

Schools for the Twenty-First Century

**Leadership Imperatives for
Educational Reform**

Phillip C. Schlechty



Foreword by Governor Bill Clinton



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The Power of Vision

Creating and Sharing the Seeds of Innovation

Causing a compelling vision of an enterprise to be created and articulated is an act of leadership. An equally important leadership act is developing, refining, and molding this vision so that it is widely understood and embraced throughout the organization. The present chapter is about both these concerns.

Who's on First?

Recent discussions of teacher empowerment, shared decision making, and participatory leadership have, unfortunately, led some principals, teachers, and superintendents to believe that behind these discussions is the assumption that no idea is worthwhile unless it comes "from the bottom up." This is a wrongheaded and potentially harmful misconception. Just as one's ideas do not become better because one has been promoted, they do not necessarily deteriorate as one moves up the hierarchy. (And all organizations have some sort of hierarchy.) The reason for this bottom-up preference, I think, is that ideas, regardless of their source, are more likely to be acted on if people understand and believe in them. Usually,

those at the bottom of an organization are going to be called to act on nearly every idea of significance. In general, though not always, people believe in their own ideas more than they do the ideas of others. Thus it makes sense that ideas generated from the bottom up will have more initial support, precisely because those most directly affected own the ideas. Does this mean that the way an organization's purpose is articulated and the way the organization is envisioned and directed must start at the bottom? Not necessarily. What it does mean is that the way purposes are articulated and the way vision is expressed must take into account the needs and values of those who are expected to act on these expressions.

Ideas begin with individual women and men; they do not begin with groups. Groups do not think anything. Groups simply create structures for thought and action. Indeed, groupthink is a dangerous commodity if an organization is to be creative and responsive, for groupthink is inherently conservative. What is needed are group structures that encourage individuals to think creatively and group structures that reward individuals for such thought. If an idea starts at the bottom, there must be a means for it to reach the top in a compelling form; if an idea starts at the top, there must be mechanisms for assuring that it flows down the hierarchy in a compelling form. And conceptualizations of vision and purpose are, above all, ideas.

It is for this reason, perhaps more than any other, that a pattern of participatory leadership is so commonly found in organizations where there is a strong culture and a definite commitment to a clear purpose and common vision. Participatory leadership creates conditions in which ideas in their most compelling form can flow up and down the organization. Furthermore, embedded in patterns of participatory leadership are processes for determining the power of ideas for action. Most important, in effective leadership systems these processes are known and understood by almost all who care to be involved. (Even the best organizations have a few people who just do their job.) The answer to the question "who's on first?" is that nearly everyone is—for coupled with the act of creating a shared vision, focused on a compelling purpose, organizations must develop or fine-tune leadership structures that ensure that an

idea that is being expressed somewhere in the system can be engaged and refined everywhere in the system.

The Ability to Rally Support for Change

Managing to Satisfy the Needs of Constituents

Substantial change in rules, roles, and relationships and in the system of beliefs and values that give meaning to these structures places great demands on those who are required to modify their own performance in response to these changes. Principals who were recruited, trained, and rewarded for "running a tight ship" and always "being in control" must unlearn and relearn much if schools are to be led in a participatory way. Union leaders and school administrators who have learned to arrive at collective bargaining agreements through adversarial negotiations will need to unlearn and relearn much if they are to produce the cooperative arrangements that schools as knowledge-work environments will require. *

Creating a flexible work structure and a policy environment that permits and encourages restructuring is critical. But unless an internal and external support system is put in place, it is unlikely that the structural and cultural changes that are needed to turn schools into knowledge-work environments will, in fact, be implemented.

knowledge-work orientation, what are we now doing that is consistent with such a view? And the list of questions could go on.

One result of serious efforts to ask and answer questions like these—especially if the questions are addressed by serious teams of teachers, principals, union leaders, and central office administrators—is certain to be the creation of new channels of communication and new patterns of thought that will eventually lead to new visions and new formulations of old problems. It is from such humble beginnings that the reinvention of schools must proceed.

Finding and Developing Intellectual Leaders

One of the chief tasks of leaders in knowledge-work organizations is to teach. Indeed, teaching, coaching, consulting, and inspiring occupy a great part of the day for most middle-level and top-level leaders in many of America's businesses. (See, for example, Peters and Waterman, 1982, and Grove, 1985.) The concept of the developmental leader is becoming widespread in business and it should become widespread in schools. (See Bradford and Cohen, 1984.) And the developmental leader is first of all a teacher.

In my view, school reform cannot proceed far unless top leaders take their obligations as teachers much more seriously than is the case in many school districts today. Superintendents and principals need to be informed about current issues, but more than that they need to take it on themselves to ensure that those with whom they work are informed as well. Principals should be prepared to assume the role of teacher educator in a school building, as must union leaders and others who would exercise authority for and over the education system. And one of the highest priorities of the superintendent must be to serve as the chief educator in the community.

Superintendents, principals, and union leaders must develop reading lists and conduct seminars for teachers, administrators, and other union leaders that explore the issues being addressed in the current reform agenda. This is being done in some places, but it must be done in every school that is serious about reform. Teachers, administrators, and union leaders need to sit down together and study the best thinking in the field of leadership and management.

I find it difficult to see how a school leader can be serious

about school reform and not be familiar with the writings of Drucker, Bennis, Peters, Waterman, and Grove as well as the work of certain educational writers and thinkers. These same works are useful to teachers—perhaps more useful than some of the intellectually vacuous materials they are exposed to on “in-service days.” (For the uninitiated, *in-service* is a term educators use for a particularly noxious form of required continuing education where teachers come together, usually in an auditorium or cafeteria, and get “in-serviced.”)

Given the school system's drive for action (“let's do *something*, even if it's wrong”) and the tendency of the present school organization to encourage what Silberman (1970) has called “mindlessness,” it is sometimes difficult to get school leaders, especially superintendents and central office staff, to undertake serious study. There is, of course, no way to *make* such a thing happen. But unless it happens, nothing much of a positive nature is likely to happen—or so I am prepared to argue. This fact is recognized by top corporate leaders. When these leaders get serious about turning their business around or heading it in a different direction, one of the first things they do is invest in study and training opportunities for themselves and their employees.

Intellectual leadership emerges in school systems when top leaders are viewed as valuing ideas, valuing the reading of books, and valuing the interchange of ideas that leads to creative formulations and innovative solutions. To establish such values, those in authority—in the superintendent's office, the union office, and the principal's office—must model what they value. People know what is expected by what is inspected and by what is respected. The superintendent who asks his or her staff “Have you read . . . ?” will shortly catch the staff reading. The superintendent who is too busy to read will have few intellectual leaders to call on when in need.

Ready, Fire, Aim

Having made a plea for intellectualism and thoughtfulness being infused in the change process, I would quickly add that without a penchant for action, a ready-fire-aim attitude, change will not occur either. (See Peters and Waterman, 1982, and Peters and Aus-

tin, 1985.) Planning cannot be separated from implementation, nor should it be. The act of planning is itself an implementation activity. Decisions regarding who will be brought in to help conceptualize the problem inevitably shape decisions regarding the other constituencies that will later be involved in the process. The superintendent who decides to overlook principals in the early formulation of a new vision will have different problems in gaining their support than will the superintendent who involves principals at an early stage. Nevertheless, involving people at an early stage is not always best. Some constituencies have such a heavy investment in maintaining the status quo that their early involvement would disrupt the creative conversations that need to occur in initial formulations. The quality that separates good participatory leaders from great ones is the ability to decide who needs to be involved and when.

More important than decisions regarding who should be involved in planning and when, however, are the signals that top leadership sends about the seriousness of its intent. If change is going to occur, people in the organization must *believe* that things are going to change. It is the obligation of top leaders to ensure that this message is delivered and heard. This is no easy task, especially when it is not clear exactly how things are going to be different. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the CEO of Ford Motor Company, which has been undergoing major restructuring, describes the past ten years as "Ford's version of hell." Change requires leaders to lead—to step beyond the data and beyond the plan. Indeed, the decision that a plan is needed, if properly framed, can be a clear signal that things are going to be different. Of course, it can also be a signal that things are going to stay the same by virtue of assigning problems to another study committee.

Marketing and Development

For change to occur in schools, some person or unit must accept responsibility for conceptualizing and articulating an initial version of what that change involves, the problems it addresses, and the futures it anticipates. This is difficult and risky work, but it is only the beginning. The real difficulties arise in creating a market-

ing and development system that will make it possible to translate ideas and visionary plans into operating systems.

Visions of the future, no matter how compelling they may be to their creators, are not shared visions until others in the organization understand and embrace them. For this to happen, the vision must be shaped in ways that meet the needs of those whose support is required to move the conception from abstract thought to concrete action. It is this articulation and communication of the vision and its implications for action—and the concomitant modification of the vision and plans of action in order to satisfy those whose support is needed—that I term the marketing and development process.

Those who are expected to support a change effort will eventually expect to have four questions answered. First, they will want to know what they are being asked to support. They will want to understand the concept and its implications for them and their lives. Second, most of them will be interested in feasibility: Can it be done? Does the leadership have the will to see it through, or is this just one more *passing fad*? Third, most of the group will want to know if they should do it, and if so why. And finally there is the practical question: How do we do it?

One of the reasons why so many change efforts fail in schools is because too little time is spent in answering the first three questions. Typically someone provides an awareness session—a this-is-the-hottest-idea-in-town session. Immediately trainers begin to "train" people to do whatever someone believes must be done to move the change along. And the more things change, the more they stay the same. The problem is that little attention has been given to either marketing or development. Such procedures are nothing more than hard-sell tactics, and products that must be sold hard are not likely to satisfy many people very long.

Once a vision has been articulated or a change conceptualized, those whose support is needed must be made aware of what is being proposed. Initially, those who need to be made aware may simply be those whose immediate interests are involved (for example, teachers at a building where teaming is being considered). Later, as the primary target has interacted with the idea and caused it to be reformulated in ways that satisfy their needs and interests,

ness is to ensure that each child, each day, is successfully engaged in working on and with knowledge and knowledge-related products. The results by which schools should be led, therefore, are results that are clear indicators of student success.

Those who would manage by results in school must understand that student learning is a result of student success in doing schoolwork; evidence of learning is not a short-term indicator of student success any more than a quarterly profit statement is an indicator of the quality of an automobile. Quality indicators have to do with the nature of the product itself—and in schools as knowledge-work organizations that product, simply stated, is schoolwork.

What is needed is a results-oriented management system that focuses internal attention on producing quality schoolwork for children. If this can be accomplished, test scores, dropout rates, and so on will improve, just as Ford Motor Company and Xerox have found that as they began to emphasize customer needs and product quality, rather than engineering and accounting, profits began to increase.

Clearly one of the new technologies that must be put in place is a means of measuring the qualitative aspects of schoolwork, for it is by such qualitative results that schools of the future must be led. This problem is too important to turn over to the measurement specialist. The inventors of these measures must be the people who will use them and be directed by them—that is, teachers, principals, and superintendents. It is hard work and it is heady work. Such work takes time, and it is never completed, for measures wear out just as slogans wear out and just as today's innovations become stale and routine next year.

Measures must focus attention on elements of systems that people believe can make a difference in the results toward which the system is managed. If teachers believe that doing homework increases learning, for example, then homework results need to be measured. Do students do the homework? Are there certain kinds of homework students are more likely to do than others? At what rate and frequency are various kinds of homework assignments turned in? These are results teachers can believe in—and teachers can invent measures of such results in which they can have confidence.

What is needed is a style of leadership that insists on the creation of such measures and provides the training and support necessary to ensure that the measures are constantly being invented. Thus if I were a superintendent, one of the first things I would do is to educate myself and others about the problems and prospects of quality measures. If I went outside the school district for help, I would be very cautious about turning to conventional education measurement specialists, for most of these experts are by training and inclination psychometricians. Psychometric procedures have their place in the education enterprise, just as accounting procedures have their place in business. But businesses that are run by the accounting department usually fail, and I suspect that one of the reasons for our present distress in education is that we have too long allowed the psychometric interests to determine how our schools are led and evaluated.

2. Human Resource Development

If teachers and school administrators are to behave as leaders rather than as managers and technicians, then school systems must invent leadership development systems that are at least as sophisticated as those in the business sector. Teachers are not independent professionals as are physicians and attorneys. Teachers are, of necessity, part of a "corporate" structure, and their effectiveness is at least partly determined by the way the "corporations" in which they work are organized and managed. Teachers have effects, but schools have effects as well.

The continuing education of teachers and administrators is, or should be, the responsibility of the employer, just as is the case with other corporate employers (including hospitals and law firms). Teachers and administrators should be expected to participate in continuing education because it is part of their job, not because it is a requirement to keep their certificates or licenses current. If it is part of the job, it must be viewed that way, not as a nonessential requirement to be satisfied in some ritual fashion. The quality of work in continuing education, for example, should be as much a part of an employee appraisal system as is the quality of work in any other part of the work of the teacher or administrator. Participation

in continuing education is not enough; quality participation is expected—or so it should be. Work days and work years should be adjusted to accommodate this expectation.

In large systems, this probably means creating a facility to support human resource development, school improvement, and leadership development activity, perhaps something like the Jefferson County Public Schools/Gheens Professional Development Academy in Louisville, Kentucky. This organization, which I helped to create, is designed to function much like a leadership development center for a large corporation combined with certain characteristics that have come to be associated with teacher centers. Besides carrying out a variety of training and development programs, the academy is officially charged with encouraging local school faculties in the effort to restructure their schools. At the same time, the academy works with district personnel to create a supportive environment at the top as well. (See Kyle, 1988.) In smaller school districts, providing appropriate support may mean creating a consortium arrangement with other school districts to invent a human resource development system that can meet the needs of a variety of school districts and maintain quality at a level that might be impossible in a single small district. Alternatively, state education agencies might create organizations that could respond to the human resource development needs of smaller school districts. Illustrations of such systems abound in the United States. In any case, school districts must have a clear vision of where they are going so that existing organizations might better serve them. And where these organizations do not exist, new organizations can be invented. Moreover, it is critical that the organizations designed to serve teachers and administrators in local schools be responsive to these schools as opposed to some externally imposed mandates.

Another possible source of support for human resource development is local institutions of higher education. Assuming that these institutions are oriented toward schools as customers for their services, and assuming that their reward structure is such that qualified faculty are encouraged to provide responsive support to schools, universities and colleges can be valuable allies in the quest for superior human resource development programs. Unfortunately, it often turns out that these institutions are structured in ways that discourage professors from responding to the human resource

development needs of school districts. Furthermore, these structures often discourage faculty from linking their private agendas to the larger cause of school reform. Unless such links exist or can be created, efforts to use higher education's resources to support human resource development in schools can be more bother than benefit—at least I have found it so.

As a superintendent, I would approach the university as if I were a customer for services. I would try to negotiate with leaders in the various departments to provide the training and support my school district's programs seemed to need. I would listen to their advice. I would however, be prepared to commit the school district to producing what was needed if a preferred-customer arrangement could not be worked out. Moreover, I would ensure that the products and materials the university delivered to the school district were tailored to meet the system's needs. I would not take any old course, workshop, or seminar that was sitting on the shelf waiting for someone to buy it.

If schools of education and universities are going to contribute to reinventing our schools, they too must become inventive. There is much that colleges and universities can do, and should do, to help restructure schools, but in many instances such help will not be available until higher education, especially that part of higher education which has to do with the education of teachers and administrators, has undergone its own form of restructuring. School leaders must do all they can to support reform in higher education, but school leaders must also be prepared to move on their own if higher education cannot be restructured to provide the support that is needed. (See Schlechty, 1989, for a detailed discussion of the restructuring of teacher education.)

Above all, I would keep in mind that local teachers and local administrators are the greatest resources available for increasing the human resource development capacity of the school district. What we need are structures and commitments that liberate the potential that is already there.

The Restructuring Agenda

Creating the capacity to assess results by which one can lead and by which decisions can be disciplined is an essential prerequi-