

Preface

“There come rare moments, hard to distinguish but fatal to let slip, when all must be set upon a hazard . . .”

—G. M. Trevelyan, British historian, 1909

The next two years provide a once-in-a-generation opportunity to transform public education in America. If that opportunity is seized, America could lead the world in the quality of its public schools and universities in the 21st century, just as it did for the first two-thirds of the 20th century. Indeed, the United States faces precisely the kind of rare moment that English historian G. M. Trevelyan thought “fatal to let slip.”

This moment has been created by an administration that prioritizes education reform; by the \$100 billion for education in the federal stimulus package, including almost \$5 billion for the “Race to the Top Fund”; by the emergence of an increasingly shared national agenda focused on standards, accountability, data, human capital, and reducing school failure; by the growing interest in international benchmarking in the United States and the emerging understanding around the world of the characteristics of successful system reform. And while the economic crisis is a challenge in so many ways, it is also a spectacular opportunity to recruit more and better people into teaching, if the right kinds of programs can be developed.

In short, we know *what* ought to be done; we know *why* it needs to be done; and the unique opportunity now means that we know *when* we need to do it. The central challenge is that it is not clear at any level in the system *how* to get it done. The presence or absence of the capacity to deliver will make the difference between a once-in-a-generation opportunity seized and a once-in-a-generation opportunity missed.

For more than 25 years, since the (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) publication of *A Nation at Risk* (with its dire warnings of “a rising tide of mediocrity”), a succession of reports and a tidal wave of books have proposed public education reforms of one kind or another. Yet, while some progress has been made, the overall outcomes of a quarter of a century of reform are judged by most people, inside and outside public education, to have been disappointing. And each disappointment fuels further debate, more reports, and more books about what the reform agenda should be.

This is *not* another report or book like that. It is based on a different premise—the premise that much of that disappointment is a result not of failed reform *content* but of failed *implementation*. The American education reform landscape is littered with potentially promising reforms that were not pursued, not sustained, not implemented, and not delivered.

So, if you are looking for another magic formula for reform, don't read this book. Neither should you read further if you are satisfied with current performance. If, however, you are ambitious for reform, determined to bring about dramatic improvements in the outcomes for students, and bold in your belief that both excellence and equity can be delivered across U.S. K–12 and public higher education, then read on.

This book describes a proven set of processes which will ensure your reform is actually delivered in the most profound sense, with the students themselves able to see, feel, and reap the benefits of a much better education. This is a book for people who want to get things done in government; who are as interested in the question *how?* as much as the question *what?*

The term *deliverology* was originally developed in the British civil service as a gentle and light-hearted term of abuse for the process developed by the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit (PMDU), which Tony Blair had me set up; we have chosen to adopt it here and give it a positive definition: It is the emerging science of getting things done in government. The precise definition we have given it is as follows:

Deliverology (n.): a systematic process for driving progress and delivering results in government and the public sector.

Like many of the best ideas for change, deliverology is a simple concept. But, that does not mean it is easy to master. It is not a passing fad, a "flavor of the month," or a piece of jargon to be adopted and discarded when the fashion moves on. Delivery requires persistence, discipline, and rigor: It often requires courageous, difficult decisions in relation to staffing, organization, and relationships with stakeholders, but it will work. The combination of the right mindset with the methods set out in this book will guarantee results.



Guarantee is a strong word. So is *proven*, which appeared a few paragraphs earlier. What evidence do I have to make such claims for deliverology?

In 2001, after winning reelection, Tony Blair, the British prime minister, asked me to set up in No. 10 Downing Street what became known as the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit. His analysis of his first term in office suggested that the British people liked his agenda for education, health, and policing but were disappointed that his ideas had not yet been translated into change on the ground. The British people had given him another chance, but, as he put it the day after the June 2001 election, they had also issued him with an "instruction to deliver." By asking me to set up his Delivery Unit, he was, in effect, passing on that instruction to me.

With a small (and fantastically talented) team, I set about this task. In collaboration with the prime minister and his cabinet, around 20 major goals for the next four or five years were established. They included major reductions in crime, less waiting for public health services, significant increases in the punctuality of trains, and dramatic improvements in school performance.

We then set about developing a set of routines and problem-solving techniques specifically designed to overcome the barriers to delivering results through the vast public bureaucracy that is the British government. Crucially, alongside the routines and techniques, we also thought deeply about how to build constructive working relationships with all the ministers and officials

responsible for delivering the prime minister's ambitious agenda. This combination of routines, techniques, and what came to be called "the alchemy of relationships" was quite rapidly seen as a new and radically different approach to delivering results. While at first, we were mocked for inventing deliverology, quite quickly we became seen as persistent, constructive, and helpful.

Within six months or so, the first evidence that our approach could deliver major performance improvements came through when an apparently remorseless rise in street crime was reversed. Less than a year later, further successes were registered in immigration and health. And after three years or so, we realized we had a proven approach that could be applied to any major problem of service delivery and bring results. By the end of Blair's second term (2005), around 80% of the ambitious goals we had set out to achieve had actually been achieved. Of the remaining 20% of targets that had been missed, in almost all cases performance had nevertheless improved. Blair concluded that the Delivery Unit was the best reform of the government machine he ever made. In his memoirs, he comments that the Delivery Unit "as an innovation that was utterly invaluable and proved its worth time and again" (p. 338).

Other governments around the world began to take notice. After all, the challenge of delivery is universal. Every government aspires to deliver improved performance without commensurate increases in taxation. The global economic crisis has made this challenge still more acute. Hence, my account of the four years of striving to deliver for Blair—*Instruction to Deliver* (2008)—has been read by prime ministers, ministers, and top officials in many countries. Since 2005, governments such as those in Australia, Holland, and Canada have looked to this experience in Blair's Britain and, after adapting and refining the approach for their own circumstances, have realized significant benefits. In the United States, Antonio Villaraigosa, the mayor of Los Angeles, created a performance management unit modeled on the British experience; Martin O'Malley, governor of Maryland, is moving in the same direction; and Jeff Zients, chief performance officer in the U.S. Government's Office of Management and Budget, is taking notice too. Meanwhile in U.S. public education, successful reformers such as Joel Klein in New York City; Paul Pastorek in Louisiana; and Charles Reed, chancellor of the California State University system, have also seen the benefits of adopting and adapting the approaches set out in *Instruction to Deliver*.

Deliverology 101 has been written specifically for leaders of American education reform. It draws heavily on *Instruction to Deliver* and freely quotes from it; but instead of telling the story, it describes the routines, techniques, and approaches in the form of a field guide. Moreover, it is based not only on the experience of the Blair administration but also on case studies of successful implementation of reform in the United States and elsewhere. Much of what is described in the book has been piloted in collaboration with state K–12 and major education systems here in the United States and honed and refined as a result.

The American education leaders I know are ambitious for their students, they know that a remarkable opportunity to transform public education is before them, they know what to do, and they know that a major barrier to seizing that opportunity is a severe lack of capacity to deliver. *Deliverology 101* is prepared precisely to address these circumstances.

As I say, there's no need to read it if you want business as usual; but if you want to seize the new day, read on . . . it would be fatal to let it slip.

—Michael Barber
Devon, UK
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