

P R E F A C E

The more complex society becomes and the more we experience rapid, unpredictable, nonlinear change in our organizations and our world, the more sophisticated leadership must become. Complexity means change, and the pace of change is increasing, as James Gleick, the author who introduced the concept of chaos into popular parlance, points out in *Faster: The Acceleration of Just About Everything* (1999).

Today's leaders face a dilemma: failing to act when the environment is radically changing leads to extinction, yet making quick decisions under conditions of seeming chaos can be equally fatal. Robert Sternberg says: "The essence of intelligence would seem to be in knowing when to think and act quickly, and knowing when to think and act slowly" (cited in Gleick, 1999, p. 114).

If we understand change better, we will be able to influence (but not control) it for the better. This workbook is intended to help leaders and leaders in training to focus on specific, key capabilities that will allow them to lead effectively under conditions of rapid, nonlinear change. It also deals with how to foster leadership in others: to encourage learning, commitment, and responsibility at all levels of the organization—a practice that is needed if our organizations are to survive the challenges of today's complex world.

Knowledge about what creates success under conditions of complexity is getting better. In addition, we have more case examples of large-scale organizational

reform and transformation, which yield valuable insights. The information in this workbook draws from experiences in both business and educational organizations. Not surprisingly, there is remarkable convergence in what we are discovering about how to lead in a culture of complex change. No matter what the setting is, leaders and organizations must attend to and develop five core themes, or capabilities, if they are to be successful: moral purpose, understanding change, relationship building, knowledge creation and sharing, and coherence making.

The leadership required in a culture of rapid change is not straightforward. Leaders must be able to operate under complex, uncertain circumstances. Thus, I dedicated *Leading in a Culture of Change* (Fullan, 2001a) to a chaos theory concept: “wildness lies in wait.” Bernstein (1996) quotes G. K. Chesterton: “The real trouble with this world of ours is not that it is an unreasonable world, or even that it is a reasonable one. The commonest kind of trouble is that it is nearly reasonable, but not quite. Life is not an illogicality; yet it is a trap for logicians. It looks just a little more mathematical and regular than it is; its exactitude is obvious, but its inexactitude is hidden; its wildness lies in wait” (p. 331).

It’s not a bad mantra for leaders in complex times: seek out and honor hidden inexactitudes.

August 2003
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

Michael Fullan