

Reflections on the Change Leadership Landscape

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The ideas presented in this paper are designed to help education leaders lead change and improvement. The paper is supported by practitioner case studies or 'change stories', links to resources offered by the National College and other organisations, as well as opportunities to link with practitioners engaged in change activity. These can be found via the College website www.nationalcollege.org.uk/

What is this paper about?

There is so much written about Change Leadership that it is difficult to see the forest for the trees. In our recent work we have established a new set of underlying assumptions to guide the would-be change leader (Fullan, 2010a, 2010b, and in press). These are:

- Practice drives practice and theory
- The need to focus on a small number of key factors
- The 'speed of quality change' can be greatly accelerated by leaders working across the system

This paper:

- Explains what we mean by the three basic assumptions
- Considers findings on school leadership in a nutshell—not to be exhaustive but to get at the essence of what matters
- Proposes a framework and related learning approach that will help current and future leadership.
- Contains an appendix that applies the framework to several case studies in order to illustrate how it can be used to gain insights about leadership

Who is it for?

While we have drawn heavily on schools research this paper has been developed in collaboration with school heads, middle leaders, children's centres leaders, and system leaders. We have worked with leaders from a range of these settings to create change stories that exemplify these basic assumptions. Moreover, our framework for the leadership of change in practice can link easily to the change work of other agencies across the sector such as the Training and Development Agency, Quality and Curriculum Development Agency and C4EO.

All in all there have been pockets of success in clusters of schools and between schools and families and communities. This has generated specific knowledge about effective leadership within an across institutions. The task now is to clarify the knowledge base, make it more accessible, and create opportunities for current and future leaders to learn from it.

Three Basic Assumptions

We think that the advice to leaders is getting too voluminous, not just in total but also in single sets of advice. We doubt if current effective leaders got successful by studying the research literature including examining good case examples. It is not that the research literature is unhelpful but rather it needs to be put into perspective so that individual change leaders can learn to become more effective in practical, meaningful ways. Our intent is to place the leader in the driver's seat, in charge of their own learning while collaborating with others.

Assumption 1: Practice drives practice and theory

The first premise is that practice drives theory. Asking the question of how to put research into practice is putting the matter the wrong way around. Putting practice front and centre is to pose the question, "now that I am working on a problem how can research including other leaders' practices help me"? Note also the question is not just how can I learn from other leaders' experiences, but how can I make my learning needs the focal point and then expand my learning. Strange as it sounds pursuing research and theory is not the best way to become a better leader. Pursuing your own and other practices, informed by research and theory is a much better bet. Effective leaders learn from their work and from other leaders—and sometimes learning is from seeing what doesn't work as much as what does. This assumption is at the heart of the professional learning purpose of this paper and the online learning resources that accompanies it.

Assumption 2: Focus on a small number of key factors

Second, there are a small number of core leadership qualities that characterize the effective learning leader. Thus our proposed framework will identify a set of powerful interrelated factors (five to be precise). In helping policy makers and practitioners bring about change at the school, area and whole system level we have found that focusing on a small number of high leverage factors is

the best and most effective way to get substantial improvement. Leaders who integrate core factors, pursue them resolutely, and stay on message are more likely to be successful.

Assumption 3: We can greatly accelerate the pace of change by leaders working together across the system

Third, 'the speed of quality change' is characteristic of the new leadership we are capturing. The idea here is to help leaders focus on a small number of key priorities (goals and strategies), do them well with relentless consistency, and get success that begets more success. Effective change becomes both deeper and more widespread when leaders work with other leaders within their organisations and across schools, agencies and in the system as a whole. At Debden Park High School, for instance, the support of a National Leader of Education has stimulated speedy improvement.

"Debden Park High School provides an outstanding quality of education for its student. The school was the subject of special measures following its inspection in January 2007. One of Her Majesty's Inspectors removed the school from this category in October 2007, after one monitoring visit...The improvement since the last inspection has been significant and much of the school's work is now exemplary...The school's success is a product of the very effective senior leadership team. Under the direction of an exceptional head teacher, and with considerable strategic support from the Kemnal Trust [an NSS], the school has become outstandingly effective." (Ofsted, Debden Park High School)

In literacy and numeracy in Ontario we have also seen cases where schools have moved from terrible to very good within one year, and certainly within three by focusing and linking with other schools. In our work across Ontario and the U.S we examined 6 districts that have improved substantially in virtually all schools in the district (districts with between 15 and 190 schools) within 3 or 4 three years. Ontario as a system (2 million students, 4900 schools, 72 LAs) improved significantly within three years.

Leaders, in other words, should look for and learn from examples of high quality change that show substantial improvement in fairly short periods of time.

Change Leadership - Findings From Schools Research in a Nutshell

In this section we sample the best and clearest findings on effective school leadership in order to understand the key knowledge that leaders might need. There is encouraging consistency here that enables us to zero in on the essentials. The recent work by Tony Bryk et al, Viviane Robinson et al, and Chris Day et al, Ken Leithwood and Robert Hill and Peter Matthews are all excellent cases in point.

Tony Bryk and his colleagues have been tracing the progress of more than 500 Chicago Public Schools involved since 1989 in the well-funded Consortium on Chicago Schools Research. In their latest book, *Organizing schools for improvement* they compare 100 elementary schools that had experienced significant progress on student achievement over time with 100 matched schools that were stagnant or declining (there are some 440 elementary schools within Chicago's system). In brief, the 100 successful schools had five characteristics that the unsuccessful schools did not - one 'driver' and four things the driver did, namely:

- School leadership (the principal) who works collaboratively on four supports:
- Parent and community ties
- Professional capacity of staff that develops knowledge, skills and professional learning communities of teachers
- A student centred learning climate
- Instructional focus including curriculum alignment and targeted resources

These key foci are consistent with core activities in the National College change stories; but they are missing one key component. Because Bryk et al's research only examined intra school development they did not address, school-to-school or school-to-district relationships. In other words they did not examine 'system leadership'. Incidentally there was no clear system development strategy in Chicago and that is why they only got 100 schools being successful instead of 440 (high schools did not improve much, but that is another story). In any case Bryk helps with some clear, longitudinal findings compatible with our change stories.

Second, Vivianne Robinson and colleagues recently completed an impressive "Best evidence synthesis" study of 'School leadership and student outcomes: identifying what works and why'. They found five key leadership behaviours, one of which was twice as powerful as the other four:

- Establishing goals and expectations
- Resourcing strategically
- Planning, coordinating and evaluating teaching and learning
- Promoting and participating in teaching and learning
- Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment

The one that was twice as powerful was number four: the degree to which the principal participated as a *learner* in helping teachers figure out how to make improvements (our italics). We see strong overlap with Bryk, although once again we see the limitation of just examining intra-school phenomenon. Significantly the new reality of school leaders is to engage with the outside, indeed to make the outside part and parcel of the inside.

Third, other prominent researchers both individually in their work (Chris Day, Pam Sammons, David Hopkins and colleagues in the UK; and Ken Leithwood et al in North America), and together in a recent major report, *The impact of school leadership on pupil*

outcomes drew similar conclusions. They identified eight leadership components:

- Defining the vision
- Improving conditions for teaching and learning
- Redesigning organisational structures, roles and responsibilities
- Evaluating teaching and learning
- Redesigning and enriching the curriculum
- Enhancing teacher quality
- Establishing relationships within the school community
- Building relationships outside the school community

Again, these conclusions are essentially compatible others we cited, but with more emphasis on the outside or system factors. Concerning the latter, because much of the wider literature on change leadership focuses on intra-school development we need to highlight the growing importance of outward-facing leadership and system leadership. We use the two terms interchangeably although we recognize that there are different subforms—some in small federations; others involving peer cultures; still others contributing to national system improvement; and increasingly those pertaining to multiagency forms of leadership in joined up children's services.

Thus, one of the most powerful recent forms of leveraging leadership consists of 'system leadership'. Robert Hill and Peter Matthews have written about how struggling schools progress fastest when they are supported by excellent leaders "who, as it were, moored their outstanding school alongside one that was marooned or sinking and offloaded systems, skills and expert practitioners to get it moving in the right direction" (Schools Leading Schools II – Title TBC – June 2010).

Hill & Matthews received the evidence of the National College's work with National (and Local) Leaders of Education since 2006. National Leaders of Education (NLEs) are different to support models that rely on 'consultants' or 'advisers' who have left the front-line of school leadership because they draw on the capacity of their own schools (National Support Schools (NSSs) and current practice or skills of their senior and idle leaders and expert teachers whose contribution to achieving improvement is fundamental.

There are currently 380 NLEs who have supported over 500 schools since the first NLEs were appointed in 2006. The National College plans to have 500 NLEs support the system by the end of 2011. There is strong evidence that this approach is helping to significantly improve Primary, Secondary and Special schools.

For the 55 Secondary schools we have evidence over two years or more, the average rate of improvement is over five times the national average. There was significant improvement in over half of these schools. Of the 27 Primary schools we have data for, the average rate of improvement was over four times the national average. And the 14 lower attaining Primary schools all improved, by an average of over 25 per cent.

The impact of NLEs has not been confined to improvements in exam performance. Hill and Matthews show that NLEs are:

- Developing and extending support for primary and school improvement;
- Contributing to the development of academies;
- Developing federations, trusts and chains or accredited groups of schools based on their improvement methodology;
- Helping to establish the concept of national teaching schools; and
- Developing strategic and advanced system leadership skills and contributing to policy development through the NLE Fellow programme.

In addition, Local Leaders of Education (LLEs) have evolved from being a means to support schools in the three City Challenge areas of London, the Black Country and Greater Manchester to being a national resource and an important part of the school improvement landscape with strong evidence of success (Peter Matthews 2010, Good to great evaluation of the National Challenge).

We filmed two very clear examples of this recently. One concerned a federation in Hackney specifically that specifically and successfully demonstrates a case in which the Local Authority through its Learning Trust supports a small federation of initially two schools which in addition to supporting each other also helps turnaround other Special Measures schools through agreements. It is very clear that the leaders in these schools are committed outside their own schools, and are talent spotting and developing other leaders who are committed to working in this manner (Fullan, unpublished video).

Another example of outward facing leadership can be seen in Tower Hamlets. School heads across the authority have strong mutual allegiance. They are quick to say and to act in ways that recognize that helping each other is both a moral and a practical virtue. School heads and local authority leaders attribute the success of the authority to the strong peer support culture in the system. Tower Hamlets has gone from being one of the poorest performing authorities in the country to equal to or above the national average on virtually all measures of achievement (Fullan, unpublished video).

In sum, if we take the literature on leadership as cited in this section we believe that the core qualities of effective change leadership are clear and small in number. Further there are many strong examples in evidence in school and school system improvement including a growing number of examples of multi-agency partnerships. In all cases our reading of the change leader landscape indicates that practice, not research per se is the liberator, and thus we have to figure out how to engage current and

future leaders in improving *their practice*.

Change Leadership in Practice: A framework for action

Taking all of the above we have developed an integrated five-factor framework that we believe is inclusive of the domain knowledge; and which is amenable to learning how to become better at the work, for example through examining informative case studies, and through applying the ideas to one's own development and change situation (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Change Leadership in Practice: A framework for action



Our aim is to provide leaders with a mental navigation tool that will help guide thinking, learning and action. Because we want it to be something you can hold in your head it is simple and visual. As we go about our business of leading really effective change, we can (in the moment) keep a mental check on which element(s) of the framework we are addressing. We can use the framework to analyse others' practice (either through reading our change stories or as we work alongside other leaders) as we learn to become better leaders of change (see Appendix 1). We might even use it to help review our formal leadership development or the research literature we are reading.

The five components described by the framework are deeply interrelated: moral purpose, core business, organisational improvement, developing others and outward facing. We treat moral purpose, and the core business of teaching and learning and children's services as one factor that stands at the heart of all activities. In order to realise moral purpose and the core work of improvement a third set of enablers must be addressed that concern the organisational conditions under which development best occurs. Fourth, for the organisation to move forward leaders must be engaged in developing others. This collaborative or distributive leadership is essential to success. Fifth, there is strong evidence that outward facing system participation and leadership is required in order to create conditions for sustained improvement. The whole framework is best activated through the continuous professional learning on the part of leaders engaged in working on their own change challenges and learning from others.

The bottom line is that leaders who exemplify the framework in action generate greater school, community and system improvement

Moral Purpose and Core Business

We start with the centrepiece that concerns the overarching commitment to the moral purpose of serving all children. It is a 'raise the bar and close the gap' commitment that should govern all activities. The next ring consists of the core work of accomplishing moral purpose for all. It is the essential business or 'calling' of serving all children. It includes the essence of teaching and learning and the work of children's services including the integration of the two components. Thus, the essential practices that focus on the development of children are centred here: personalized learning, assessment practices, teaching and learning activities, support for pre-schoolers and their families, and the like.

Organisational Improvement

The rest of the framework is about what leaders need to do 'realize' success. The research we sited earlier can be boiled down to

three interrelated elements. Organisational improvement involves the structures, conditions and circumstances that make the work more efficient and effective. Within this cluster are: acquiring resources, communication throughout, student behaviour and climate, embedded planning time, leadership structures, and so on.

Developing Others

Developing others is based on the powerful research and practice findings that effective leaders build the capabilities of others. This includes leaders developing other leaders through mentoring, courses, daily feedback and work together. Developing others also includes focusing on the quality of all people from the selection process onwards—teachers, childcare workers, support staff, caretakers, parents.

Outward Facing

Third, outward facing is about wider leadership involvement. It relates to participation in and contribution to multi-agency coordination, learning networks, federations, and national leadership. This domain also deals with how effective heads address multiple external demands, initiatives, policies and so on. It is one of the most powerful new leadership developments we have seen in the past five years.

Professional Learning

We think this framework is a concise and complete rendering of what change leaders face in the schools and children's centres. The question is 'how can leaders learn the ideas and skills embedded in the actions within the framework'. This takes us to the outer ring of the framework, *professional learning*. There are two dimensions of professional learning which we label: *Tackling change challenges*, and *Self-learning*. To be specific, change leaders should constantly cycle back and forth from between understanding and acting on the change challenges in their context, to reflecting on their own qualities as a professional and human being (e.g., how leaders model self-awareness or positive regard to others).

The National College web pages associated with this paper provide further examples and links to material that support each of these elements. The web resources also provide 'change stories' and commentaries reflecting the change journeys of leaders from a range of different contexts (middle leaders, headteachers and children centre leaders). You will also find a 'protocol' to help you construct and analyse your own change story. The learning protocol will help you think through your own change challenge either by yourself or in interaction with others. You will also be able to analyse other change cases provided online in order to gain further insights into change leaders. All these resources can be found online at [HYPERLINK "http://www.nationalcollege.org/changeXXXX"](http://www.nationalcollege.org/changeXXXX) www.nationalcollege.org/changeXXXX.

In Appendix 1 we have provided several applications of the framework to case studies in the National College's resources for promoting online professional learning.

In Conclusion

In sum, the elements of the framework in Figure 1 are closely interrelated. All five components have to be fused in action. As we have suggested and illustrated the framework should be used as an aid for learning about your own leadership. Leaders develop best if they examine others' change stories, as well as their own change challenge situations, in order to understand change, identify specific challenges, diagnose the needs of the organisation, and carry out and learn from action.

It should be clear that everyone should and can exercise and improve his or her own leadership. This is no time to feel that only other seemingly accomplished leaders can solve our problems. Opportunities for improving our change leadership capacities are accessible to all of us.

Appendix I

Case Study Application of Figure 1: Change Leadership in Practice: A framework for action

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