

The Five Components of Change Leadership

*These days, doing nothing as a leader is a great risk,
so you might as well take the risks worth doing.*

Michael Fullan

Change is a double-edged sword. Its relentless pace is difficult to adjust to, yet when things are unsettled, we can find new ways to move ahead and create breakthroughs that are not possible in stagnant societies. When asked how they feel about change, people often describe anxiety, fear, danger, loss, and panic, as well as excitement, energy, exhilaration, risk taking, and improvement. For better or for worse, change arouses emotions, and when emotions intensify, leadership is key for addressing leadership needs.

LOOKING FOR THE RIGHT KIND OF LEADERSHIP

This book is about leading in a culture of change. It is *not* about being a super-leader. Charismatic leaders inadvertently often do more harm than good because, at best, they provide episodic improvement followed by frustrated or despondent

dependence. Superleaders usually are role models who cannot be emulated by most other people, but deep and sustained reform depends on many of us, not just on the extraordinary few.

This book describes key dimensions of leadership that will help any leader, at any level, to guide change better. Every leader can become more effective by focusing on these core aspects of leadership and by developing a new mind-set about a leader's responsibility to himself or herself and to those with whom he or she works.

Leadership and management often overlap, but one difference between them is that leadership is needed for problems that do not have easy answers. The big problems are complex, rife with paradoxes and dilemmas. For these problems, there are no once-and-for-all answers. Yet we expect our leaders to provide solutions. In response, some leaders propose popular, oversimplified solutions. Homer-Dixon (2000) observes that “we demand that [leaders] solve, or at least manage, a multitude of interconnected problems that can develop into crises without warning; we require them to navigate an increasingly turbulent reality that is, in key aspects, literally incomprehensible to the human mind; we buffet them on every side with bolder, more powerful special interests that challenge every innovative policy idea; we submerge them in often unhelpful and distracting information; and we force them to decide and act at an ever faster pace” (p. 15).

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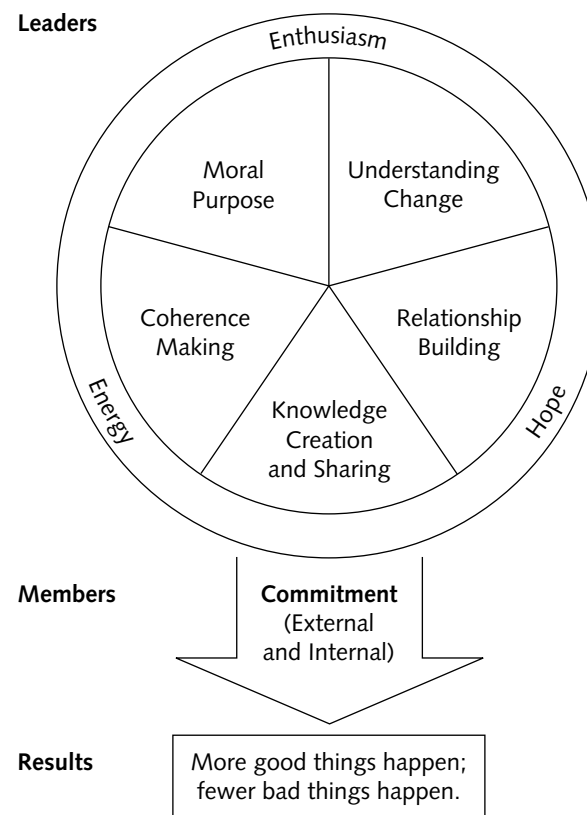
Heifetz (1994) accuses us of looking for the wrong kind of leadership when the going gets tough: “In a crisis . . . we call for someone with answers, decision, strength, and a map of the future, someone who knows where we ought to be going—in short someone who can make hard problems simple. . . . Instead of looking for saviors, we should be calling for leadership that will challenge us to face problems for which there are no simple, painless solutions—problems that require us to learn new ways” (p. 21). Heifetz argues that we should look at the role of the leader as “mobilizing people to tackle tough problems” (p. 15). So lead-

ership is not mobilizing others to solve problems we already know how to solve, but helping them to confront problems that have not yet been addressed successfully.

A FRAMEWORK FOR LEADERSHIP

There is a recent, remarkable convergence of theories, knowledge bases, and strategies that help us to confront complex problems that do not have easy answers. This convergence creates a new mind-set—a framework for thinking about and leading complex change more powerfully than ever before. Figure 1.1 summarizes the framework.

Figure 1.1. A Framework for Leadership



The Five Components of Leadership

There are strong reasons to believe that the five components of leadership presented in *Leading in a Culture of Change* (Fullan, 2001a) and here represent independent but mutually reinforcing forces for positive change:

1. **Moral purpose.** *Moral purpose* means acting with the intention of making a positive difference in the lives of employees, customers or clients, and society. This is an obvious value with which many of us can identify. Chapter Two explains why there may be inevitable evolutionary reasons that moral purpose will become more prominent and that leaders must be guided by moral purpose to be effective in complex times. Examples from business and education in Chapter Two show that moral purpose is critical to the long-term success of all organizations.

2. **Understanding change.** It is essential for leaders to *understand the change process*. Moral purpose without an understanding of change will lead to moral martyrdom. Moreover, leaders who combine a commitment to moral purpose with a healthy respect for the complexities of the change process not only will be more successful but also will unearth deeper moral purpose. Understanding of the change process is elusive. The advice in management books often is contradictory, general, confusing, and nonactionable. Chapter Three offers six guidelines that provide leaders with concrete, novel ways of thinking about the process of change: (1) the goal is not to innovate the most; (2) it is not enough to have the best ideas; (3) appreciate the early difficulties of trying something new (this is referred to as the implementation dip); (4) redefine resistance as a potential positive force; (5) reculturing is the name of the game; and (6) never a checklist, always complexity.

3. **Building relationships.** The one factor common to every successful change initiative is that *relationships* improve. If relationships improve, things get better. If they remain the same or get worse, ground is lost. Therefore, leaders must be consummate relationship builders with diverse people and groups, especially with people different from themselves. Chapter Four tells how effective leaders foster purposeful interaction and problem solving and are wary of easy consensus.

4. **Creating and sharing knowledge.** The work on *knowledge creation and sharing* reflects an amazing congruence with the previous three themes. We live in the knowledge society, but that term is a cliché. New theoretical and empirical studies of successful organizations examine the operational meaning of the term *knowledge organization*. True leaders commit themselves to continually generating and

increasing knowledge inside and outside the organization. What is astonishing (because it comes from an independent theoretical tradition) is how intimately knowledge relates to the previous three themes. First, people will not voluntarily share knowledge unless they feel some moral commitment to do so; second, people will not share unless the dynamics of change favor exchange; and third, data without relationships merely cause more information glut. Put another way, turning information into knowledge is a social process; for that, you need good relationships. Chapter Five focuses on knowledge building, but we need moral purpose, an understanding of the change process, and good relationships if we are to create and share knowledge.

5. Making coherence. All of this complexity keeps people at the edge of chaos. It is important to be at that edge because that is where creativity resides, but anarchy lurks there too. Therefore, effective leaders tolerate enough ambiguity to keep the creative juices flowing, but along the way (once they and the group know enough), they seek coherence. *Making coherence*, described in Chapter Six, is a perennial pursuit. Leadership is difficult in a culture of change because disequilibrium is common (and valuable, provided that patterns of coherence can be fostered).

Chapters Two through Six present the powerful knowledge base represented by these five components of effective leadership.

In summary, moral purpose is concerned with direction and results; understanding change, building relationships, and knowledge building honor the complexity and discovery of the journey; and coherence making extracts valuable patterns worth retaining. Alas, none of this is quite so linear and fixed as the descriptions of the components.

Energy, Enthusiasm, and Hope

Figure 1.1 shows another set of more personal characteristics that all effective leaders possess: the *energy-enthusiasm-hope* constellation. Energetic, enthusiastic, and hopeful leaders “cause” greater moral purpose in themselves, bury themselves in change, naturally build relationships and knowledge, and seek coherence to consolidate moral purpose. Looking at the dynamic from the other side, we can see that leaders immersed in the five aspects of leadership cannot help feeling and acting more energetic, enthusiastic, and hopeful. Effective leaders make people feel

that even the most difficult problems can be tackled productively. They are always hopeful, conveying a sense of optimism and an attitude of never giving up in the pursuit of highly valued goals. Their enthusiasm and confidence (not certainty) are infectious, and the leaders are infectiously effective, provided that they incorporate all five leadership capacities in their day-to-day behavior.

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The five capacities operate together in a checks-and-balances fashion. Leaders with deep moral purpose provide guidance, but they also can have blinders if their ideas are not challenged through the dynamics of change, the give-and-take of relationships, and the ideas generated by new knowledge. Similarly, coherence is seen as part of complexity and never can be completely achieved. Leaders in a culture of change value and almost enjoy the tensions inherent in addressing hard-to-solve problems, because that is where the greatest accomplishments lie.

Member Commitment

Figure 1.1 shows how leaders who are steeped in the five core capacities generate long-term commitment in those with whom they work. Effective leaders, because they live and breathe the five aspects of leadership, find themselves committed to staying the course (often they are also inspired by others in the organization as they interact around moral purposes, new knowledge, and the achievement of periodic coherence), and they mobilize more people to be willing to tackle tough problems. By *commitment* we do not mean blind commitment or groupthink, in which a group goes along uncritically with the leader or members adopt the ideas of others in the group. Leaders can be powerful, and so can groups, which means they can be powerfully wrong. This is why the five components of leadership must work in concert: they provide a check against uninformed commitment.

Even when commitment is evidently generated, there are qualifiers. Argyris (2000) helps us make the distinction between external and internal commitment: “These differ in how they are activated and in the source of energy they utilize. Ex-

ternal commitment is triggered by management policies and practices that enable employees to accomplish their tasks. Internal commitment derives from energies internal to human beings that are activated because getting a job done is intrinsically rewarding” (p. 40). Argyris notes that “when someone else defines objectives, goals, and the steps to be taken to reach them, whatever commitment exists will be external” (p. 41).

Moral purpose usually is accompanied by a sense of urgency. If a leader is in too much of a hurry, he or she will fail; no one can bulldoze change. More sophisticated leaders may set up systems of pressure and support that will obtain noticeable desired results in the short run, but these will be derived primarily from external commitment. External commitment is still commitment; it is the motivation to put one’s effort into the task of change and can be valuable. It can include excitement and the satisfaction of accomplishment and can generate impressive short-term results. But developing internal commitment on a large scale is an extremely difficult proposition.

No one can bulldoze change.

The litmus test of all leadership is whether it mobilizes people’s commitment to putting their energy into actions designed to achieve improvements. Individual commitment leads, above all, to collective mobilization. The subsequent chapters show that collective action by itself can be short-lived if it is not based on or does not lead to a deep sense of internal purpose among organizational members. Generating internal over external commitment and external over blind commitment is the sign of effective leadership.

Results

The outcome of effective leadership and commitment is that “more good things happen” and “fewer bad things happen.” In business, good things are economic viability, customer or client satisfaction, employee pride, and a sense of being valuable to society. In schools, good things are enhanced student performance, increased capacity of teachers, greater involvement of parents and community members, engagement of students, satisfaction and enthusiasm about going further, and greater

pride for all in the system. In both venues, the reduction of bad things means fewer aborted change efforts; less demoralization of employees; fewer examples of piecemeal, uncoordinated reform; and a lot less wasted effort and resources.

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP

This workbook explores the components of leadership presented in Figure 1.1. It provides insights, strategies, and better theories, knowledge, and action suited to leadership in complex times. In Chapter Seven, it examines how new leaders can be developed. How to foster large numbers of effective leaders in all areas of society is a question that is more pertinent today than ever before. If leadership does not become more attractive, doable, and exciting, public and private institutions will deteriorate. If the experience of rank-and-file members of the organization does not improve, there will not be a pool of potential leaders to cultivate. Good leaders foster good leadership at other levels. Leadership at other levels produces a steady stream of future leaders for the whole system.

Good leaders foster good leadership at other levels.

The conclusion is that leaders will increase their effectiveness if they continually work on the five components of leadership with energy, enthusiasm, and hope: if they pursue moral purpose, understand the change process, develop relationships, foster knowledge building and sharing, and strive for coherence. The rewards and benefits are enormous. It is an exciting proposition. The culture of change beckons.

Key Points

The components of effective leadership are:

- Moral purpose (making a positive difference)
- Understanding change (innovation is not change; there will be an implementation dip; resistance is a potential positive force; reculturing is required; change is complex)

- Relationship building (among diverse people)
- Knowledge creating and sharing (information becomes knowledge through a social process)
- Coherence making (integrating, focusing amid complexity)
- Energy, enthusiasm, hope

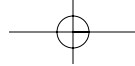
These lead to:

- Member commitment (internal and external)
- Results (more good things happen; fewer bad things happen)



Note your reactions to this chapter and any questions it may have generated.

1. In this introductory chapter, what resonated for you or interested you the most?



2. What do you particularly want or need to learn more about?

3. Other comments:

