

Michael Fullan's insights on what it takes to make professional learning stick — in other words, Learning Forward's Implementation standard — have long helped leaders at the school



and system level create change in ways that lead to better outcomes for students. In his full thought leader essay in *Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning: Implementation*, Fullan begins by considering the failure of professional development and then explores promising models and offers recommendations for succeeding at implementation.

In this excerpt, learn about the role of human, social, and decisional capital in building educator capacity, and more importantly, a culture of learning within schools.

# AMPLIFY CHANGE WITH PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL

By Michael Fullan

In our recent work on professional capital, Andy Hargreaves and I (2013) have been explicit about the conditions at the school level that are essential for continuous professional learning.

We see professional capital as the key to scaling up change efforts from individuals to groups to schools and districts.

Professional capital is a function of the interaction of three components: human capital, social capital, and decisional capital. For a principal, human capital refers to the human resource or personnel dimension of the quality of teachers in the school — their basic teaching talents. Recruiting and cultivating the skills of individual teachers are one dimension of the principal's role.

Social capital concerns the level of quality and quantity of interactions and relationships among people.

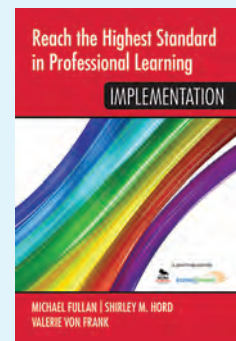
Social capital in a school affects teachers' access to knowledge and information; their senses of expectation, obligation, and trust; and their commitment to work together for a common cause.

Decisional (or decision-making) capital refers to the sum of practice and expertise in making decisions that may be spread across many individuals or groups in a school and its community.

Decisional capital is that which is required for making good decisions — especially decisions about how to put human and social capital to work for achieving the goals of the school.

This three-part conception of professional capital can be used as a way of organizing one's roles in leading learning. In effect, the role of school leaders is to build professional capital across and beyond the school. All three must be addressed explicitly and in combination.

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students **applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.**



#### ABOUT THE BOOK

**Fullan, M., Hord, S.M., & von Frank, V. (2015).** *Reach the highest standard in professional learning: Implementation.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin. Excerpted with permission.

#### ENLIST THE POWER OF THE GROUP

More confirmation of the more powerful alternative of combining human and social capital comes from studies by professor Carrie Leana (2011), a management professor at University of Pittsburgh with strong credentials in learning research. She claims, as I do here, that commonly touted change strategies typically err in trusting too much in the power of individuals to solve educational problems while failing to enlist and capitalize on the power of the group. Just hire great teachers, great principals, and the problem will be solved.

In a straightforward study of elementary schools in New York City, Leana measured only three main variables:

- Human capital — by gathering information on the classroom experience and qualifications of individual teachers;
- Social capital — by asking questions such as, “To what extent do you work with other teachers in the school in a focused collaborative way to improve learning for students?”; and
- Math achievement over a one-year period.

While Leana found that teachers with greater human capital

did get better math results, the teachers who got the greatest gains for their students were good at math teaching and worked with peers regularly to improve what they were doing and what they could learn from each other. She also found that teachers with lower skills who happened to be working in a school with high social capital got better results. The worst scenario was when both human and social capital were low.

Human capital should not be thought of as the main driver for developing the school. While it's true that, in situations where teacher quality is extremely low, bringing in great leaders (high individual human capital) is essential for beginning a turnaround process, little meaningful change results unless and until social capital enables the group to get its act together. Once you get started, social capital (the group) improves individuals more readily than individuals improve the group.

For example, it is very hard for a weak teacher who enters a highly collaborative school to remain there without improving. Conversely, a highly talented individual will not remain in a noncollaborative school for very long. To paraphrase the post-World War I hit about Paris, "How you gonna keep 'em down on the farm, after they seen the farm?!" Good people will not stay at places that are unproductive.

### LET THE GROUP CHANGE THE GROUP

Ultimately, we need both human and social capital, and we need the group to change the group for the better. The principal who spends a lot of time at the individual level, as current strategies demand, has less time to spend fostering group work and thereby building social capital with and among teachers and with the community and other sources of external support. How's the following for a finding?

When principals spent more time building external social capital (with the community, and seeking other sources of ideas), the quality of instruction in the school was higher and students' scores on standardized tests in both reading and math were higher. Conversely, principals spending more time on mentoring and monitoring teachers had no effect on teacher social capital or student achievement. The more effective principals were those who defined their role as facilitators of teacher success rather than instructional leaders (Leana, 2011, p. 35).

Let's not misinterpret the direction that these findings are taking us. The implication is not that principals should abandon the focus on instruction, but rather that they should get at it by working with teachers individually and collectively to develop their professional capital. The press for continuous instructional improvement is central.

There is still a lot of precision to be had — what specific expertise is needed for learning in math, what teams are needed for what tasks, what new pedagogy has students as partners in learning and uses technology to accelerate and deepen learning. The principal is in there by helping the group get that good. The question is what combination of factors will maximize that

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press for most teachers learning and therefore for most students learning.

Schools that invest in both human and social capital and make them interact build the resources required for schoolwide success. They quite simply come to have the wherewithal to accomplish wider and deeper results. The principal's role is to participate as a learner and leader in ensuring that the combined human and social capital forces are devoted to outcomes in a targeted, continuous manner.

Further development on the job is the key. We know that most teachers do not get ongoing feedback about the quality of their teaching. The question, then, is what conditions or processes best serve that purpose. Formal appraisal schemes represent a crude and ineffective method as the main mechanism for giving constructive feedback. How many professions do you know in which formal appraisal looms as the major instrument of improvement?

There are better ways of improving all teachers or of getting rid of the bottom 5% — one of them being strong collaborative cultures (i.e. social capital). If you make culture the main strategy, formal feedback becomes a lot easier. Thus much of the effective feedback becomes built into the day-to-day purposeful interactions of the culture at work. The effective principal participates in shaping the culture of learning. It is more natural, organic, and by definition persistent so that it is more effective. Most teachers want constructive feedback to get better, and most find it lacking in the culture of the profession.

### FEEDBACK FOR GROWTH

In my experience, formal appraisal schemes become counterproductive when people bend over backward to separate coaching from evaluation, for example, by specifying that instructional coaches should give only nonevaluative feedback or by making principals responsible only for formal, consequential evaluation. This separation typically is associated with low-trust cultures. It's there to protect.

But put all the protective mechanisms you want in a low-trust culture, and you will still never get motivated development. All feedback in a sense is evaluative, and when carried out primarily for growth, it results in improvement. If feedback that is acted on is the main point, and surely it should be, then let's see how that can be accomplished best and not make formal

appraisal an end in itself.

Systems can and should “get evaluation right” in the formal sense. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2013) has summarized well the key issues concerning using evaluation to improve teaching. Its TALIS survey of teachers in 25 countries strikes all-too-familiar notes: 22% of the teachers have never had any feedback from their principals (not to mention whether the feedback was valuable from any of those who did get appraised), over 50% have never received feedback from external source, yet 79% of teachers would find constructive feedback helpful.

And, as OECD also found, there are increasingly good formal appraisal frameworks around the world that contain valuable components and standards. The TALIS survey also found that 55% of teachers want more professional learning, but only if it is connected to their growth and implementation of improved practices. Only 33% report that they are engaged in cooperative professional learning communities — that is, collaborative cultures (Weatherby, 2013).

Formal teacher appraisal can never be the main driver of improving the profession. But since most jurisdictions are developing and requiring formal appraisal, let’s position it effectively:

1. Make the appraisal framework sound (based on best standards and efficient ways of assessing them).
2. Underpin its use with a development/improvement philosophy versus an evaluative/punitive stance.
3. Make the learning culture of schools and districts the main event, and integrate any performance appraisal in the service of this shared work.
4. Ensure that professional development/learning is a fundamental ongoing feature of the entire process.
5. Realize that by far the most effective and telling feedback that teachers will get is what is built into the purposeful interaction between and among teachers and the principal. Such interaction is specific to the task of learning. For example, collective analysis of evidence of student learning and the practices that lead to greater learning is at the heart of continuous improvement.

In short, schools should use formal appraisal of human capital to buttress the work of day-to-day improvement but should not expect it to have major impact on organizational learning. For the latter, you need well-led groups working together to make specific changes in instruction tied to student learning.

### TRUST PLUS EXPERTISE

As I suggested earlier, social capital is expressed in the interactions and relationships among the staff of any school that support a common cause. There is no question that a group with plenty of social culture is able to accomplish much more than a group with little — not a correlation, but cause and effect. Interpersonal trust and individual expertise work hand in hand toward better results. Social capital increases your knowledge

because it gives you access to other people’s human capital.

Absence of social capital helps explain why professional development often does not have much effect. Peter Cole (2004) was formerly with the Victoria (Australia) Department of Education and Training and is now a consultant who focuses on professional learning. Who could not be intrigued by the title of his paper: *Professional Development: A Great Way to Avoid Change*, in which he describes how people go to workshops, feel as if they are learning something new, and rarely follow through.

Of course, what matters is what happens after (or between) workshops: Who tries things out? Who supports you? Who gives you feedback? Who picks you up when you make a mistake? Whom else can you learn from? How can you take responsibility for change together? Productive answers to all of these questions depend on the culture to which one returns, especially its social capital.

Cole’s (2012) paper, *Aligning Professional Learning, Performance Management and Effective Teaching*, draws similar conclusions to the case I am making here: Make the culture of the school and the district the main focus, not the qualifications or expertise of individual humans.

Both Bryk et al. (2010) and Leithwood (2011) show that developing the social capital of schools and that of the community forms a powerful combination. When schools work on their own social capital, they are more likely to see parents and the community as part of the solution. When they remain isolated, individualistic cultures, they can easily treat parents as part of the problem, thereby reinforcing a downward spiral.

Decisional capital refers to resources of knowledge, intelligence, and energy that are required to put human and social capital to effective use. It is basically the capacity to choose well and make good decisions. It is best thought of as expertise that grows over time. It should be thought of at both the individual (i.e. a given teacher’s expertise) and group levels (i.e. the collective judgment of two or more teachers).

Like decision making itself, the process of accumulating decisional capital should also be deliberate. In schools, principals must have great decisional capital of their own, but even more of it should reside in the many other individuals and groups of which schools are composed. When human and social capital merge over time, based on the expertise of the people learning through deliberate practice, their professional judgment becomes more powerful.

This decisional form of professional capital can easily be taken for granted, yet it is at the heart of any profession. Working in isolation does not usually increase this type of expertise. Nor does working together automatically increase it. Beware of schools where teachers appear to be working together but mainly run on contrived collegiality, where administrators have mandated professional learning communities (PLCs), or “cozy collaboration,” in which there is little focus and intensity of effort.

Instead, decisional capital is developed through deep learning cultures. Consider an example from outside the field of education. When Liker and Meier (2007), who have studied Toyota over the years, found that Toyota's culture was so effective at continuous learning linked to top performance, they traced this strength to "the depth of understanding among Toyota's employees regarding their work" (p. 112). I prefer to say shared depth.

You don't get depth at a workshop, you don't get it just by hiring great individuals, and you don't get it through congenial relationships. You develop shared depth through continuous learning, solving problems, and getting better and better at what you do. Developing expertise day after day by making learning and its impact the focus of the work is what pays off. Expertise, individual and collective, on a wide basis is what counts.

### FOCUS ON SHARED GOALS

In schools and educational systems, decisional capital is about cultivating human and social capital over time, deliberately identifying and spreading the instructional practices that are most effective for the learning goals of the school. People don't learn these once and for all (and in some cases if at all) in preservice teacher education programs. They learn them best by practicing on the job, having access to coaches and skilled peers.

In education, as in any profession, there are discretionary decisions to make to determine the most effective response to the situation at hand. When a parent puts a difficult question to a teacher who has to consult the manual or check the scripted lesson, you know that teacher is not a professional.

When the school is organized to focus on a small number of shared goals, and when professional learning is targeted to those goals and is a collective enterprise, the evidence is overwhelming that teachers can do dramatically better by way of student achievement. Well-led school-based learning with peers is the best way to learn the fundamentals of teaching — let's call them the nonnegotiable basics.

When University of Melbourne education researcher John Hattie conducted his in-depth research analysis of over 1,000 meta-studies, he did us a favor by identifying the high-impact teaching practices. These practices (e.g. feedback to students, frequent examining and acting on effects of teaching, metacognition where students become self-aware and in control more of their own learning, peer learning among students) are best learned explicitly and with peers.

At the end of the day, says Hattie (2009), expert teachers "can provide defensible evidence of positive impacts of teaching on student learning." You get that way through deliberate practice on a continuous basis, which can be done on one's own but is much more likely to occur if forcefully led and accelerated by the group.

The latter is the only way to foster expertise at scale. If you want to change the group, use the group to change the group. The role of the principal in this endeavor is clear: It is to help

establish challenging goals and corresponding environments "for teachers to critique, question, and support other teachers to reach these goals [that] have the most effect on student outcomes" (p. 83).

In one of his best sellers, *Outliers*, Malcolm Gladwell (2008) made the 10,000-hour rule famous. That figure comes up time and again for individuals trying to become accomplished at their trade: 10,000 hours of deliberate practice over 10 years or more. It is what separates professionals from the rest of us.

I suppose it is obvious that this process can be accelerated when people are learning from each other, and that, equally, it may never succeed (except for the odd genius) if a person simply goes it alone. Teaching is not the kind of profession where staying cloistered will often result in one's achieving personal mastery or ending up having much collective impact.

So it is practice at exercising judgment and a great deal of it that accumulates decisional capital. And power of judgment is sharpened and accelerated when it is mediated through learning with colleagues (social capital).

High-yield strategies become more precise and more embedded when they are developed and deployed in teams that are constantly refining and interpreting them according to impact on students across the school. At the same time, poor judgmental practices and ineffective procedures get discarded along the way. When clear evidence is lacking or conflicting, accumulated collective experience carries much more weight than idiosyncratic experience.

### HOW TO DEVELOP THE BEST LEARNING

Expertise and judgment become all the more critical in time of innovation. The Common Core State Standards represent a potential powerful opportunity or a disaster of titanic proportions, depending on the decisional capital of the teaching force and school leaders. Now that standards and assessments are being spelled out, the difficulty will be how to develop the best learning in relation to the standards.

Some states may very well provide specific directives that strip teachers of the opportunity to make independent judgments. Others may leave it to the discretion of individual teachers, with equally problematic results. In any case, I think it is accurate to say that, at this stage of the evolution of the Common Core, standards are the strongest part of the new direction, assessment is the second strongest, and by far the weakest is curriculum and instruction. This underscores my main conclusion that collaborative cultures focusing on instructional practice are a crucial part of implementing Learning Forward's Implementation standard.

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responses to problems, issues, or needs. Schools or districts often see new programs or interventions as the solution to disproportionality or underrepresentation even before analyzing student data or student needs and posing questions that challenge operating assumptions.

Implementation decisions for school change initiatives should be based on student achievement and participation data, involving educators in collaboratively selecting intervention programs, developing instructional techniques, and designing assessment strategies that reflect student needs. Educators have to be engaged in collaborative conversations and data dialogues as part of their districtwide reform efforts to support all students, parents, and community members.

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