

## WHERE ARE WE GOING AND WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?

Education has traditionally operated from the premise of the “great man theory,” that is, the superintendent and principal are the formal leaders. Yet more and more literature is being written about teachers as leaders and distributive leadership, concepts that empower others in schools, such as teachers, to make important decisions regarding school issues. But how can teachers be expected to function effectively as leaders if they don’t have appropriate background on the research and evolution of leadership theory? All effective leaders need to have a context for their leadership work. What is the contemporary thinking about how leaders function using a process that aligns with followers?

## WHAT, NO SILVER BULLET?

The 21st century is about innovation in a global, flat, digital, information-laden, and knowledge-based world economy. Yet what passes as innovation in education isn’t normally transformational or related to “breakthrough” and doesn’t always result in real improvement. Additionally, really successful innovative educational practices rarely become known to all educators who could benefit from using them. This is because there is no effective dissemination process that transcends every district and school in the United States to communicate innovative products, programs, and practices. What is interesting to note is that even sports fans are using innovative thinking and technology to create a national network to connect them and distribute information about their teams. They are creating SportsBlog Nation, and it is intended to cover almost all sports, leagues, teams, and players (Hart, 2009).

Just think about this. Medicine has produced some incredible innovations that transformed the profession in profound ways with amazing results for patients. The laser transformed modern corrective vision surgery, and scalpels are now a tool of the past. The laser for correcting vision has made eye surgery faster, safer, less expensive, less intrusive, and more effective and has reduced recovery time. In orthopedic surgery, Dr. Bryan Neal, my wife’s doctor who treated her when she broke her wrist, said that hip and knee replacement have transformed the lives of those who have had these procedures. Without the innovation of that type of surgery, including the replacement parts, patients would be required to live their lives with considerable pain.

Where are the parallels in education? Educators are still looking for the innovative silver bullet that will solve some of the most challenging problems related to accountability compliance requirements. It won’t come

interactive whiteboard. I discuss what Toyota and Pacific Learning and others have done with the hope that their ideas can be transferred to school innovation initiatives.

## CHAPTER 4

Chapter 4 is a summary of my final thoughts and conclusions on compliance, leadership, and innovation. From the words of my CEO, Gina Burkhardt, who introduced the importance of linking these three topics, I have attempted to articulate a realistic approach to how they can be implemented in a 21st-century education environment. A brief essay of summary comments is provided by Gina at the end of Chapter 4.

## SUMMARY

This book is an attempt to triangulate compliance, leadership, and innovation. Using these three important but somewhat disconnected concepts, I hope to offer a framework for their use and for those who want to lead improvement initiatives in a compliance-driven environment. This is not a long book filled with pages upon pages of information. Instead, it is a thin book filled with ideas that I hope will be used in professional study groups as the first step in the process of working on school improvement initiatives. I don't offer a book of recipes, but rather the context for getting started. Leadership is a critically important component of school improvement, but it is often overlooked. I hope this book will encourage education leaders to think with a compliance, leadership, and innovation mindset. Mental models, those pictures in the minds of leaders about how things should look, are known to be helpful when working on complex problems. This book should be the foundation for teams to discuss the key issues in order to make substantive improvements in their organizations while addressing the challenges of complying with federal laws and other regulation-driven requirements. The concepts are based on three critical ideas for leading schools or other organizations to a point at which they will be conceptually prepared to meet the needs of the next generation of students and workers. While most adults currently working in the education infrastructure have been trained in traditional delivery models of instruction, today's students are digital natives. They form their own online social communities using sites such as Facebook, they communicate digitally using cell phones and text messaging, they maintain their music and pictures digitally and even take online courses offered through accredited schools. All of this can be done without ever having to leave the confines of their homes. These evolving trends will be critical to complying, leading, and innovating in schools and workplaces that meet the needs of their stakeholders.

These key points about what leadership involves are informative for school leaders. Accepting personal responsibility is important for all educators who are leading a project. Integrity is a personal characteristic that has received considerable attention lately, particularly with business leaders whose moral compass led them to lose sight of the fact that people placed great trust in them. Followers lost a lot of their financial security because of egregious leadership behavior that lacked integrity.

Most leadership work today involves change. Understanding the process of how to lead change is essential for successful school improvement initiatives. In their book *The Heart of Change*, John Kotter and Dan Cohen (2002) provide a good eight-step model for leading change:

- Increase urgency.
- Build the guiding team.
- Get the vision right.
- Communicate for buy-in.
- Empower action.
- Create short-term wins.
- Don't let up.
- Make change stick.

Now let's return to Daft's (2008) final four elements of leadership: shared purpose, followers, influence, and intention. Since contemporary thinking about leadership focuses on it as a process of influencing others, leaders must create a shared purpose for their followers. Which brings us to the next point: if one is going to lead, then there need to be followers. And gaining followers and creating a shared purpose will require the ability to influence the group to buy in to the leadership vision. Finally, it has to be the intent of the leader and followers to accept responsibility for the ultimate success of their undertaking.

It would seem logical to conclude that an acceptable definition of leadership is that it is a process of influencing others to collectively follow with sincere commitment a vision that will achieve results. The process is collaborative and empowering to all who are involved, and a team mindset keeps everyone equally engaged in the process.

One premise of this book is that teachers must be part of the leadership team in schools. This premise incorporates the notion that they have the power and authority to do what they are asked without becoming mired down in an overwhelming burden of bureaucratic rules and procedures. The role that teachers will be given necessitates that they receive the appropriate leadership training to do the work. It is generally safe to assume that when teachers are asked to lead education projects, they are expected to do it based on their experience and not whether they have had any training in leadership.

School leaders have traditionally emerged from higher education programs that prepared them for their leadership positions, programs that

The TQ Center also says to be careful not to do the following:

- Withhold, control, or limit power from teachers who are involved in decision making appropriate to their experience, knowledge, and expertise.
- Devalue the work and efforts made by teacher leaders.
- Place teachers in isolated rather than in collaborative situations.
- Focus on micromanaging the details instead of providing the big picture and supporting the larger goal. (National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, 2007, p. 5)

From preservice teachers who are participating in the teacher leadership seminar at Messiah College to the harsh comments in the Institute of Education Leadership Task Force Report to the recommendations of the TQ Center, it is apparent that much more can and should be done to promote real leadership opportunities for teachers in schools.

## Professional Learning Teams

The final topic to discuss in terms of the transformation of education leadership is professional learning teams, which can make significant contributions to the success of an organization. We operate in a knowledge- and information-focused society, so the task of these teams is to ensure that organizational knowledge is continuously being updated. Teams require leaders, and professional learning teams in schools can be ideally led by teachers. But it is important to recognize that the teams must focus on building knowledge and not on the process of team formation. That task belongs to the team leader, and that leader should have the proper training, resources, and authority to lead the team.

It is clear that any change in a school must be accepted, appreciated and nurtured by the principal. In the case of professional learning communities, accepting, appreciating and nurturing change may be a difficult challenge for some principals, because one of the defining characteristics of professional learning communities is that power, authority and decision making are shared and encouraged. (Hord & Sommers, 2008, p. 10)

The concept of learning teams is not really new. Peter Senge (2000) discusses learning organizations in *Schools That Learn*: “It is becoming clear that schools can be re-created, made vital, and sustainably renewed not by fiat or command, and not by regulation, but by taking a learning orientation” (p. 5). One wonders why, after nearly 10 years, this notion proposed by Senge is still not a common practice in schools.

routines. The paper clip was also a practical innovation and is still commonly used by people who want to organize and hold their papers together. These ideas are truly metaphors for what might emerge from education innovation teams.

In this section, I describe a framework for organizing a district or school innovation team that can easily be modified to fit a variety of contexts (see Figure 3.3). It is not intended as something that must be rigidly followed, but instead it should be used to implement a process that will lead to innovative

**Figure 3.3** The Process of Innovation

