ABOUT MICHAEL FULLAN AND KEN LEITHWOOD

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HOW THE ROLE IS EVOLVING

As we look ahead into the 21st century, how do you think the role of the education leader is evolving?

KL: One shift that I think most people would quickly point to is the increasing accountability that leaders – both school and district – now have. This encompasses the expectation that education leaders are ultimately responsible for how well students are doing and the extent to which achievement is improving. So that's one of the biggest changes, I think, over the past 15 years, this context of accountability, and the need to assess the extent to which goals are being reached.

The second biggest change, especially here in Ontario, is the degree to which education leaders feel responsible for taking action quite directly to a fairly substantial and well-specified set of goals from the ministry. And along with that, the ministry's work over the past eight years has moved away from what is a fairly common approach in western nations – which is to be clear about goals but leave the means to those in the field instead – toward an approach in which it takes upon itself the role of helping to ensure that people are using the best available means to accomplish those goals. So depending on where you sit at any given moment, it may feel quite prescriptive or it may feel very encouraging.

Why this evolution in particular, toward greater collaboration to thinking beyond our own schools to the system as a whole?

MF: Well, one of the reasons the principal has to develop the whole school is the big finding that schools do well when teachers work in a purposeful way – focusing on instructional improvement and student achievement and well-being. If teachers are to work together successfully, the leader has to help

To add to Michael's comment about teachers working in a purposeful way, we also know that teachers' commitment to their work, teachers' feelings of cohesion among themselves including positive school climate, really depend on having clarity about the focus of their work and their role in it.

MF: Absolutely. And then moving out from there to the big picture – in the same way, but on a bigger scale – we've also realized that we can't depend on changing one school here or one school there. We need what we've come to call "whole system

Certainly there have been struggles in making the transition from classroom and school autonomy toward transparency. One difficulty centres on the fact that teachers may be unsure about how their contributions will be judged, and the other is that they simply may not feel they have the experience or capacity to work as part of a team. So our work in Ontario has been to show teachers that if they step outside the classroom and work collaboratively with other teachers – and if the process is effectively-led and focused – they can actually gain a great deal as well as contribute a great deal. Sometimes people have to experience this kind of collaboration to believe in it. But once they have some successful experiences with good collaboration it soon becomes the new norm.

This brings us to the current emphasis on the principal as instructional leader. How do principals effectively balance this role with what some describe as organizational leadership?

KL: It's important to say upfront that there has been a preoccupation in the language with the term "instructional leadership." I actually think it would be a step forward to stop using the term because the role of the school leader involves so much more than that term would suggest.

In the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 (OLF), we have embedded what some people call an integrated model of leadership – one that combines

leadership practices that are often referred to as “transformational” with those that have been termed “instructional.” And I think above and beyond those two we also have organizational leadership. Because of course we appreciate that principals are running organizations. And they face the same challenges that any leader running an organization would face.

So clearly, principals have all the demands of budgets and timetables and other operational tasks to manage in ways that contribute to growth within the organization.

But in the final analysis, whether a principal or a director of education, leaders have responsibility for improving student learning. So I would say whatever it is leaders do that results in greater learning we can call instructional leadership if that’s the term of the day. But in fact we know that both school and system leaders are doing a lot of other things that are indirectly – but importantly – linked to

MF: Well in some ways I’d be more worried, if there were less attention on instruction than on the broader question of running the organization. I would rather err on the side of too much instruction than on too much running of the organization.

But in terms of making sure both are done, I think it is the case that we do want instructional leadership to be the primary focus. And on an operational level, principals often get drawn into the nuts and bolts of running the school, and what can get lost in the shuffle is the focus on student learning.

So we need to address this. For one thing, as I alluded to before, principals need not be – and should not be – doing all this alone. They need to be mobilizing staff so that a lot of the work is done by the staff collectively, and not solely by the leader. So one role of the principal is to facilitate this and make it possible.

And of course there are many other things that impinge on the learning agenda such as the climate or culture of the school, behavioural management –

The way we've dealt with it is consistent with the research, and with the highest performing systems like Singapore and Finland. What we've been saying is, "oka223ka223hrrv cenhh5(the identi4een 4ypg sense of identity indnseeMC 02 / ƃ identity indnseeMC 02 / ƃ d896 /Lang

that, we have processes in place in which people learn laterally – within schools, within clusters of schools, across districts and so on.

So that's what we've done. What the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) recommends is that a certain degree of autonomy is essential, because people need to have ownership, and the creativity that goes with it. But as I mentioned earlier, too much autonomy and you're left alone. There aren't enough checks and balances. There isn't enough stimulation. And there isn't enough accountability.

So essentially what we've said is, "there will be a lot of autonomy, we will not be judgmental, and we will not be ordering you around. But in exchange for autonomy, we want two things: transparency of practice, and results." And we've also said, "we want you to contribute, not just to your narrow piece of the system, but outward from wherever you are."

When you can achieve that balance, a healthy level of autonomy, some central direction, but not prescription around how to do it – rather, the identification of good practice through transparency – then I think people come to an increased sense of identity in the system. They identify with the larger enterprise and therefore they contribute, and want to contribute.

KL: Yes, and I'd add to this the fact that it's politics. So I think of politics as the power of the leader to have a healthy organizational climate, and to deal with the resistance they may encounter.

Your comments about the challenges of leading change and the inevitable resistance that results bring us to the question of the attributes that are essential to effective leadership. In the Ontario Leadership Framework 2012 (OLF) these are identified as "personal leadership resources." Can these traits, especially those referred to as psychological resources, be learned?

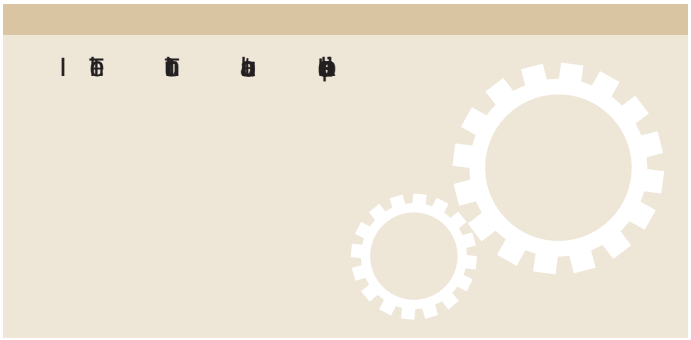
KL: The OLF 2012 identifies three psychological resources that are embedded in the framework, referred to as optimism, resilience and efficacy. And they're there because they are supported by considerable evidence. There are others that could also have been included, but they are supported by less evidence. And so yes, one question we need to ask is, to what extent can these be learned, or do we simply have to select people who already possess these attributes, if they are as important as we think they are.

And I think the answer is that they are learnable, but not as quickly and not as easily as more obvious skills and knowledge.

MF: Yes, I agree that they are learnable. People are not necessarily born with those qualities. But in the first 20 years of life they may well develop them. So in that sense, in your criteria for selection, you're looking for people who have those qualities.

But then I think you can also train those qualities through role modelling and mentoring – and through working with other leaders who have those traits. You can role model what I would call "true grit." It's about not giving up. It's about staying on a problem, not being too rigid in how you approach the problem, looking for creative ways to deal with it. And certainly we can role model that, we can see leaders who are effective, who have worked their way through very difficult circumstances, through their persistence, through their optimism, through their sense of efficacy.

And this goes back again to the role of the leader in developing other leaders. I am a leader, and I have those qualities, and I see my role as training other leaders in the school to be effective. And of course, I'm also role modelling day to day for my vice-principal and my teacher leaders, and all teachers for that matter. I'm going to role model, naturally, because that's who I am. I'm also going to be conscious of how to cultivate those traits in others, by giving feedback, by supporting others when they are having difficulty, by making explicit what we're doing in the school, and so forth. And so our job is to look for, identify, role model, develop and reinforce those qualities. Our job is to develop leaders as we develop as leaders ourselves.



KL: One of the features of these qualities, also, is that in my view they are mutually reinforcing. That is, they are sides of a three-sided coin. Develop one and you are simultaneously developing the others. Right now, we know the most about how to develop self-efficacy on the part of leaders. There is a very well-developed theory of self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Albert Bandura is the person who has done the most work on this, and we know that mastery experiences, for example, are among the most powerful ways to build efficacy.

So we can certainly develop efficacy on the part of aspiring or active school leaders by putting them in circumstances that give them lots of learning opportunities, without undue risk of failure. That means, as Michael mentioned, working on the job with someone who becomes a mentor whether officially or unofficially, working with somebody who models good leadership practices and models confidence, moving forward in the job, without much self-doubt. And as people begin to acquire more of those capacities, their sense of efficacy about what they will be able to accomplish down the road begins to grow.

stepping out in front of the band, advocating for something dramatically new to take place, you're probably looking at someone with a lot of psychological resources. Promote them quickly before they leave and go to some other system!

MF: The core here, I think, is encouraging and

So what's different about just adding up the capacity of the individual units in the organization and saying, "we're contributing to district capacity as a whole?". I think the answer to that question lies in how people – the individual units or people in the organization – relate to one another. And the goal, of course, of organizational learning is to make the whole larger than the sum of its parts.

We've all experienced a meeting, for example, where we bounce ideas off one another, and as a result of those ideas bouncing around, a new idea pops out. Sometimes we don't know where the good idea came from, but it's likely that no single individual within the group would have thought of it. So there's something about the pattern of relationships that occur within groups of people that can sometimes be greater than the sum of the parts.

And so when you say you want to build district capacity, I think you want to do two things: you want to build the individual capacity of the people and units within the district and you want to build the capacity of those people to work together productively. I don't think it's any more complicated than that.

[illegal] conversations, if they're listening to one another and thinking about their own ideas in relation to the ideas of others, and they're being stimulated intellectually by their colleagues, eventually something emerges which is greater than the sum of the parts.

MF: And this is an area in which we've had many lessons in the past. For example, individual schools in a district have become highly innovative, but they are islands. It's atomistic. There is excellence, but it's here and there. So what that means ultimately is that they come and they go. Yes, there is innovation but something changes two years later, or five years later, and things go back to their original state. And then another innovative school pops up elsewhere. So you get a broken front – and you never get a genuine coalescing the whole district.

And that's why here in Ontario we've said that we're not actually focusing on school culture, we're focusing on district culture. And by district culture, we include district leadership of course, but also the 200 schools in the district. And so once you define what you're looking for as change in the culture of the district, in substantive terms, it means that there are different relationships developed between district leadership and school leadership. That's one dimension of the culture change – it amounts to a shift to a two-way partnership.

Another shift is that there is a fostering of learning from each other. That's the horizontal, lateral learning that builds up mutual commitment of people to each other, to schools, to principals, and so on. It gives you access to ideas from other people in the system. So you can see what's happening in this example. Once you change the culture of the district, when you have two-way dialogue between the district and the schools, when schools interact with each other, and when the agenda is improved student achievement through collaboration, once you change that, then that new culture has stability and a continuity of its own.

that they realize not one of them actually wanted to do that. The person who made the suggestion says, “I was just throwing out an idea. I didn’t actually want to do it.” And another person who agreed to go says, “I didn’t want to do it either but I didn’t want to insult you by saying no.” And, you know, on it goes. So there has to be something within

KL: I would say that more autonomy for people to work on these issues would certainly help. As we've discussed, the problem with moving to a more prescriptive mode is that the more you prescribe things, the more you're responsible if they fail. That is, "You said this would work and it didn't. It's your problem. I did what you told me to do." If you feel autonomous, that's not your reaction to failure. Your reaction to failure is to make it work, because you feel it's your responsibility. You took it on. It was something you felt needed to be done and something you believed you could do.

So I think we need to create a greater sense of autonomy for this larger mission, using the resources that are available at the ministry. Those resources are very substantial and very sophisticated – as resources, not as sources of prescription. For example, we've involved leaders in the OLE, which has been developed as a resource for the leader's own, more autonomous work. It's a starting point but not the endpoint. The endpoint is when you've accomplished the goal you have in mind.

And so, I think innovation really does depend on people feeling a strong sense of both autonomy and responsibility for the mission, and for devising ways to accomplish the mission, and a sense of shared

What I think is converging here, and this is where

of technology 24/7. I think another key here will be to create learning experiences that are steeped in real-life problem solving.

KL: I think quite closely connected to that, and something that will be very challenging, is moving beyond what we currently consider to be an important set of outcomes for schooling, and toward more sophisticated expressions of those goals – toward something more ambitious, something that aspires to place our students, when they graduate, in positions of global leadership in the future.

Nobody is quite clear on what those capacities will look like, but it does strike me that this is going to be the next big challenge facing not only school and district leaders but probably provincial leaders as well – working out what those purposes should be, working out what our image in the province is of the educated person in that global environment, and redesigning our schools and districts in a way that holds some possibility of accomplishing that for our students.

schools, and building on that knowledge and feeding it back to their colleagues.

I think a big challenge, then, to sum this up, is to capture the good practices that are in place at the present time, make them very explicit, synthesize them the best we can, compare them to the more systematic research evidence that's available, and make that the basis for the leadership practices at the next stage.

I think it has to be much more synthetic, if you like, than it has been in the past. It's not simply the research community figuring out what good people are doing and then telling everybody else. That won't do it. We already know what that looks like and it's not going to change very much going forward.

So I think leadership right now, as Michael alludes to, is more about taking control over improving your own practices, but in a larger context. Along with this is a sense of responsibility not only for the students in your school but also for the improvement of all the children and youth in your district, and maybe in the province as well. This means expanding our horizons. That, I think, is what the future is about.