MANAGING PEOPLE, THINGS, AND IDEAS IN THE "EFFECTIVE CHANGE ZONE": A "HIGH-TOUCH" APPROACH TO EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP AT THE DAWN OF THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

The ability to effectively manage people, things, and ideas in the change process requires that educational leaders focus on providing for the personal and professional "high-touch" needs of school personnel and utilize key planning concepts.

Introduction

Elementary and secondary curricula at the dawn of the twenty-first century are dynamically changing as a result of several key cultural forces including, but not limited to, the following: (a) pervasive focus on accountability, (b) omnipresent use of evolving technologies, (c) acute appreciation of the value of diversity, and (d) professional emphasis on constructivist principles (Brandt, 2000).

The ability to effectively manage those four dynamic forces, as well as others that may emerge in the future, requires that educational leaders manage their organizations in the "effective change zone." Such leaders focus on providing for the personal and professional needs of teachers and other school personnel, as well as utilizing key planning concepts in order to promote sustainable changes.

The "effective change zone" occurs where "high-touch" interpersonal management practices, based on meeting personal and professional needs, intersect or commingle with the application of appropriate planning practices (See Figure No. 1). This "effective change zone" is similar to the "zone of proximal development" identified by Lev S. Vygotsky, as the arena where "real" learning takes place. It is at this stage of learning development that scaffolding or proactive support, by those more competent, is necessary for the learner to acquire the processes, dispositions, skills or knowledge that are being introduced (Slavin, 2003). That is similar to the concept of the "effective change zone" introduced in this article: the arena where "real" change occurs because the "high-touch" needs of the people implementing the change are being met. Transformational leaders are most efficacious in managing in the "effective change zone" because they are proactive, raise the awareness levels of followers about inspirational collective interests, and help followers achieve unusually high performance outcomes (Hoy and Miskel, 2005). They manage the issues in a systematic manner, scaffolding complex changes using simple, but sound, planning principles that can be appreciated, articulated, and internalized by all involved.

Personal and Professional Needs of Educators
Related to Change

The literature and research relating to effective change emphasize that people possess five key personal needs or dispositions that must be met for personal and/or organizational satisfaction and productivity. These needs and dispositions have been articulated in social science research and literature as the following: (a) challenge, (b) commitment, (c) control, (d) creativity, and (e) caring (Polka, 1997). Educators, also, have six professional needs or expectations that must be positively reinforced in order to facilitate their effective dealing with significant changes in their careers. These six professional needs or expectations have been identified as: (a) communication, (b) empowerment, (c) assistance in decision-making, (d) leadership, (e) opportunity for professional growth, and (f) time (Polka et al., 2000).

During the dusk of the twentieth century, social science research and literature on coping with change also reinforced that those five individual "high-touch" needs or dispositions of: (a) challenge, (b) commitment, (c) control, (d) creativity, and (e) caring were significant for organizational and personal satisfaction and productivity in a climate of pervasive flux (Polka, 1997). Accordingly, each individual must look at life as a constant "challenge" and develop the ability to see change as an opportunity, not a crisis (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). People who successfully cope with significant life changes exhibit a

strong "commitment" to themselves, their families, and their organizations (Kobasa, 1982). Individuals who believe and act as if they are in "control" and can influence the course of events in their particular lives are better prepared for change (Glasser, 1990). People who possess the "creativity" to envision optimal experiences are able to cope most effectively with change (Csikszentmihaly, 1990). And, a "caring" family attitude in the workplace plays an important role in the effective adjustment to changes (DePree, 1989). These five personal needs or dispositions for effectively coping with change were documented comprehensively using a plethora of diverse psychological research studies and were the same 5 Cs as key reference points in an American Broadcasting Company (ABC) television production titled: *The Mystery of Happiness: Who has it. . .and how to get it*, narrated by John Stossell (1992). These five "high-touch" personal dispositions have been cited as the key "hardiness factors" of the management personnel that contributed to the success of companies classified by Jim Collins, contemporary management researcher, as those companies who, ". . .have made the leap from good to great." (Collins, 2001, p. 82).

The six professional "high-touch" needs or expectations were identified and comprehensively articulated in twentieth century educational research and literature as: (a) communication, (b) empowerment, (c) assistance in decision-making, (d) leadership, (e) opportunity for professional growth, and (f) time (Harnack, 1968). The significance of these six professional needs as related to effective educational planning activities were reconfirmed by subsequent regional (Yuhasz, 1974) and national research studies (Polka, 1977) and are integral components of the late twentieth century literature and research on the professional needs of most significance in terms of dealing with change (Beane et al., 1986; Brandt, 2000). Subsequently, leaders promulgating changes in their respective organizations must be certain that the people being impacted by those changes have: (a) the ability to know (communication) the level of concern and the quality of their thinking and feeling about the change process; (b) the ability to choose or influence (empowerment) the various aspects of the changes and/or have significant input relating to the applications of the changes in their work settings; (c) resource personnel available (assistance in decision-making) to scaffold their experiences with the changes so that they may appropriately adapt or adopt them into their real world work; (d) knowledge that their supervisors and other management personnel (leadership) who are advocating the changes are committed to the changes, accept the challenges of the changes and are focused on the outcome of implementing them; (e) comprehension of individual personal and organizational benefits (opportunities) associated with the changes that make those changes attractive to them. This awareness tends to limit their resistance to changing the way they have conducted their business in the past and positively gravitating toward the change; (f) time to reflect about the changes (time) as well as to internalize the benefits and pragmatically apply the changes in their daily operations. These six "high-touch" professional needs or expectations of people experiencing change are critical to its successful short-term implementation as well as significant to its long-term sustainability (Kotter & Cohen, 2002).

Thus, the above five personal needs or dispositions and the six professional needs or expectations have been identified as key components for organizational and personal satisfaction and productivity in diverse literature and research studies and serve as significant "high-touch" factors for the effective planning of educational reforms. This perspective is consistent with the "real change" research by John Kotter and Dan Cohen who stated, "Both thinking and feeling are essential, and both are found in successful organizations, but the heart of change is in the emotions. The flow of see-feel-change is more powerful than that of the analysis-think-change" (Kotter & Cohen, 2002, p. 2). Educational leaders must focus on the professional and personal "high-touch" needs of their respective colleagues in order to effectuate meaningful and sustainable changes.

It has been stated that, however, "Personal concerns are the most overlooked and under-managed concerns in the change process. If change is to be successful, people need to recruit the help of those around them. We need each other. That is why support groups work when people are facing changes or times of stress in their lives" (Blanchard & Warghorn, 1997, pp. 159-160). The significance of this "high-touch" focus for leaders and the imperativeness to scaffold in the "effective change zone" is further emphasized by Blanchard and Warghorn who stated, "Everyone must take responsibility for understanding the concerns that they and other people have about change, and they also must be willing to ask for what they need and be there for others in their time of need. Effective change is not

something you do to people. It is something you do with them." (Blanchard & Warghorn, 1997, pp. 200-201). Fullan (2005) corroborated this perception by insisting that sustainable changes in education are promoted by leaders who help people find meaningful connections to each other. He stated that, "They find well-being by making progress on problems important to their peers and of benefit beyond themselves" (Fullan, 2005, p. 104). They learn from each other in the finest Vygotsky tradition, by scaffolding each other in the "effective change zone."

PRINCIPLES OF EDUCATIONAL PLANNING

Contemporary leaders must operate in the "effective change zone" and utilize planning processes that incorporate the above "high-touch" needs of educators as they are promoting changes in their educational organizations to address those contemporary factors of accountability, technology, diversity, and constructivism.

Educational planning, as a strategic process for the improvement of teaching and learning, first appeared in the educational literature of the post-World War I era (Ornstein & Hunkins, 1988). Since that time, educational leaders have utilized several different approaches in designing programs to improve teaching and learning in light of changing societal factors (Hyman, 1973; Brandt, 2000).

An educational planning framework that has effectively been utilized in the later half of the twentieth century to improve teaching and learning, however, is based on the premise that planning activities for the improvement of instruction should be designed to be: (a) cooperative, (b) comprehensive, (c) continuous, and (d) concrete (Krug, 1957). Planning for change, according to Krug, must not be done by individuals or small groups exclusively, but must be undertaken by large groups of stakeholders working in "cooperative" settings to develop implementation projects. The more people involved in the problem analysis, the better, and more sustainable the solution. The planning process itself must be "comprehensive" and consider a vast array of real and potential intervening variables (people, things, and ideas) that may impact on the implementation of change. The planning process must be viewed as a "continuous" experience that may not have a specific "end-date." There must be continuous monitoring and adjusting of the change itself as the context continues to change. And, the planning process must produce specific artifacts or events related to the changes in order for participants in the process to have "concrete" evidence that they can identify and celebrate as the outcomes of their collective efforts.

Contemporary educational leaders need to keep this twentieth century four C planning model in mind to meet the ever-changing educational landscape of the twenty-first century. Recent studies conducted on successful change efforts reinforce Krug's planning orientation (Fullan, 2005). The sustainability of school reform efforts, according to Fullan, is related to, ". . .continuous improvement, adaptation, and collective problem solving in the face of complex challenges that keep rising" (Fullan, 2005, p.22). This planning perspective is, also, consistent with that advocated by strategic planners such as Kaufman, Herman, and Waters who stated that,

> People are complex and so are the organizations they develop and to which they contribute. If we are not to dehumanize, oversimplify and artificially make our educational world linear and restricted, it is imperative that we develop strategic plans based upon the actual realities of our organization and society--which are complex. (Kaufman, Herman & Waters, 2002, p. 109)

EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH RELATED TO THE PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL NEEDS FOR COPING WITH CHANGES

Research conducted in New York, commencing in 1992, with a sample of two hundred and seventy-nine (279) educators, specifically identified the significance of the five personal needs and the six professional needs for the implementation of technological changes in education (Polka, 1994). Additional studies replicated that research. Three hundred and twelve (312) educators from two different samples in 1998 reconfirmed the significance of these five personal needs and six professional needs as key factors to be addressed when dealing with educational changes (Polka, et al., 2000). The results of these studies illustrated that educational leaders must not only be cognizant

of these "high-touch" needs but must directly provide for them in a hierarchical order to promote effective educational changes.

Generally, those educators surveyed divided the five personal needs or dispositions into two broad categories as follows: (a) The personal needs of most importance have consistently been identified as those of control, creativity, and caring; (b) The personal needs of moderate importance have consistently been challenge and commitment. They ranked the six professional needs into the following three distinct categories: (a) The professional needs of greatest importance have consistently been empowerment and time; (b) The professional needs of considerable importance have consistently been assistance and leadership; (c) The professional needs of moderate importance have consistently been communication and opportunity for professional growth (Polka, et al., 2000). These findings are consistent with the findings from more than twelve hundred (1200) K-12 teachers in a survey conducted in 2000 that identified the critical interpersonal relationship behaviors of educational leaders who facilitated effective school reforms (Blasé & Kirby, 2000). Subsequently, educational leaders need to recognize that there may be diverse hierarchies of these "high-touch" personal and professional needs within their respective organizations and must be prepared to provide for them in customized ways.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

Change in education is a process, however, not an event, and is accomplished first by individuals (Hord, et al., 1987). Subsequently, the most effective educational changes, or the ones that will yield the most personal and organizational satisfaction and productivity for the professional educators involved with them, are those that occur in the "effective change zone" and reflect attention given to the five personal needs or dispositions of (a) challenge, (b) commitment, (c) control, (d) creativity, and (e) caring, as well as the six professional needs of (a) communication, (b) empowerment, (c) assistance in decision-making, (d) leadership, (e) opportunity for professional growth, and (f) time. Consequently, educational planning projects that address the four contemporary cultural forces of accountability, technology, diversity, and constructivism, as well as others that may emerge, must be introduced to educators with primary attention given to their "high-touch" needs using Krug's 4 C model of cooperative, comprehensive, concrete, and continuous as a valuable strategic planning framework. Thus, the changes related to people, things ,and ideas will be more successfully implemented and will be more sustainable because the leaders managed in the "effective change zone."

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Figure 1

Managing People, Things, and Ideas in the Effective Change Zone

Key Planning Concepts
- Cooperative
- Comprehensive
- Continuous
- Concrete

Effective Change Zone

Professional Needs or Expectations
- Communication
- Empowerment
- Assistance in decision making
- Leadership
- Opportunity for growth
- Time

Personal Needs or Dispositions
- Challenge
- Commitment
- Control
- Creativity
- Caring