

Chapter One

Changing Paradigms

The revolution we are in is first and foremost a revolution of the total situation. It is not just new kinds of problems and opportunities that we are facing, but whole new contexts within which these problems and opportunities reside.

—PETER VAILL (1989, pp. 2–3)

The fallacy of rationalism is the assumption that the social world can be altered by logical argument. The problem, as George Bernard Shaw observed, is that “reformers have the idea that change can be achieved by brute sanity.”

—MICHAEL FULLAN (1991, p. 96)

At a conference on school reform, the principal of an urban high school, unable to contain himself, burst out, “We’ve spent all morning discussing which changes are best. In my school, we have too many problems hurting too many kids. We need to change everything—now!”

Many critics of our schools would agree. The rhetoric of school improvement is relentlessly assertive. Advocates may differ sharply about which changes are needed, but most share a common conviction that radical change is both crucial and possible. No matter how complex the problem they diagnose or how dismal the history of previous efforts to treat it, they have a remedy. Indeed, it often seems that the greater the dilemma, the greater their expectations for change. At its best, this combination of impatience and confidence can stimulate and sustain exceptional effort in the face of

imposing obstacles. But it also overlooks fundamental truths of human psychology and organizational behavior, and it flies in the face of experience.

Organizational change—not just in schools, but in institutions of all kinds—is riddled with paradox. We study it in ever greater depth, but we practice it with continuing clumsiness. Change itself proves Protean, its implementation Sisyphean. We try to define it, analyze it, plan it—management experts speak of “mastering” it—all in vain. It remains elusive, mutable, never what it seems. When we try to implement it, to actually get an organization to do something new, the result is often painful and futile. Acknowledging these problems, a growing number of observers have shifted the way they think about organizational change. They have turned away from the traditional rational-structural paradigm of change, a paradigm on which decades of organizational and school reform have been based, toward a new strategic-systemic paradigm marked by very different assumptions and emphases. This emerging model has profound implications for efforts to improve schools. It calls on us to revise old assumptions and, ultimately, reaffirm old truths.

Approaches to Change, Gaps in Knowledge

Over the past few decades the knowledge base about school change has grown appreciably. Some scholars feel that we know more about innovation than we ever have (Miles, 1992, pp. 29–30). But although we have surely learned much, there remain two large gaps in our knowledge: training and implementation. The first involves who “we” are. There may be a group of researchers who have learned more about school change, but such knowledge is not widely disseminated among practitioners. Few school administrators receive the regular training in organizational development and innovation that is common among business executives. One consequence, readily apparent to those of us who consult in both corporations and in schools, is that many educational change efforts fail due to expectable problems that well-trained leaders would anticipate.

The second problem is even larger. Despite what has been learned about implementing change, we—everyone involved in school improvement—still face a major implementation gap, for

we are now attempting reforms that are far more extensive and complex than ever before. In 1968 I joined a team of teachers that sought to develop a high school English curriculum that would be both highly relevant for students and “teacherproof,” with content so engaging that it would make students want to learn and lesson plans so clear that no teacher, however dull or incompetent, could fail to conduct an interesting class. As comparatively simple as our reform was, it proved futile. Yet, the changes currently under way in schools are far more extensive and sophisticated. One of the central lessons we think we have learned about previous rounds of innovation is that they failed because they didn’t get at fundamental, underlying, systemic features of school life: they didn’t change the behaviors, norms, and beliefs of practitioners. Consequently, these reforms ended up being grafted on to existing practices, and they were greatly modified, if not fully overcome, by those practices. Dull and incompetent teachers taught the new content dully and incompetently.

The flaw here, as some see it, is that most of these projects aimed at first-order change rather than at second-order change. First-order changes try to improve the efficiency or effectiveness of what we are already doing. Even when these efforts are large in scope (having all the elementary schools in a city adopt a new basal reader, for example), they are usually single, incremental, and isolated. They do not significantly alter the basic features of the school or the way its members perform their roles. Second-order changes are systemic in nature and aim to modify the very way an organization is put together, altering its assumptions, goals, structures, roles, and norms (Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch, 1974, pp. 10–11). They require people to not just do old things slightly differently but also to change their beliefs and perceptions. The various school reforms that live under the tent of “restructuring” include an array of efforts at second-order change, altering everything from instructional methods to governance. Some seek overtly to change the culture of the school; the rest require culture change to succeed. These types of reforms are vastly more ambitious than even the large efforts of the past, such as the effective schools movement. Changing a school’s culture, for example, is a huge and daunting task, as Chapter Three will show. So, despite what we have learned, our reach for more extensive, complex change

means that we still face a disparity between what we know and what we need to know about accomplishing innovation.

In an effort to close this knowledge gap and enhance both the theory and practice of change, a number of keen observers, chief among them Michael Fullan, Matthew Miles, Philip Schlechty, and Thomas Sergiovanni, have offered compelling analyses of the process of school change and its implications for leadership. Their work takes a new paradigm of change that has emerged among experts in organizational development, management, and psychology and applies it to schools. This new paradigm, derived from systems thinking and strategic approaches to organizational development, opposes the rational-structural model that has dominated organizational and school reform for decades and still underlies most restructuring efforts.

The Rational-Structural Paradigm of Change

The traditional—and prevailing—approach to change is rooted in the concept of scientific management. Developed by the famous (and now much-criticized) Frederick Winslow Taylor (1911) in the early twentieth century, scientific management began as an effort to radically improve industrial performance by making work more rational and efficient.¹ Its impact was profound. It sped the development of mechanization, specialization, and bureaucratization, bringing vast increases in productivity and transforming the factory and the office into places where work processes were prescribed and results measured. It also earned Taylor widespread, enduring criticism for degrading skilled crafts into rote tasks and reducing humans to automatons. Even so, decades later its principles abound, not only in the way we organize our workplaces but also in the way we train our athletes and even in the ways we structure our personal and family lives (Morgan, 1986, p. 30). Modern notions of professional management have softened and adapted Taylor's original concepts, but they still share its highly rational, structured, command-and-control mindset. I shall have more to say about these theories when we look at leadership in Chapter Eight. For now, we are concerned with their impact on our thinking about organizational functioning and improvement.

The traditional model of change is rooted in three of Taylor's assumptions: stability, rationality, and structure. Its principal di-

mensions are summarized in Table 1.1. It assumes that an organization and the environment in which it operates are relatively static entities. The environment, even if it is challenging and not fully under the organization's control, is nonetheless stable and predictable enough that one can measure it and plan accordingly. In this respect the paradigm reflects the basic assumptions of Newtonian physics: the world is an ordered place in which events unfold according to causal, linear laws; everything can be understood, provided enough information is available. Similarly, in this paradigm the organization itself is seen as a fundamentally stable and logical enterprise, to be understood chiefly in terms of its formal properties: its division of labor, structural hierarchy, official roles, and prescribed procedures, all of which should be logical and functional and should foster accountability.

In its planning, the organization depends on rational, objective decision making, quantitative measurement, and the pursuit of long-range goals. Innovation, when it is needed, requires this same objectivity in its development, implementation, and assessment. It is typically seen as an end product or event, a specified outcome (such as a restructured school) that conforms to a step-by-step

Table 1.1. Paradigms of Change.

	<i>Rational-Structural</i>	<i>Strategic-Systemic</i>
<i>Environment</i>	stable predictable	turbulent unpredictable
<i>Organization</i>	stable logical	fluid psychological
<i>Planning</i>	objective, linear long-range	pragmatic, adaptable medium-range
<i>Innovation</i>	product fixed outcome	process emerging outcome
<i>Focus</i>	structure, function tasks, roles, rules	people, culture meaning, motivation
<i>Implementation</i>	almost purely top-down disseminating, pressuring	top-down and bottom-up commitment-building ("purposing")

design developed in advance by experts: "Conventional organizations are analytic and detail-oriented in their problem solving. . . . They enshrine . . . the 'endless planning, flawless execution' model of problem solving, in which a lengthy period of analysis leads to a plan so perfect that any fool could supposedly carry it out" (Hammer and Champy, 1994, p. 112).

Whether the blueprint calls for new outputs or for greater efficiency in current outputs, it focuses on changes in the organization's structure and in its tasks, roles, and rules. The methodology for innovation is almost entirely top-down in nature, a combination of dissemination and pressure. There may be much lip service paid to "participation," but this usually means getting people to "go along," to have a "sense of ownership." The implementation goal is to have staff adopt the expert plan as is. This requires explanation, persuasion, training, and incentives; if these fail to produce the proper results, it requires mandates, requirements, and policies.

Rational-structural assumptions have long dominated thinking in corporate, governmental, and educational spheres in America. They are incarnated in models of management such as PPBS (Program Planning and Budgeting System) and MBO (Management by Objective), among many others. In education, examples of such traditional approaches to innovation range from teacherproof curriculum projects like mine in the 1960s to more recent movements by federal and state governments to impose curriculum standards and competency testing. The mandating of detailed procedures for diagnosing and teaching students with special needs is a classic example of a rational-structural blueprint to be implemented as specified by its developers. At the district level, this approach dominates thinking about professional development. In-service offerings are typically designed by the central office and consist of defect-based "how-to" programs aimed at correcting deficiencies in teachers' performance via technical training in new strategies and materials.

This summary of the rational-structural approach to innovation does not credit the sincerity or diligence of those who have sought change in this way. Although it has become *de rigueur* for organizational theorists to attack Taylor, scientific management's gravest failings are simply its naïveté and its age: after nearly a cen-

tury, events have overtaken it. There is nothing wrong with trying to make schools more functional or trying to plan change thoughtfully, and it is surely true that the way an organization is structured significantly affects its performance. There is a natural appeal to the notion that effectiveness ensues when goals and policies are clear, jobs are well defined, control systems are in place, and employees act rationally. Still, there is no denying that change efforts based on the traditional paradigm have compiled a dismal record. The rational-structural perspective may be very good at explaining how organizations ought to work, but it is very poor at explaining why they often don't, why the same kinds of problems recur over and over (Bolman and Deal, 1991, p. 36).

In education, the persistence of the same old problems is famous. Successive waves of school reform, though not nearly as ineffectual as they are often portrayed, have failed to fully realize the improvements they promised, and many staff development programs have developed teachers' cynicism more than their expertise. The typical pattern when reform fails has been to blame teachers rather than designers; it now appears, however, that the designers' assumptions are often at the core of the chronic failure of change efforts. This realization is growing not only among observers of school reform but also more broadly, among experts in organizational development who see that extensive change efforts based on traditional assumptions have failed to improve organizational performance in the corporate sphere. "There has been more of this rationalistic analysis, design, and control of human systems in the last fifty years in America than possibly anywhere else in possibly all of the rest of human history," notes management expert Peter Vaill, yet people everywhere continue to find their organizations "mysterious, recalcitrant, intractable, unpredictable, paradoxical, absurd, and—unless it's your own ox getting gored—funny" (1989, p. 77).

To many critics, the traditional paradigm is riddled with conceptual and practical faults. It ignores the flux and complexity in and around organizations; it overemphasizes linearity, rationality, and formal structure; and it overlooks vital realities of context, human psychology, and the process of change. For truly practical, effective approaches to school improvement to develop,

the rational-structural paradigm must give way. In its place we need a conceptual framework that acknowledges the real world of people, institutions, and change.

The Strategic-Systemic Paradigm: Environment and Organization

Though it requires taking some conceptual liberties, such a framework can be fashioned from two current perspectives on organizations: strategic management and systems theory. These two bodies of thought differ in important ways, but because they make similar critiques of the traditional paradigm and because they each have inspired some of the most promising reassessments of school reform, I amalgamate them here into what I call the strategic-systemic paradigm. We may best understand this hybrid by contrasting it with the older model on each of the dimensions in Table 1.1.

The strategic-systemic paradigm begins by challenging traditional assumptions about stability and causality. For both systems and strategic thinkers, conventional notions of organizational functioning are simplistic and unrealistic. Systems theory, rooted in cybernetics, emphasizes the multiplicity and complexity of factors that affect the functioning of any person or group over time. It looks at wholes rather than parts, at “patterns of change rather than static ‘snapshots’” (Senge, 1990, p. 68).

Linear notions of cause and effect fail to see that every event is both cause *and* effect, part of an interactive loop of mutual influences; no single element can be altered without affecting the rest. (For example, successful crackdowns on drug dealers may raise a city’s crime rate by reducing the availability of heroin, pushing up its price and causing addicts to commit more theft to support their addiction.) It is these loops, these larger systems, though intricate and subtle, that govern behavior, not, as we so often imagine, single events or particular individuals or functional job descriptions. The complexity of these loops is increasing rapidly: we now have the capacity “to create far more information than anyone can absorb, to foster far greater interdependency than anyone can manage, and to accelerate change far faster than anyone’s ability to keep pace” (Senge, p. 69). Systems thinkers argue that only by staying focused on the broader, underlying systemic patterns can we solve

problems effectively and develop a truly creative, self-renewing “learning organization” that can cope with a changing environment (Senge, pp. 42–54).²

Strategic theorists, too, challenge the traditional model’s simplistic assumptions about stability and predictability. Their view of organizations concentrates more on “people issues” and on the non-rational aspects of organizational life than does systems theory. It sees more than complexity; it sees chaos without and fluidity within. The rate of both planned and unplanned change—technological, social, economic, and political—is accelerating so sharply that we simply can no longer take for granted the stability assumed by the traditional paradigm, in any aspect of our experience. As it accelerates, change ceases to be incremental; it virtually explodes and becomes discontinuous. “Thirty years ago most people thought that change would mean more of the same, only better. They expected and welcomed this incremental change. Today we know that in many areas of life we cannot guarantee more of the same . . . and cannot even predict with confidence what will be happening in our own lives” (Handy, 1990, p. 6).

Strategic thinkers find in chaos theory a better model for understanding this world of discontinuous change. Chaos theory, a growing body of thought, calls for a sharp revision of Newtonian physics and its assumptions that the world is orderly and predictable and that, given sufficient information and perspective, everything can potentially be understood and explained (a view that many systems thinkers would accept). Chaos theory sees systems as not only complex but also spontaneous and idiosyncratic—and, most importantly, as unpredictable. Systems may in fact be orderly underneath, but that order is often extremely elusive, if not impossible to discern. In books with titles like *Thriving on Chaos* (Peters, 1987), strategic writers trace the dilemmas of leadership when change is so rapid and events so complex that leaders cannot predict long-range trends. They conclude that the very context within which organizations exist has become destabilized, so that we can no longer treat as given the most fundamental things we once took for granted (Vaill, 1989, p. 3).

To describe this destabilized context of discontinuous change and chronic uncertainty, Vaill uses the metaphor of “permanent white water” (p. 2), a river of endless rapids with no stretches of

lakelike calm. Examples are legion. The popular business press has chronicled the way in which events have swamped one flagship American corporation after another, from major steel producers and the “big three” automakers to Polaroid, Digital Equipment Corporation, and IBM. In truth, the tendency of organizations to flourish and then falter is not new. Almost all the leading corporations of one hundred years ago—including such giants of the time as the Eastern Buggy Whip Company and the Lobdell Car Wheel Company—are extinct (Malkiel, 1990, p. 89). What is new is the speed and extent of change and the vulnerability of organizations to rapid decline. Many large industrial companies don’t live past their fortieth birthday. Fully one-third of the Fortune 500 companies in 1970 no longer existed by 1983 (Senge, 1990, p. 17). The context surrounding organizations is now so full of unplanned, unpredictable change that adapting is extraordinarily difficult.

Like American companies, American schools exist in a destabilized context. The entire educational environment is in flux, as social, economic, and political forces radically reshape the world of schools. As recently as 1980, few educators were anticipating an explosion in the number of non-English-speaking students or accelerating poverty among young children or intensifying divisions between racial, ethnic, and religious groups. Nor are schools themselves immune to the competitive pressures convulsing corporate America. As recently as 1985, few would have taken seriously the idea of companies’ running schools for profit, or that Baltimore and Hartford would hire such a company, or that the president of Yale would leave his post to help lead another one for a salary reported to be \$800,000 (Stewart, 1994, p. 75).

This external chaos and unpredictability is mirrored in the internal turbulence and variability within today’s organizations. Instead of the utilitarian scheme of the organizational chart, with its orderly, predictable logic, the strategic-systemic paradigm sees an intricate human system governed by a complex, nonrational logic that is often paradoxical, if ultimately comprehensible and susceptible to influence (Fullan, 1991, p. 97). Taking a human resource perspective on organizational life, it eyes the gaps between, on the one hand, functional designs and formal procedures and, on the other, the actual behavior of workers, which can

vary widely from formally prescribed roles. It sees human nature as complex and malleable, marked by variability in at least two ways. First, the personal lives and needs of staff routinely intrude on their performance—intrusions that can significantly hamper efforts at innovation.³ Among these personal changes, one of the most important in schools has been the aging of the faculty. The majority of educators are veterans of more than twenty years' experience. These professionals have reached midlife and midcareer, a time when changing attitudes, interests, and energy levels are likely to reduce one's investment in work and one's appetite for innovation—a subject we will explore in Chapter Six.

A second source of variability in staff performance is the sheer social complexity of organizational life itself. The fulfillment of official job descriptions is affected by such things as politics—power struggles between different interest groups and conflicts over resources and status, among other factors. In addition, there is the general refusal of the environment to stand still. When Warren Bennis, an expert on leadership and organizational development, became a college president, he learned that “routine work drives out nonroutine work and smothers to death all creative planning, all fundamental change” and that, “make whatever grand plans you will, you may be sure the unexpected or the trivial will disturb and disrupt them” (1989, pp. 15–16). Anyone who has led a school or any similarly complex organization recognizes instantly what Bennis means.

Planning and Innovation

Strategic theorists oppose the highly objective approach to planning and innovation that has long dominated management and policy making in schools and corporations. They object to the internal rigidities and flaws in what they see as a narrow, limited, overly rational view of organizational development. Relying on long-range forecasting, cause-and-effect thinking, step-by-step problem solving, and statistical measurement; devaluing judgment, intuition, and nonrational aspects of decision making; treating innovation as a fixed outcome—these staples of management constitute what Vaill calls a “technoholic” approach. A technoholic is someone trying to avoid uncertainty, messiness, politics, and the

“fundamental back-and-forthness” of human interaction, someone who wants to “front-end a project by imposing a technique or protocol on a stream of organizational events.” This rigidity spawns two key problems. One is reification, a tendency for a plan to become an end in itself and to be pursued even when the context changes in such a way as to invalidate the assumptions on which the plan was based. Following the blueprint comes to substitute for addressing the actual problem facing the institution. The second is that traditional planning leads an organization to concentrate on first-order changes, on means rather than ends, on how to do things rather than on why to do things. The “can-do” attitude so prized in America may keep an organization focused on finding better procedures for its current ends rather than reconsidering the very ends it should be pursuing. In a destabilized, rapidly changing context, this can be dangerously shortsighted (Vaill, 1989, pp. 88–89).

At a deeper level, the traditional emphasis on rationality is much less substantive and objective than it seems and much more a matter of ideology and symbolism. We have only to look at an institution in terms of its politics, Gareth Morgan argues, to expose organizational rationality as a myth designed to overcome an inherent contradiction: an organization is not just a system of cooperation but a system of competition, too: “Organizations may pursue goals and stress the importance of rational, efficient, and effective management. But rational, efficient, and effective for whom? Whose goals are being pursued? What interests are being served? Who benefits? . . . These [questions] suggest a reevaluation of the ideological significance of the concept of rationality” (p. 195). To see schools in this way is to be reminded that power issues do indeed influence behavior, that the change process is often not so much a matter of clear, objective improvement as it is a competition for control.⁴

Many organizational experts are discarding what they see as an overreliance on “hyperrationality.” This means abandoning traditional long-range master plans—with their specific goals and time lines and their extensive use of statistical measurement—in favor of much more pragmatic, adaptable approaches that acknowledge the nonrational, unplannable aspects of organizational life and the importance of being ready to respond to external change. Strate-

gic planning emphasizes, among other things, adapting to the organization's environment, setting medium-range goals (two to three years), and conducting performance assessments that rely on the judgment of leaders instead of on statistical measurements. Strategic management goes even further. Despite its ring of sophistication and complexity, it de-emphasizes formal planning altogether and relies on experience and intuitive judgment in decision making (Louis and Miles, 1990, pp. 31–32).

These approaches see change as a journey, rather than a blueprint. They recognize that we frequently do not know what we're truly after or appreciate the consequences of pursuing it until we have already begun the effort (Fullan, p. 5) and that "specific organizational achievements are always only approximations of what was intended" (Vaill, 1989, p. 78). This is because they see change as a multidimensional process that involves all aspects of the organization: its structure, its politics, and especially its people. They see it as a process that requires people to learn new technologies, practice new behaviors, and, ultimately, adopt new beliefs. Change is not a predictable enterprise with definite guidelines but a struggle to shape processes that are complex and elusive. Its result is an emerging outcome that will be modified during the process of implementation as internal and external conditions shift, data accumulate, and judgment dictates.

Focus and Implementation

Just as it challenges earlier assumptions of stability and rationality, the strategic-systemic paradigm opposes the traditional model's focus on organizational structure and its heavily top-down implementation methodology. It does not deny the need to change the structure of schools or to redefine the roles of teachers, administrators, and students; instead it argues that structure, though important, is not a sufficient focus for change. Centering innovation on formal tasks and procedures and moving directly to how-to-do-it training ignores much about the process of how people actually change (especially how they alter their beliefs). To strategic theorists, the rational-structural bias of the traditional paradigm stimulates staff resistance but is unprepared to cope with it. After all, a good solution is only useful if people adopt it, if its implementation

enables them to really make it their own. Traditional organizational change often fails because its designers, overemphasizing rationality, underestimate the opposition reform generates and the power of staff members to resist. They frequently fail to build a base of support for their innovations, and staff are often unwilling or unable to fulfill the new roles created for them. Instead, they informally redesign their roles “to fit what [they] used to do rather than what they are now supposed to do” (Bolman and Deal, pp. 401–402, 429). In the face of this or other kinds of resistance, structural reformers can only resort to exhortation and pressure, repeated explanations and stricter rules. “When their ‘if-then’ procedures don’t work, they become ‘if-only’ procedures. . . . [But] wishing for, waiting for, and urging the system to become more rational is in itself irrational—it won’t happen” (Fullan, p. 97).

At the core of traditional approaches to change lies an arrogance that invites failure and plays a key role in the inability of those approaches to overcome resistance. Innovation is almost certain to encounter problems when its implementation is defined according to only one reality (its creator’s). The reason is straightforward: the subjective reality of the implementer (in schools, the personal experience of the teacher) is crucial to successful innovation; transforming this subjective reality is a key task of change. When change agents assume they have “the right answer” and ignore the processes that foster this transformation, they can be “as authoritarian as the staunchest defenders of the status quo” (Fullan, p. 36).

This hubris has marred many past efforts at school improvement and is embedded in much current restructuring. Having a strong commitment to a particular reform, even having the authority to force people to adopt it, does not guarantee successful innovation. On the contrary, it can prove counterproductive. The conviction of an advocate, even a powerful one, inspires resistance if it simply dismisses the inevitable dilemmas of implementation. Being heavily committed makes one less likely to establish the lengthy procedures vital to implementation, less amenable to modifications, and less tolerant of the unavoidable delays and setbacks that ensue as others struggle to adopt the change. It is not that innovators should not have deep convictions but rather that they must be open to the realities of others, to the necessary modifica-

tion their ideas will undergo as others encounter them—and to the delays this will surely cause.

Strategic approaches to organizational change begin with these realities and complexities. They emphasize meaning before roles, culture before structure. Implementation depends crucially on the meaning the change has to those who must implement it. As we will see in Chapter Two, our response to change, particularly when it is imposed upon us, is determined by how we understand it, what it does to our attachments and beliefs, and how we can fit it into the sense we make of our world. This is crucial to our motivation; few of us will accept the losses and discontinuities of change unless the undertaking is meaningful to us.

The primacy of meaning leads directly to considerations of culture. The strategic-systemic paradigm emphasizes the importance of organizational culture—the deep, implicit, taken-for-granted assumptions that shape perception and govern behavior. It recognizes that no matter what kind of change is undertaken, these ingrained, second-order features of organizational life influence the outcome. “Culture constrains strategy,” as Edgar Schein (1992, p. 382) notes, and trying to restructure an organization without confronting its underlying cultural assumptions is usually futile. Schlechty puts it this way: “Changing the structure of schools—or any other organization—is no simple task. Social structures are embedded in systems of meaning, value, belief, and knowledge; such systems comprise the culture of an organization. To change an organization’s structure, therefore, one must attend not only to rules, roles, and relationships but to systems of beliefs, values, and knowledge as well. Structural change requires cultural change” (1990, pp. xvi–xvii). No simple task, indeed. Cultural change, increasingly seen not just as vital to certain programmatic changes in schools but as a goal in its own right, is an extraordinarily complex undertaking. As we shall see, culture is conservative: it works to preserve the status quo. Changing it is vastly more difficult than is popularly imagined.

A focus on meaning and culture calls for implementation that relies on commitment building far more than on carrots and sticks. An enormous amount has been written in recent years about the importance of vision and mission. It is now widely accepted that a clear sense of purpose is vital to productivity and

especially to innovation, that leaders invigorate performance and inspire commitment to change by engaging their people in the pursuit of shared goals. “Purposing” is the term coined by Vaill, who defines it as a “continuous stream of actions by an organization’s formal leadership that [induces] clarity, consensus, and commitment regarding the organization’s basic purposes” (1982, p. 29). Strategic approaches to innovation place great emphasis on building followership—an active, engaged, self-managing commitment to change among those who must implement it. Followership first requires a strong initiative by a leader to articulate a clear sense of purpose—or to lead her staff in the development of one. The strategic-systemic paradigm thus begins with a top-down approach. But it is also a bottom-up model, or, more accurately, a “widen-out” model, for it takes the principle of participation seriously. Its emphasis on flexible, developmental planning and the building of shared meaning demands that leaders listen actively to staff, modify their initial goals to reflect staff experience, and aim toward building innovation that is truly collaborative wherever possible. To change schools, therefore, requires much more than “restructuring” them; it requires reconceptualizing the entire enterprise of reform from the strategic-systemic perspective. In Chapter Two we take a close look at this reframing by examining two fundamental elements of innovation that will concern us throughout the rest of this book: the meaning of change and the role of culture.

Notes

1. Taylor emphasized five principles: make the manager responsible for organizing the work; use scientific methods to discover and specify the most efficient way of working; select the best workers for these specifications; train them well; and monitor their performance closely (Morgan, p. 30).
2. Although systems theory makes a seminal contribution to our grasp of organizational functioning, my approach is primarily strategic. For me, systems theory offers a fascinating and elegant diagnostic lens, but it has fundamental flaws as a prescriptive guide for action. It resembles the traditional paradigm it criticizes in that it is highly focused on structure (albeit a deeper, richer notion of structure) rather than people; and, more important, in that it is overly rational in its orientation. It sees most problems as conceptual, approaching organizations and

change in terms of “mental models” and “feedback loops,” and relies on a truly remarkable degree of objectivity, on problem solving through cognitive self-observation. (Senge calls for a “shift of mind,” a kind of transcendent objectivity he terms “metanoia,” [pp. 13–14]). It assumes not only that individuals can routinely diagnose the longer-term, underlying patterns in which they themselves are enmeshed, but that, through insight, they can change these patterns. As a clinically trained psychologist, I find this inconceivable: it contradicts vast bodies of psychological, sociological, and anthropological data. As a consultant to organizations and a member of an organization myself, I find it more than unrealistic: it ignores the overwhelming evidence of everyday life. Although systems theory does allow for intuition, it virtually disregards the role of emotions, interpersonal dynamics, culture, and other crucial nonrational influences in organizational functioning. Ironically, a body of thought that seeks a higher-order awareness of self and context has a blind spot: it fails to recognize that the prevalence of the shortsightedness it criticizes, the non-systems thinking that predominates everywhere, calls into question its own prescriptions.

3. Tom Bird, reflecting on the turbulence that affects any school change project, observes: “At any time, about half of the persons needed to pursue a solution are getting married or divorced; tending a sick or well relative; going bankrupt or coming into money; just starting, getting ready to leave, or near retirement; taking care of babies or putting children through college; making up or breaking up; getting sick, getting well; getting chronic or dying” (1986, p. 45).
4. Despite its insistence on objectivity, rational management’s key components, such as goal setting or quantitative measurement and evaluation, often function, Morgan argues, much as magic does in primitive societies. Since our belief systems emphasize rationality, the legitimacy of our organizations depends on their demonstrating that objectivity guides their performance. Thus, we take the setting of goals as essential to organizational life. In truth, it is “a socially constructed necessity, characteristic of a mechanical mentality” (p. 106). Choosing and pursuing goals becomes an end in itself—an organization no sooner achieves one objective than it adopts another—because we have defined it as part of rational management. Think of the scandal if a school district, even one which has enjoyed tremendous success and achieved *all* of its targets over the past five years, were to announce a moratorium on planning or a period of consolidation during which no new goals would be pursued! Measurement and evaluation are even more “magical.” The quantitative analysis of modern management

experts, just like the reading of entrails by shamans, is designed to forecast and manipulate the future. Like the shaman, it frequently fails but is nonetheless allowed to preserve its credibility (in each case, failure is attributed to unanticipated factors). In many ways, rationality is “the myth of modern society” (pp. 134–135).