

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:

hard-wiring: we're pattern-seeking animals

changes themselves never have only one consequence (technology, for example)

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

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 ("Leadership is the art of disappointing people in proportion as they can tolerate it.")
- incompetence
- conflict

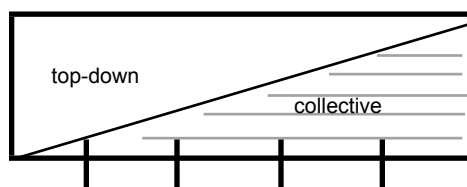
2. Innovating in schools is intrinsically harder than in most other organizations due to:
 - a. chronic tensions (leadership vs. management; responsibility vs. authority; parental transference)
 - b. mission: developmental; fundamentally a conservator's work
 - c. operations & personnel
 - schools are most like pastoral settings
 - teachers are highly autonomous; many are at their best with students, not adults; can be expert about the classroom but naïve about the school as an organization
 - conflict avoidance is rampant
 - d. outcomes: accountability not clear-cut (at graduation, students have spent 10% of their lives in school)

Keys to Leading and Managing Change

1. Shape the meaning
 - a. tell the story: where we were, we are, what we need to do to get where we're going—and link this to enduring commitments, values
 - b. they have to know that the change is *personal* to you—and that you are personally interested in them

DIGRESSION RE: KEEPING TEACHERS: best friend, somebody above me cares abt my development

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 anxiety, coupled with limits
 - 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