

THE LEARNING Principal

FOR A DYNAMIC COMMUNITY OF SCHOOL LEADERS ENSURING SUCCESS FOR ALL STUDENTS

10 DO AND DON'T ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT CHANGE

BY MICHAEL FULLAN

Editor's Note: At this stage of the school year, you've likely tried to implement a new idea, a new program, a new curriculum — and found that some members of your staff are pushing back against those changes.

University of Toronto education professor Michael Fullan reminds us that such "resistance" is part of the change process and that there is no silver bullet solution for how to convert resisters to supporters. But there are some broad guidelines for principals to consider as they address challenges in their buildings.

This excerpt comes from his book, *The new meaning of educational change* (Teachers College Press, 2001).

The assumptions we make about change are powerful and frequently subconscious sources of actions.

When we begin to understand what change is as people experience it, we also begin to see clearly that assumptions made by planners of change are extremely important determinants of whether the reality of implementation gets confronted or ignored.

The analysis of change carried out so far leads me to identify 10 "do" or "don't" assumptions that are basic to a successful approach to educational change.

1. Do not assume that your version of what the change should be is the one that should or could be implemented.

On the contrary, assume that one of the main purposes of the process of implementation is to *exchange your reality* of what should be through interaction with implementers and others concerned. Stated another way, assume that successful implementation consists of some transformation or continual development of initial ideas.

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Engage in dialogue-like conversations

“If you advocate with the intention to persuade, control, or manipulate others, the group will instantly fall out of dialogue. Advocacy spoken with an attitude of ‘I am right’ squashes listening and triggers defensiveness, aggression, and/or withdrawal. In such advocacy, there is no invitation to hear and learn from differing perspectives. ... We are all experts at advocating from an ‘I am right’ stance.”

—Linda Ellinor and Glenna Gerard

The clarity with which leaders express their views and their ability to interact with others in ways that promote sustained learning are critically important leadership skills.

In my previous two columns, I discussed Noel Tichy’s view that leaders best serve their organizations when they function as teachers of adults and that the basis for that teaching be leader’s Teachable Points of View (TPOVs). Tichy recommends that leaders communicate their TPOVs through what he calls “interactive teaching,” a dialogue-like process that “... occurs when the teacher respects the students and has a mind-set that they probably know things that he or she doesn’t, and when the students have the mind-set that they have something to say and that the teacher would be interested in hearing it” (p. 70).

Tichy underscores that interactive teaching is not the same as selling or telling. “Many executives close off learning. In their day-to-day interactions with staff, they are usually either issuing instructions or making judgments about the ideas or performance of others. . . . Even executives who participate as teachers in formal development programs are often little more than lecturers,” he notes (pp. 60-61).

To convey a TPOV, Tichy recommends weaving its elements into a story “that people

can understand, relate to and remember” (p. 121). Tichy describes three types of stories:

- **Who am I?** This explains the experiences that have shaped the leader and his or her TPOV.
- **Who are we?** This describes the common experiences and beliefs of those in the organization.
- **Where are we going?** This tells what the organization is aiming to do and how it is going to do it.

“At the same time that leaders are creating and constantly improving their TPOVs, they must also craft them into stories that are not only intellectually clear, but emotionally engaging, so that other people will be eager and willing to participate,” he writes (p. 131).

In these dialogue-like interactions, individuals speak *their* “truth” (lower-case “t”) as formulated in their TPOVs rather than *the* Truth (upper-case “T”) as a means of promoting their own learning and that of others. Leaders also convey a willingness to be influenced by listening attentively to others to better understand their perspectives. I use the term “dialogue-like” conversations because leaders sometimes believe dialogue can occur only in settings designated for that purpose over a period of several hours or even days in the presence of trained facilitators. In my experience, powerful dialogue-like interactions can also occur during brief “hallway conversations” or in meetings in which assumption sharing, attentive listening, and an openness to being influenced are part of a larger action-oriented agenda.

CONSIDER:

- Using TPOVs in the spirit of dialogue to influence others and to reach common understanding with colleagues about important issues prior to taking action.
- Communicating through your words and demeanor an open, non-argumentative approach to the views of others.

REFERENCE

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The Cycles of Leadership: How Great Leaders Teach Their Companies to Win. New York: Harper Business.



Pat Roy is co-author of *Moving NSDC's Staff Development Standards Into Practice: Innovation Configurations* (NSDC, 2003)

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For more information about the NSDC Standards for Staff Development, see www.nsd.org/standards/index.cfm

Understand, anticipate the process of change

A set of assumptions undergirds the NSDC Standards for Staff Development. Some of those assumptions address our beliefs about how people experience and manage new practices and strategies. They also address a belief that organizational culture, policies, and structures impact individual change. These assumptions are clarified in the Learning standard.

Among the new knowledge and understandings that principals need to implement the standards is the ability to **apply knowledge about the change process when planning and implementing school-based professional learning** (Roy & Hord, 2003, p. 90). One of the vexing problems associated with any change is how

to get people to use new practices. Principals in cooperation with their faculties will make a number of decisions about how to help staff members learn about and use new practices. These decisions are best informed using research on individual and organizational change.

First, principals need to believe that part of their goal is to **build capacity of the school-based staff to apply information about individual change processes**. Hall and Hord (2001) created the Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) to explain the process of change as well as identify the interventions necessary to move educators through stages of concern and levels of use of innovations. This work clarified that educators do not go from non-use to expert use of new practices in one fell swoop. Individuals first address concerns about self, then concerns about tasks, and finally concerns about impact. Each stage has needs that must be resolved in order to progress to the next stage.

LEARNING

Staff development that improves the learning of all students applies knowledge about human learning and change.

Understanding and anticipating these stages will help the principal and the staff make powerful decisions that impact individual adoption of new practices.

Similarly, the principal needs to **build capacity of the school-based staff to apply information about organizational change processes**. Some of the new practices impact organizational structure, policies, and procedures. Fullan (1991) has helped educators understand the powerful issues related to changing organizations. He has described three distinct phases in organizational change: Initiation, Implementation, and Institutionalization. Fullan has discovered that many believe that once a new program is launched it will automatically be implemented. His work has shown

that belief to be untrue. This work will help schools anticipate the barriers and obstacles to change at the organizational level.

Lastly, the principal **coaches internal facilitators to support individuals as they move through changes in school and classroom practices**. The change process is messy work. Individuals move through stages at different rates and speed. This fact requires many people, beyond the principal, to understand and facilitate the change process for their colleagues. These facilitators also need an opportunity to reflect, problem solve, and share solutions to common issues. The principal can play an important support role for internal facilitators.

Many principals would not describe themselves as change facilitators. The Learning standard clarifies the importance of knowing and applying knowledge of individual and organizational change.

Beware the generation gap!

Every principal is challenged to understand the unique characteristics of teachers when they work to distribute leadership throughout a building. Consider these guidelines for understanding teachers in different generations.

GENERATION	HOW THEY ASSIMILATE ON TEAMS	HOW THEY LEAD
VETERANS <i>Ages 62-75</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See power of collective action, as long as there's a central leader • Respect experience • Want to know where they stand and what's expected of them • Eager to conform to group roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value dedication and loyalty of subordinates • Equate age with status and power • Make most decisions themselves • Work and personal life kept separate • See change as disruptive and undesirable
BABY BOOMERS <i>Ages 45-61</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoy and value teamwork • Want group to stick to the schedule • Are willing to go the extra mile • Have good people skills • Embrace equity and equality • Like to receive credit and public recognition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shy away from conflict • Tend to lead through consensus • Employ a participatory style but may struggle with delegation and empathy • Embrace leadership trends, training, and personal development • Exhibit less flexible attitude when it comes to change
GEN-XERS <i>Ages 25-44</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prefer informal roles and freedom to complete tasks their own way • Perform well on projects that call for technical savvy and creativity • Work best with members of their own choosing • Feel concerned about being taken advantage of • Struggle with communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drawn to leadership roles for altruistic reasons, not power or prestige • Enjoy casual and friendly atmosphere • May lack tact and diplomacy when dealing with subordinates • Able to create and embrace alternative workplace structures • Willing to challenge the higher ups
NEXTERS <i>Ages 25 and under</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accept team diversity as a norm • Determined to achieve group goals • Respond well to mentoring • Need supervision and structure • Enjoy working with idealistic people • Like to share in decision making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tolerate and are open to new challenges • Cope and adapt to different employee learning styles and needs • Prefer a flattened hierarchy • Inexperienced with handling conflict and difficult people

Source: *Generations at Work*, by Ron Zemke, Claire Raines, and Bob Filipczak. New York: American Management Association, 1999.

DARE TO DELEGATE CHECKLIST

Many school leaders have difficulty delegating responsibility. Complete the checklist to determine areas you need to focus on to improve your delegation skills.

	ALWAYS	SOMETIMES	NEVER
1. Do you decide what you can delegate?			
2. Do you break the task into the smallest pieces possible?			
3. Do you form a mental picture of each completed task?			
4. Do you select the tasks you must do yourself?			
5. Do you assess the skills of the people to whom you will delegate tasks?			
6. Do you assess the interests of these people?			
7. Do you assign the tasks based on skills and interests?			
8. Do you assign the authority and limits of discretion so the task can be completed?			
9. Do you identify who will do the task?			
10. Are you specific about what you want done?			
11. Do you determine why you want this person to do the task?			
12. Do you decide when the task must be completed?			
13. Do you explain what the completed task will look like?			
14. Do you ask questions to ensure understanding?			
15. Do you inform others who need to know about the assignment?			
16. Are you enthusiastic about the duties you delegate?			
17. Do you monitor the progress of each task at regular intervals?			
18. Do you require feedback?			
19. Do you provide feedback?			
20. Do you reward others for a job well done?			

SCORING GUIDE: Give yourself 2 points for every Always response, 1 point for Sometimes, and 0 for Never.

30-40 POINTS: *A Daring Delegator.* You consistently and expertly adhere to the principles of delegation. These skills maximize your effectiveness and help you develop the full potential of your staff. You demonstrate confidence as a leader.

20-29 POINTS: *A Progressing Delegator.* Morale and efficiency are good, but could be even better if you were more conscientious in assigning and following up with delegated tasks. Even though you may be able to perform a task better or faster, you are aware that delegation allows others to grow personally and professionally.

10-19 POINTS: *A Reluctant Delegator.* You have a hard time figuring out when and what to delegate. You worry that assigning tasks to others will lead to a loss of authority or control. It's time to re-evaluate your priorities and recognize that if a task doesn't involve privileged information or setting policies, you probably can delegate it.

9 AND BELOW: *A Guilt-Ridden Delegator.* You struggle to complete tasks on time and feel overwhelmed at work. Your lack of mental discipline keeps you spiraling from one activity to the next. You need to take a step back and look in the mirror. Consider what the worst and best outcomes are if you start allowing others to help.

Source: "Making the leap to shared leadership," by Suzette D. Lovely. (2005, Spring). *JSD* 26(2), 20.

10 do and don't assumptions about change

Continued from p. 1

2. Assume that any significant innovation, if it is to result in change, requires individual implementers to work out their own meaning.

Significant change involves a certain amount of ambiguity, ambivalence, and uncertainty for the individual about the meaning of the change. Thus, effective implementation is a *process of clarification*. It is also important not to spend too much time in the early stages on needs assessment, program development, and problem definition activities — school staff have limited time. Clarification is likely to come in large part through reflective practice.

3. Assume that conflict and disagreement are not only inevitable but fundamental to successful change.

Since any group of people possess multiple realities, any collective change attempt will necessarily involve conflict. Assumptions 2 and 3 combine to suggest that all successful efforts of significance, no matter how well planned, will experience an implementation dip in the early stages. Smooth implementation is often a sign that not much is really changing.

4. Assume that people need pressure to change (even in directions that they desire), but it will be effective only under conditions that allow them to react, to form their own position, to interact with other implementers, to obtain technical assistance, etc.

It is alright and helpful to express what you value in the form of standards of practice and expectations of accountability, but only if coupled with capacity-building and problem-solving opportunities.

5. Assume that effective change takes time.

It is a process of “development in use.” Unrealistic or undefined time lines fail to recognize that implementation occurs developmentally. Significant change in the form of implementing specific innovations can be expected to take a minimum of two or three years; bringing about institutional reforms can take five or ten years. At the same time, work on

Fullan's six guidelines for principals

- 1. Steer clear of false certainty.** There is no ready-made answer out there to the “how” question.
- 2. Base risk on security.** Promote risk-taking but provide safety nets of supportive relationships.
- 3. Respect those you want to silence.** Incorporate and learn from dissenters.
- 4. Move toward the danger in forming new alliances.** “Out there” may be dangerous but you need external partners.
- 5. Manage emotionally as well as rationally.** Work on your emotional intelligence. Don't take dissent personally.
- 6. Fight for lost causes.** Be hopeful against the odds.

Source: The new meaning of educational change, 3rd edition, by Michael Fullan. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001, pg. 150.

changing the infrastructure (policies, incentives, capacity of agencies at all levels) so that valued gains can be sustained and built upon.

6. Do not assume that the reason for lack of implementation is outright rejection of the values embodied in the change, or hard core resistance to all change.

Assume that there are a number of possible reasons: value rejection, inadequate resources to support implementation, insufficient time elapsed, and the possibility that resisters have some good points to make.

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“When you disturb the status quo, disagreement is normal.”

— Michael Fullan
August 2005

10 do and don't assumptions about change

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7. Do not expect all or even most people or groups to change.

Progress occurs when we take steps (e.g. by following the assumptions listed here) that increase the number of people affected. Our reach should exceed our grasp, but not by such a margin that we fall flat on our face. Instead of being discouraged by all that remains to be done, be encouraged by what has been accomplished by way of improvement resulting from your actions.

8. Assume that you will need a *plan* that is based on the above assumptions and that addresses the factors known to affect implementation.

Evolutionary planning and problem-coping models based on knowledge of the change process are essential.

9. Assume that no amount of knowledge will ever make it totally clear what action should be taken.

Action decisions are a combination of valid knowledge, political considerations, on-the-spot decisions, and intuition. Better knowledge of the change process will improve the mix of resources on which we draw, but it will never and should never represent the sole basis for decision.

10. Assume that changing the culture of institutions is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations.

Put another way, when implementing particular innovations, we should always pay attention to whether each institution and the relationships among institutions and individuals are developing or not.

Source: *The new meaning of educational change*, 3rd edition, by Michael Fullan. New York: Teachers College Press, 2001, pgs. 108-110. Used with permission.

“We learn more potentially from people who disagree with us. But we overlisten to those who agree with us. We hang around people who agree with us. That’s not a bad strategy for getting through the day but it’s not a very good strategy for getting through implementation.”

— Michael Fullan
August 2005

KNOTS

By Ronald Laing

There is something I don't know
That I am supposed to know.
I don't know what it is I don't know,
and yet am supposed to know,
and I feel I look stupid
if I seem both not to know it
and not know what it is I don't know.
Therefore, I pretend I know it.
This is nerve-racking since I don't
know what I must pretend to know.
Therefore, I pretend I know everything.

Source: *Knots*, by R.D. Laing. London: Routledge, 1999, pg 56.



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Learn from those who are improving

Educators have much more to learn from studying high-poverty schools on the path to improvement than from studying “nominally high-performing schools that are producing a significant portion of their performance through social class rather than through instruction,” writes Richard Elmore in a recent issue of the *Harvard Education Letter*.

“Although these schools may be stigmatized as ‘low-performing’ or

‘in need of improvement,’ they are working hard to learn about their practice and beginning to focus on the individual and organizational conditions that create more powerful learning for adults and children,” he said.

In high-performing, high-poverty schools that he has studied, Elmore found that such schools were “not just different in degree from other schools, they were different in kind.”

“School leaders had clearly articulated expectations for student learning, coupled with a sense of urgency about improvement; they adopted challenging curricula



and invested heavily in professional development. Teachers in these schools internalized responsibility for student learning; they examined their practices critically, and, if they weren't working, they abandoned them and tried something else. Most important, school leaders insisted that classrooms be open to teacher colleagues, administrators, and outsiders for observation and analysis of instructional practice,” he said.

Source: “What (so-called) low-performing schools can teach (so-called) high-performing schools,” by Richard Elmore, *Harvard Education Letter*, Sept./Oct. 2005.

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