectations collect data on player performance, participation rates, financial stability, supporter preferences and community needs that are connected to their core purposes. Turning the biggest profit, maximising shareholder value and gaining the most wins possible are not valued at any price if they compromise financial sustainability, control of core purposes, reputation or corporate social responsibility. Moreover, performance measures and targets are discussed and processed within a valued and respectful relationship of personal consideration, knowledge and even inspiration between leaders and the led – even when the targets are imposed. Performing beyond expectations may mean knowing your numbers, but not without knowing your people.

Patterns of performance measurement in state education diverge disconcertingly from those in business organisations that perform beyond expectations. Changing the leader, or only changing the leader, moving out all the staff, or closing down the school to replace it with another is not always the answer. Measurement, in the form of tested achievement, is not always seen as valid or meaningful or reflective of the kinds of learning that educators know are important for life-long success in today's world. Pushing for the very highest test scores can often distract attention from other valued goals and outcomes. Standardised test scores do not provide teachers with real-time data that can help them to help their pupils. The introduction of detailed systems of pupil progress management into many of our educational sites helps data serve teachers and pupils in real time when it follows a curriculum that is fitted to and engages all the learners. These educational sites do not constantly drive pupils on to pass the next test or examination within a curriculum that is less suited to them.

4. The fallacy of standardisation: pacing and prescription yield better results

England has been emerging from years of standardisation and prescription in educational reform. Standardised performances and measures of it have also characterised much business practice as judgement, and discretion has increasingly been taken away from frontline office and service employees in banking, airline services and other organisations¹². But organisations in business and sport that surpass the average and perform beyond expectations are far from standardised. Flexibility, creativity, innovation, risk and discretionary judgement are their hallmarks, provided this fits the dream or mission, does not undermine the team and still secures results. People are not locked into scripted roles but can and do play in multiple roles and positions. This happens in schools, too, when teachers, teaching assistants and learning mentors get involved together in common tasks that serve a greater good. They roll their sleeves up and go the extra mile even if this falls outside their usual jurisdiction.

As Michael Barber once put it, standardisation and prescription are simply what gets you from being awful to adequate rather than good to great¹³. Performance beyond expectations embraces innovation, creativity, flexibility and risk – the essence of 21st-century knowledge economy aspirations¹⁴.

5. The fallacy of competition: market competition is the best way to raise standards

Public and private sectors have historically taken different approaches to competition. This is changing. The principles of new public management have introduced many private sector practices into the management of public organisations – standards, performance targets, quality control, data-driven decision-making, market competition, outsourcing of services, customer satisfaction, and so forth.

The arguments for increased competition in education based on transparent indicators of performance are that such competition is consistent with business practice. Opponents of market-based strategies of inter-school competition point to increasing inequities between wealthier choosers and poorer non-choosers and lack of any consistent impact on narrowing achievement gaps.

In business and sport, organisations that perform beyond expectations collaborate as well as compete. They embrace co-opetition. They collaborate with competitors out of moral commitment as well as strategic opportunity. They have collaborative edge¹⁵. Cricket Australia's investment in India, Burnley Football Club's collaboration in community development with its local arch-rival Blackburn Rovers, and Dogfish Head Craft Brewery's joint launch of a new alternative ale all demonstrate how collaboration and competition can work effectively together. This has a positively impact on performance and also increases social value.

In education, England has been a world leader in promoting schools working with schools and strong schools helping weaker partners in order to raise achievement – as, for instance, in the Raising Achievement, Transforming Learning project of the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust, and the National Leaders of Education programme, instituted by the National College¹⁶. The schools of Tower Hamlets and Walsall also collaborate with an added twist of friendly rivalry in order to promote the greater good of their communities. Schools and their leaders have more to gain by working together with an edge of friendly rivalry rather than prospering at the expense of their neighbours. It is vital that this collaborative ethic, with its decisive impact on pupil achievement, persists in the coming years even when resources become more scarce.

6 Conclusion

Leaders who perform beyond expectations have a proper sense of urgency but they do not deplete their own and others' resources and energy by expanding and changing too fast or in too many directions. Leaders who perform beyond expectations make intelligent and informed use of evidence and statistics but they are never dazzled or driven by data. Leaders who perform beyond expectations know how to run against the grain and 'bowl uphill into the wind'. In the end, leaders who perform beyond expectations fit the characterisation made by Leonardo Da Vinci – that 'people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things'.

Yet, performing beyond expectations depends not on one leader, in one moment, with one style. Leaders who perform beyond expectations exhibit leadership fusion of many skills, styles and people. Nicolo Machievelli told us, 'The first method for estimating the intelligence of a ruler is to look at the men he has around him'. Maria Montessori also reminded us that a good leader is like a good teacher. The greatest sign of success for a teacher, she said, is to be able to say 'the children are now working as if I did not exist'. This is what leadership beyond expectations ultimately means.

Appendix: The cases and their criteria of performance beyond expectations

Education

1. Tower Hamlets is a London borough that serves a predominantly Bangladeshi population experiencing high rates of deprivation. It was positioned 149th out of 149 local education authorities in 1997 but is now ranked at or above the mean of all local authorities on all key indicators of student achievement.
2. Walsall Council, in the West Midlands, handed over the responsibility for improving education to the private contractor Serco after a 1999 Ofsted inspection judged 12 of the local education authority's functions to be inadequate. Following a decade of previous underperformance, Serco achieved a substantial rate of initial improvement from 2001 to 2002 and sustained further improvements in student achievement from 2003 to 2008, working in effective partnership with schools and Walsall Council.
3. Grange Secondary School in Oldham, Lancashire, which serves a predominantly Bangladeshi population in a community that ranks among the top 1 per cent in the country on indices of deprivation, almost failed its Ofsted inspection in 1996, and only 15 per cent of students were achieving 5 or more A*-C grades at GCSE. By 2008, however, this figure had increased to 71 per cent. By that time, the school's contextual value-added score (a measure of the contribution it makes to student progress between the ages of 11 and 16) was positioned in the top 2 per cent nationally. By 2005, it ranked as the highest performing visual arts college out of 30 in the country, and remained in the top 2 by 2009. For reasons connected to a wider social cohesion agenda, Grange was converted into a city academy in September 2010.
4. John Cabot Academy in south-west England is an innovative and entrepreneurial school, which was formally established in 2007 after being a city technology college. Examination results have been consistently above the national average since the school's first cohort of students sat their GCSE examinations in 1998. Steady improvement in these results from 1998 to 2003 preceded a sudden drop in 2004 from which it took four years to recover. Even then, results remained above the national average. Cabot's 2009 Ofsted report ranks it as 'outstanding' (the highest grade) in almost all categories.
5. Central Technology College was a small secondary school serving around 400 boys in Gloucestershire. After a demoralising last-minute derailment of its plans to merge with a local girls' school in 2003, the school's examination performance record fell dramatically back to 1996 levels after years of sustained improvement. Following two years of steady recovery from 2003 to 2005, Central entered a strategic partnership with the Ninestiles Consortium in Birmingham. After dramatic improvements in its 2006 GCSE results, a 2007 Ofsted inspection report judged that Central was now a 'good' school, but in 2009 it was announced that Central would be merged with a lower performing neighbour to form a new academy.
6. West Oaks North East Specialist Inclusive Learning Centre operates on three sites and also provides support for local mainstream schools in the city of Leeds. The main site, West Oaks School, is a specialist technology college. All 132 students (aged 2-19) who attend the learning centre have a statement of special educational needs. These statements cover a wide range of conditions including profound and complex disabilities, and various behavioural, emotional and social difficulties. The centre's 2007 Ofsted report awarded it the top grade, 'outstanding'. The inspectors' report judged the school to be 'extremely effective' in ensuring that pupils make 'outstanding progress' in 'catching up to nationally expected standards'.

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7. Kanes Hill Primary School serves a socio-economically disadvantaged housing estate in the suburbs of Southampton. The school is in the top five per cent of the most deprived areas in the country. Over three-quarters of the children at Kanes Hill live in overcrowded houses and 56 per cent have identified special educational needs. In 1997, test scores at the end of Key Stage 2 put the school in the bottom five per cent nationally. These results have improved dramatically since 1997. For the last three years the school has far exceeded the national average in test scores and has appeared in the top two per cent of schools on contextual value-added achievement. Ofsted inspection reports in 2005 and 2008 confirm that although children start school with very low levels of literacy, numeracy and social skills, by the time they leave at age 11, they have all made exceptional progress in academic and personal development.
 8. Limeside Primary School in Oldham is set in an area of significant social and economic deprivation. Most of the school's families live on the local housing estate in rented accommodation. A high number of students are eligible for free school meals and more than a quarter of the students have learning difficulties and/or disabilities. A series of critical Ofsted inspections resulted in the school being placed in special measures in 2000. In the past decade, Limeside has experienced a steady and sustained improvement. Test scores are now well above the national average, and the 2007 Ofsted inspection report judged the school to be outstanding.
 9. Mills Hill Primary School, also in Oldham, was the subject of a local authority inspection in 2004, which judged it to be 'causing concern'. Despite more favourable community demographics compared with the other two Oldham examples, the school's performance had dipped so that it was now a coasting school – doing less well than might be expected given its local circumstances. In recent years the school has improved its performance but most importantly is known for its community focused work, which is viewed as exemplary.

Sport

10. Cricket Australia was ranked number 1 in men's and women's cricket at test-match level in 2008-09, and ranked second, just behind South Africa, in one-day cricket. Australia has won the Ashes against England on 9 of the last 11 occasions after winning only 1 Ashes series in the previous 12 years. Cricket also ranks first or second every year in sport participation in Australia with only swimming sometimes surpassing it, and then only in Olympic years.
11. Burnley Football Club, one of the original founders of the English football league, was ranked 92nd out of 92 clubs on the last day of the 1986-87 season, and was rescued from amateur oblivion only by a headed goal by the smallest man on the field. Over 20 years, the club rose to mid-table respectability in the second-tier of the championship before gaining promotion to the premier league in 2009. Ticket sales at Burnley also ranked in the bottom five of the division, and the club had the smallest squad and used the least number of players of any team in the championship promotion season. Although promotion was swiftly followed by relegation, the club has attained a key goal of financial stability and of future promotion opportunity from the additional income and investment of £48 million that accompanied premier league promotion – indicated by a top-six placement at the time of this report's completion.
12. Hull Kingston Rovers, one of the classic cornerstones of English rugby league, reached one of its pinnacles of achievement in 1980 with a famous 10-5 challenge cup final victory over neighbours Hull at Wembley Stadium. This is still commemorated by the club's boardroom clock being stopped at 10 minutes to 5. From this point, Hull Kingston Rovers tumbled down into the second division in 1989 and then to the third division in 1995. When a rugby super league was created in 1996, Hull Kingston Rovers' wealthier and then higher-placed neighbour Hull Football Club was awarded the local franchise to join the league. Hull Kingston Rovers came back strongly through the lower divisions, however, and after a sputtering period in the early part of this century, the team surged into the top division in 2006, becoming team of the year in 2008 and rising to fourth in the super league at the end of 2009.
13. Kilkenny Hurling in Ireland is the leading team in a sport that is a national passion attracting crowds of up to 80,000. Formed from a smaller population of eligible players from fewer county clubs than most competitors, Kilkenny won its fourth consecutive all-Ireland title in 2009, won all four all-Ireland hurling championships at different age levels in 2008, and won the women's senior camogie title in the same year.

Business

14. Fiat Auto in Turin is one of the founding giants of auto manufacturing. The company had its heyday in the 1960s and then went into a slow decline, where it withdrew entirely from the US market in the 1980s and reached near-bankruptcy in 2004 after 17 continuous quarters in the red. Following the appointment of a new CEO, Fiat enjoyed two straight years in the black until the collapse of the global economy in 2007. It turned a €1.6 billion loss in 2004 into a €1.6 billion profit by 2008; increased its market share in Europe and Latin America – especially Brazil; and tripled its share value between 2004 and 2007, doubling it again between August 2008 and 2009 after the global economic downturn. In 2009, it led a merger and possible eventual takeover with Chrysler in the United States to become one of the largest players in its sector.
15. M&S is another iconic institution with a history reaching back over 125 years. Although it is now a global sustainability leader in retail on the Dow Jones Sustainability Index and has a high global ranking as one of the world's most reputable companies according to the Reputation Institute, this leading retailer suffered a precipitous decline in the late 1990s. By 1999, the company value on the stock market was down to £7 billion, less than half of the value in late 1997. The introduction of more eye-catching fashion collections produced a false recovery when the subsequent departure of the designers reinstated a decline that culminated in a fierce takeover bid in 2004. By 2008, however, M&S had re-established its position as an industry leader by reconnecting to its core values. It is now ranked among the top 50 retailers in the world – not as large as before, but with a stronger record on reputation, sustainability and more focused success.
16. Shoebuy.com started up in a makeshift office in a converted funeral parlour in Boston, Massachusetts, with the apparently improbable idea of selling footwear on the internet. The company's inventory-free model enabled it to survive the dotcom bust, and Shoebuy now ranks as one of the two major internet footwear retailers. The 7th largest internet shopping site, it is in the internet's top 10 most-visited apparel and accessory shopping sites, and one of the top 10 stickiest websites (a measure of how long customers stay on the site) in the internet shopping sector. Shoebuy.com has achieved eight straight years of double-digit percentage increases in revenue growth. In 2009, while its major competitor, Zappos, was forced to cut at least eight per cent of its staff, Shoebuy continued to expand.
17. Dogfish Head Craft Brewery in Milton, Delaware, started in 1996 in a New York City apartment as a tiny, innovative, one-man craft (real ale) brewery. It has since become one of the most successful models of independent and innovative brewing in the United States, featuring in the New Yorker Magazine and on the Discovery TV channel. In 2008, it ranked 22nd among 1,400 craft brewing companies by beer sales volume. Since 2003, Dogfish Head has averaged 40 per cent yearly revenue growth, outpacing almost every competing craft brewery every year – yet with a clear understanding of how it must retain quality by limiting scope of exports and rates of expansion.
18. Scott Bader is an unusual multinational chemical company, which was established in 1921 and now concentrates on plastic resins used to mould doors and window-frames as well as parts for luxury yachts and racing cars. In 1951, Ernest Bader restructured his company as the Scott Bader Commonwealth on the socialist principle of sharing responsibility for the future of the company with his employees. While the company continues to operate on this guiding philosophy, it has had to restructure the ways in which it achieves its goals following a financial crisis in 2003 and a debt that had reached £18.5 million by 2005 setting the company on a path to bankruptcy. The result of this restructuring is that the company returned profits of £5 million by 2007, yet has retained its core principles, which include making donations to charity.

Footnotes

1. The review process is still incomplete for Fiat Auto, so findings reported here about this case are drawn from public domain information.
2. The concept of leadership fusion or fusion leadership was first developed by Daft and Lengel in 1998. For them, the fusion applies to integration of qualities within individuals. We also use it to describe fusion of leadership qualities across communities and over time. See Daft, R L & Lengel, D L 1998, [Fusion Leadership](#), San Francisco, Berret-Koehler.
3. Schumpeter, J A, 1942, [Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy](#), New York, Harper & Brothers
4. On co-opetition, see Nalebuff, B J & Brandenburger, A M, 1997, [Co-opetition: competitive and cooperative business strategies for the digital economy](#), *Strategy and Leadership*, 25(6), 28–35. On the concept of collaborative edge, see Hargreaves, A, Shirley, D, Harris, A & Boyle, A, 2010, [Collaborative edge: how helping others helps you](#), *Principal*, March/April, 16–20.
5. Daft & Lengel, [Fusion Leadership](#)
6. Daft & Lengel, [Fusion Leadership](#), 13
7. Daft & Lengel, [Fusion Leadership](#), 16
8. Stone-Johnson, C, 2010, [A Literature Review of Performing Beyond Expectations in Business](#), unpublished manuscript
9. Boyle, A, [A Literature Review of Performing Beyond Expectations in Sport](#), unpublished manuscript
10. See Boyle, [A Literature Review of Performing Beyond Expectations in Sport](#). A striking example of false recovery was in what are known as the John Bond years at Burnley Football Club in the 1980s when Bond's arrival as the new manager brought mass changeovers in the playing squad with many new signings coming from his former club, Manchester City. A run of good results was then followed by a string of losses after one key player was injured, team cohesion was lost, the manager abruptly departed and several seasons of increasing failure, burdened by debt, then ensued.
11. On false recoveries, see Collins, J, 2009, [How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In](#), New York, HarperCollins. Marks & Spencer was subject to striking false recovery when new designers brought a temporary lift in consumer response but then left (incurring a subsequent company decline) when their success drew outside attention having no existing loyalties to M&S to keep them there.
12. This argument about the presence of pervasive standardisation in business is made by M B Crawford in Crawford, M B, 2009, [Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work](#), New York, Penguin.
13. See Barber, M, 2009, From system effectiveness to system improvement: reform paradigms and relationships. In Hargreaves, A & Fullan, M (eds), [Change Wars](#), 71–96, Bloomington, IN, Solution Tree.
14. Hargreaves, A, 2010, Leadership, change, and beyond the 21st century skills agenda. In Bellanca, J & Brandt, R (eds), [21st Century Skills: Rethinking how Students Learn](#), 327–348, Bloomington, IN, Solution Tree.
15. Hargreaves et al., [Collaborative edge](#)
16. These examples are described more fully in Hargreaves, A & Shirley, D, 2009, [The Fourth Way: The Inspiring Future for Educational Change](#), Thousand Oaks, CA, Corwin Press.

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