

Chapter 20: Leadership for Change

MICHAEL FULLAN

University of Toronto

Wanted: A miracle worker who can do more with less, pacify rival groups, endure chronic second-guessing, tolerate low levels of support, process large volumes of paper and work double shifts (75 nights a year out). He or she will have carte blanche to innovate, but cannot spend much money, replace any personnel, or upset any constituency. (R. Evans, Education Week, April 12, 1995)

We have come a long way since the days of valuing leaders who 'run a tight ship'. We have gone through the phases of the principal 'as administrator' and the principal 'as instructional leader' to a broader and more fundamental notion of principal as change agent. In this chapter I take a critical approach to understanding the nature of the evolving role of school leadership, why it has changed, and what we need to know and to be able to do to make the leadership role more doable. While the focus is on 'school' leadership (principal and teacher leadership), much of the analysis applies to 'system' leadership involving superintendents and other central office staff.

The premise of the chapter is that we are obtaining a general appreciation of the new work of leaders, but that two problems remain: (1) the noise function in which misleading conceptions of leadership persist, and (2) to the extent that new conceptions are on the right track, they remain at a general level of understanding with little practical meaning about how to carry out the role at the operational level.

The chapter is organized in the following sections. First, the new context is analysed to identify key underlying reasons why and how the role of school leadership has changed. Second, I discuss the broad conceptions of leadership with a view to sorting out less productive from more productive lines of thinking. The intent is to capture how 'leadership for change' might be conceptualized. Although this is still at a general level, the mindset of effective leadership is clearly articulated. Third, (and this is the essence of the chapter) I present a number of 'middle level' examples of how key problems of change would be specifically handled. This section on how 'leadership for change in action'

focuses on what leaders would actually do in real situations of complex change. This, I believe is missing from much of the literature and is obviously crucial for informing both understanding and action.

THE NEW CONTEXT

I will not address here the broad issues of the age of paradox and chaos in postmodern society (although these issues do get introduced in the following two sections). Rather, we are interested in the more specific manifestations of these trends as they directly change the very context within which leadership must work. Eight trends in particular affect school leadership directly (see Fullan and Hargreaves, 1996; Hargreaves and Fullan, 1996).

First, there is a world-wide trend toward *self-managing* schools. This has meant a sea-change in the role of the school leader transforming responsibility towards whole school development, school development planning and the like. Developing collaborative work cultures with a focus on teaching and learning for all students has become a major mandate for school principals. The term self-managing, however, is misleading because the other trends, paradoxically mean that with greater autonomy comes greater permeability of boundaries and more visible accountability and involvement with other constituencies.

Second, part and parcel of the new devolution of authority – from Chicago to New Zealand and points in between – is new forms of *school-community governance*. Most directly this takes the form of legislated ‘local school councils’ with new responsibilities and powers. The formal governance component as we shall see later, is only the most obvious structural aspect of a much more comprehensive realignment of parental/community-school relationships. In effect, school boundaries are becoming more transparent, and the work of the school not only much more visible but ultimately more intertwined with the family and the community (Epstein, 1995). School leadership, in turn, is radically affected. We are no longer talking about attempting to have cordial relationships with parents but rather developing more comprehensive learning systems in new public arenas, requiring new conceptions and skills that school leaders have hitherto never experienced.

Third, there is a trend to *reduce dependence on outside bureaucracy and regulation*. Because of the ambivalence of the state to ‘let go’, this trend is difficult to interpret. It is the case, driven partly by the need to reduce expenditures and partly by the new conceptions described here,

that there is a widespread reduction in the number of bureaucrats at both the regional and state levels. In these jurisdictions that have district school boards, it is not at all clear that this level of bureaucracy will survive as some of the powers devolve to local school councils while other powers are usurped upward to the state.

Fourth, while middle level bureaucracies are becoming simplified or eliminated, *the state is taking on new centralist roles*. Depending on the degree of centralizing tendencies this takes the form of developing state-wide curriculum frameworks, standards of practice, and accountability of performance and outcomes. School leaders, of course, must constantly negotiate this simultaneous centralization-decentralization terrain.

Fifth, there is more talk and action about *reinventing teacher professionalism* with increased standards of practice that in effect widen and deepen the role of the teacher, transcending the classroom door to new forms of collaboration and partnership within and outside the school. This reduction in the isolation of teachers is accompanied by new opportunities and expectations for teacher leadership. School leadership, then, becomes more complex. Every teacher is expected to exercise such leadership, and particular new teacher leadership roles become established. The principal finds himself or herself participating in the change of the teaching profession itself where the role of the traditional school leader is disappearing.

Sixth, massive expansion of *information technology* brings with it greater global access to ideas and people, and untold opportunities and headaches about how to manage the information explosion in relation to its positive potential and harmful downside.

Seventh, a focus on the *new learning outcomes* continues apace, defined less in terms of traditional content and more in terms of teaching for understanding and performance in a changing world. School leaders become embroiled in debates that are no less fundamental than revisiting the question of the purpose of schools in a social and work world very different from the past.

Eighth, *multi-racial, gender and sexual politics* bring new styles of leadership and more visibility to issues of equity. The socio-political complexity of the role of the school leader comes with the new territory.

In short, to begin to understand 'leadership for change', one must first understand basic changes in the social context.

BROAD CONCEPTIONS OF LEADERSHIP

I wish the reader for the time being to accept the following premise: neither the passive facilitator leader who tries to be responsive to others, or the forceful charismatic leader is effective under the contextual conditions just outlined. The former leader fails to stand for anything, and the latter dominates the agenda.

Since vision-driven leadership tends to be a major component of leadership theory over the last decade, it is necessary to clarify the limitations of this view. Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) provide a succinct version of this conception. There are four key aspects, they say: creating and setting the vision; communicating the vision; building commitment to the vision; and alignment to the vision (p. 25). Similarly, Bennis and Nanus (1985) advocate four leadership strategies: I Attention through Vision; II Meaning through Communications; III Trust through Positioning; IV The Deployment of Self through Positive Self-Regard.

Senge (1990) I believe provides the definitive critique of the above image of leader as saviour:

Our traditional views of leaders – as special people who set the direction, make key decisions, and energize the troops – are deeply rooted in an individualistic and nonsystemic world view. Especially in the West, leaders are *heroes* – great men (and occasionally women) who ‘rise to the fore’ in times of crises. Our prevailing leadership myths are still captured by the captain of the cavalry leading the charge to rescue the settlers from the attacking Indians. So long as such myths prevail, they reinforce a focus on short-term events and charismatic heroes rather than on systemic forces and collective learning. At its heart, the traditional view of leadership is based on assumptions of people’s powerlessness, their lack of personal vision and inability to master the forces of change, deficits which can be remedied only by a few great leaders. (p. 340)

Yet, we know that strong leadership is required to manage the barrage of problems and potential opportunities to make major reforms. In the remainder of this section I will develop a more balanced view of strong leadership which leads to the following two conclusions: (1) the conception of the leader of the future is becoming more articulated *at the*

broad level (2) and a corollary, it is very difficult to obtain from this literature what leaders would do at the operational level if they attempted to follow this conception in their own work.

A good place to start is Champy's (1995) recent excellent book on 'reengineering management'. He claims, I think correctly, that there are four broad issues for managers of the future:

- *Issues of purpose.* Insistently, persistently, relentlessly, the new manager must ask, 'What for?' What is it that we're in business for? What is the process for? This Product? This task? This team? This job? What are we doing here, anyway
- *Issues of culture.* If successful reengineering requires a change in a company's whole culture, as seems to be the case in many instances, how is it to be accomplished by the same management that did so well in the old culture? If it is true (and it is) that reengineering is unlikely to succeed where the corporate atmosphere is charged with fear (and its twin, mistrust), how do we generate another, better environment – one, say, of willingness and mutual confidence.
- *Issues of process and performance.* How do we get the kind of processes we want? How do we get the performances we need from our people? How do we set the norms and standard, or measure results – for worker performance, management performance, and the performance of the whole enterprise? Reengineering usually demands radical objectives, leadership, and political skills to realize. But how do we know whether we have the stuff? What does it take to be a good manager today?
- *Issues of people.* Who do we want to work with? How can we find them from both inside and outside the company? How do we get them to want to work with us? How do we know whether they're the kind of people we want? (p. 7)

Champy advocates that we should 'lead experimentally', and that 'linear thinking, general strategy thinking, familiar thinking, conventional thinking, produce only comforting illusions, bland rigidities, complacent passivity, all the slow working recipes for disaster' (pp 32-33). What follows in Champy's book are many illustrations, ideas and insights (and we shall draw upon some of them later), but at the end of the book, one would be hard pressed to answer the question: 'what do I do now, where do I start?'

International Handbook of Educational Leadership and
Administration

Leithwood, K.A.; Chapman, J.D.; Corson, P.; Hallinger, P.;
Hart, A. (Eds.)

1996, XLIV, 1176 p. 3 illus., Hardcover

ISBN: 978-0-7923-3530-6