

# Leading Change in Schools: A Primer

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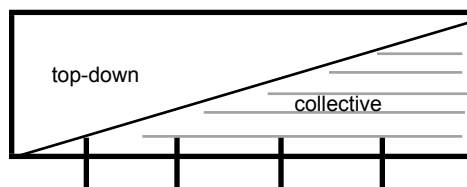
## Challenges

1. Change provokes chronic ambivalence, not just between but *within* individuals. We long for change (for other people to change, usually) *and* we cling to patterns, due to:
  - a. changes themselves never have only one consequence (technology)
  - b. hard-wiring: we're pattern-seeking animals
  - c. meaningfulness: patterns give life meaning (we cling to them even when we dislike them)
    - how we react to any change depends on what it *means* to us
    - it's a *psychological* matter, not just a logical one
  - d. we typically promote planned change by saying it means progress, growth, development, etc. This is often ultimately true, but it usually starts out as meaning:
    - loss
    - incompetence
    - conflict
2. Innovating in schools is intrinsically harder than in most other organizations due to:
  - a. chronic tensions (leadership vs. management; responsibility vs. authority; parental transference)
  - b. mission: developmental; fundamentally a conservator's work
  - c. operations & personnel
    - schools are most like pastoral settings
    - teachers are highly autonomous; at their best with students, not adults; expert about classrooms, but often naïve about schools
    - conflict avoidance is rampant
  - d. outcomes: accountability is rarely clear-cut (10% of their lives)

## Keys to Leading and Managing Change

1. Shape the meaning
  - a. link change to enduring commitments, values
  - b. it has to be *personal* (to you and ultimately to them), not just intellectual

*N.B.: The leader's active engagement is crucial*
2. Pressure and support (why, what, how)
  - a. making the case is vital, though not sufficient
  - b. acknowledge the loss
  - c. be clear about what's negotiable/what isn't, what will change and what won't
    - decision-making continuum ("principal/not-principal")



- d. buy-in is an end state, not a beginning one
      - resistance yields to appropriate guilt or to anxiety, coupled with inevitability
      - the greater the change, the more inevitable there will be "casualties"
3. Goals: Clarity and focus (bite off what you can chew); set a reasonable time frame
4. Celebrate small positive steps, not just big ones
5. Expectations: balance reach and realism
6. Lighten up and develop a cognac factor

Further reading:

*Seven Secrets of The Savvy School Leader; The Human Side of School Change.*

Other articles and resources: [www.robevans.org](http://www.robevans.org)